TEXAS PYS 2022-2023 (MOD)

CONTENTS

Texas PYs 2022-2023 (Mod) 1

I. WIOA State Plan Type and Executive Summary 3

a. WIOA State Plan Type 3

Combined Plan Partner Program(s) 3

b. Plan Introduction or Executive Summary 3

II. Strategic Elements 6

a. Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis 6

b. State Strategic Vision and Goals 36

c. State Strategy 42

III. Operational Planning Elements 53

a. State Strategy Implementation 53

b. State Operating Systems and Policies 72

IV. Coordination with State Plan Programs 114

V. Common Assurances (For All Core Programs) 117

VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core Programs 118

Program-specific Requirements for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities under Title I-B 118

Program-Specific Requirements for Wagner-Peyser Program (Employment Services) 156

Program-specific Requirements for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Programs 191

Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) 211

VII. Program-Specific Requirements for Combined State Plan Partner Programs 299

Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) 299

Performance Indicator Appendix 328

All WIOA Core Programs 328

Additional Indicators of Performance 331

I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

This is a combined plan

COMBINED PLAN PARTNER PROGRAM(S)

Senior Community Service Employment program (programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))

B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) Combined State Plan for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) for Program Years 2020–2023 (PY'20–'23) was submitted to the US Departments of Labor and Education on April 13, 2020, and was approved on June 26, 2020. WIOA §676.145(a)(1) requires states to submit modifications to the Combined State Plan (CSP) at the end of the first two-year period of a four-year plan. The modifications are to "reflect changes in labor market and economic conditions or other factors affecting the implementation of the Combined State Plan." During the interim between full four-year plan submissions, TWC submitted and received approval for multiple plan modifications.

This plan submission covers the period of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2024. The plan is written to represent a workforce system in which all core programs set forth in WIOA are under the purview of TWC. Texas proposes through this Combined State Plan (plan) to implement jointly administered activities concerning the following core programs and two optional programs authorized by WIOA:

- The Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs
- The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES) program, including the Agricultural Outreach Plan
- The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program
- The Vocational Rehabilitation programs
- The Senior Community Service Employment Program

The Texas Workforce system is composed of the workforce programs, services, and initiatives administered by eight agencies and 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), as well as independent school districts, community and technical colleges, and local adult education providers. System partners are responsible for the delivery of 23 programs and services focused on education, workforce education, and workforce training for adults, adults with barriers and youth.

System partners operate in a complex, changing economic environment as they strive to provide employers, current workers, and future workers with services that are comprehensive, timely, and relevant. By 2025, the Texas population is projected to exceed 30.7 million people, with almost 12 million workers being 25-54 years of age. The demographic composition is expected to continue to change, with Hispanics growing to the largest percentage of the population (43.55 percent) and the number of females slightly exceeding that of males.[1]

One major shift in our workforce system has been the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 13, 2020, the president declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency. That same day, with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in multiple Texas counties, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for Texas. As a result, the governor, mayors, and county judges throughout the state

enacted unprecedented levels of heightened public health safety measures to limit the spread of the disease.

"Nonessential" businesses and services were forced to close, leaving affected employers no choice but to lay off workers or reduce workers' hours. In the first week following the national and state emergency declarations, the number of claims filed in Texas skyrocketed more than 12-fold, from an average of 13,000 a week to more than 158,000. In less than a month, more than a million Texans filed UI claims, far exceeding the 750,000 total claims filed in 2019. During PY'20, over 3.2 million individuals received UI benefits compared to roughly 434,000 individuals during PY'18.

To help ensure that TWC and its partners were able to adjust to the changing demands of the economy, the Commissioners approved a series of COVID-related grant activities, including new grants to 20 Boards for more than $12,000,000 in WIOA statewide funding. These grants were designed to provide rapid response services to assist employers and support impacted workplaces, including layoff aversion strategies to keep workers working, and facilitating remote access to services and skills training. Boards purchased virtual job software for online job fairs, virtual technology hubs to direct participants to workforce services, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools like chatbots to intuitively answer customer questions in real time. These have enabled Boards to provide a wider range of services online and innovative in-person services. As of October 2021, Boards have served 688,718 participants using WIOA COVID grants. Workforce Solutions Office staff has been able to place more than 1,200 COVID-impacted individuals in training. To date, 445 individuals have successfully completed training.

While the impacts of pandemic-related restrictions have been felt across all industry sectors, the restaurant industry was hit particularly hard. Limitations on occupancy capacity and changes in both hours and modes of operation have created great difficulty for restaurants trying to open safely and remain open. TWC, in partnership with the Texas Restaurant Association, launched the Texas Restaurant Recovery Initiative to help restaurateurs develop new strategies to operate safely and leverage new technologies. Funded by a donation from IKEA, the initiative is built around a series of training videos in English and Spanish that will share best practices to help employers adapt jobs to contactless operations and new service trends. Other recovery efforts include free training and certifications through the ServSafe food handler program and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission's seller/server certification program, both of which provide a work-ready talent pipeline for the restaurant industry, and the Service Industry Recovery (SIR) program, which uses federal COVID-relief funds to provide free child care to service industry workers.

WIOA National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWG) have also enabled Boards to assist individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, TWC has used NDWG Disaster Recovery grants and Employment Recovery grants to provide employment and training services to dislocated workers and other eligible participants as well as providing disaster relief and humanitarian assistance employment in disaster-declared areas. As recovery efforts continue, disaster-impacted areas experienced a surge in the demand for many occupations that were not on the Board's list of target occupations. Boards and Workforce Solutions Office staff members were able to use such grants to place participants in jobs that were and currently are needed for recovery efforts such as contact tracers and vaccination support.

Additionally, growth in middle-skills jobs, those that require more than a high school degree but less than a four-year degree, continues to increase the demand for workers with industry-based certifications. The Texas workforce employed in middle-skill occupations in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields is projected to increase by 24 percent to nearly 1.5 million workers in the next decade. This growth will include significant increases in health care, construction, and manufacturing fields.[2] In Texas, future workers will also be needed in the

growth industries of computer systems design and related services, as well as service-related industries.

TWC and its 28 Boards are expanding training strategies to increase completions of industry-based certifications that meet employer-defined needs, in part by streamlining new employment hiring and orientation. TWC distributed $2.5 million to the Boards for the industry-recognized skills certification initiative. Boards and employers identified the top certifications needed for high-demand jobs in their local areas. Certifications were awarded in industries such as manufacturing, health care, construction, information technology, and transportation.

Securing industry-recognized certifications is an essential strategy for helping job seekers find and keep meaningful employment post-release from correctional facilities. The Windham School District works closely with industry partners to build a well-trained workforce for industrial and heavy construction industries. Currently, 25 partnerships have been developed with companies. Program expansion efforts include adding training in technical fields, such as telecommunications connections, energy management, computer numerical control machining programming, and piloting self-paced training programs that utilize study guides and materials for selected certifications.

The programs discussed in this plan reflect only a portion of the programs administered by TWC. Through the integrated workforce system in Texas, TWC also administers several other federal programs:

- Choices [the employment program for recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)]
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) [4]
- Child Care and Development Block Grant Funds/Child Care Development Funds (CCDBG/CCDF)
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)
- Registered Apprenticeship grant programs

TWC also administers state-funded workforce development programs, including:

- Apprenticeship Texas
- Skills Development Fund training (customized training for businesses)
- Self-Sufficiency Fund training
- Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) (grants for community colleges, nonprofit organizations, and school districts that provide opportunities for students to pursue new career and technical education programs in high-growth industries)

Through this highly integrated system, TWC intends to implement enhancements that continue to strengthen the state's workforce development system to put more Texans to work. A major goal for Texas is an inclusive system that offers services to everyone. Many of the strategies laid out in this plan advance the goal of expanded inclusivity. The Texas Pathways to Reentry program, for example, engages with ex-offenders by offering employment opportunities to help reintegrate them into the workforce. Women are another population at risk of underemployment, especially as the pandemic has increased demands on caregivers and forced many women to prioritize responsibilities at home. Registered Apprenticeship programs are another strategy Texas is using to increase women's employment opportunities and reinvolve

women in the workforce. Foster youth and people with disabilities are other underserved populations that the Texas plan targets for workforce initiatives.

By eliminating barriers to employment for populations at risk of dropping out of the workforce, TWC and the local Boards are working to connect everyone in Texas with employment support services. The plan describes a four-year strategy that spurs skill and credential attainment, employment, retention, and earnings of participants, including those with barriers to employment, resulting in a higher quality workforce, reduced welfare dependency, and increased productivity and competitiveness in the state.

The plan complies with WIOA by aligning its core programs and two optional programs to the state's workforce investment, education, and economic development systems, as discussed in the unified strategic planning requirements, common performance accountability measures, and requirements governing the one-stop delivery system. As WIOA intended, the plan serves as a map to develop, align, and integrate the entire system across federal education, employment, and training programs. The plan enumerates the state's vision and strategic and operational goals for providing workforce services and continuously improving the quality and performance of its system.

1. Texas State Data Center, based on the 0.5 migration scenario (http://demographics.texas.gov/, September 2018).
2. Texas Workforce Investment Council, Defining Middle-STEM Occupations in Texas. (December 2015).
3. Texas Workforce Commission LMCI Tracer, Texas Fastest Growing Industries (www.tracer2.com/, September 2018).
4. The SNAP E&T program is administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and is operated by TWC through an interagency agreement. TWC coordinates and collaborates with the 28 Boards and their contracted workforce service providers and community partners.

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

Employment data for this update was compiled considering the ETA program year time frame. As of November 2021, however, Texas Seasonally Adjusted Total Nonfarm employment surpassed the February 2020 pre-COVID level and continued to climb to a high of 13,059,900 positions at the end of 2021. The unemployment rate dropped for 17 months from a historic high reading of 12.9 percent in April 2020.

With respect to the ETA program year time frame, employment rose for 15 months after an April 2020 precipitous decline as the Texas labor market was poised for a return to pre-COVID levels. Over the month, employment grew 13 instances since April 2020, with the state adding 657,300 jobs from June 2020 to June 2021. The unemployment rate mirrored this movement as it fell 6.4 percentage points from a series-high rate of 12.9 percent in April 2020 to 6.5 percent in June 2021. All 25 metropolitan statistical areas recorded a year-over-year decline in unemployment rates ending June 2021 with an average annual decline of 1.5 points.

While all major industries were negatively affected by shutdown orders designed to protect the public from the spread of COVID-19, three industries surpassed pre-coronavirus employment levels by June 2021. As indexed to February 2020, industries that allowed for more telework

fared better than industries that rely on in-person physical work. In June 2021, Financial Activities and Professional and Business Services had already recovered from an employment standpoint, while Trade, Transportation, and Utilities led with 101.4 percent of February 2020 employment. The Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities subsector buoyed the major industry, enjoying 132 consecutive months of positive annual growth as more and more consumers switched to online shopping during the pandemic.

The following industries in Texas are arranged by fastest projected growth rates for the 2018–2028 period.

Industry Title	Employment 2018	Employment 2028	Change	Percentage Change
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	783,315	967,930	184,615	23.6
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,570,840	1,898,313	327,473	20.8
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	144,521	172,744	28,223	19.5
Management of Companies and Enterprises	141,915	168,393	26,478	18.7
Accommodation and Food Services	1,209,953	1,425,745	215,792	17.8
Construction	739,137	858,046	118,909	16.1
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	244,410	275,893	31,483	12.9
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	221,519	249,781	28,262	12.8
Finance and Insurance	534,991	602,995	68,004	12.7
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	811,161	913,202	102,041	12.6
Wholesale Trade	595,769	669,264	73,495	12.3
Transportation and Warehousing	550,467	615,744	65,277	11.9
Educational Services	1,203,973	1,326,956	122,983	10.2
Retail Trade	1,328,105	1,450,882	122,777	9.2
Information	135,441	147,569	12,128	9.0
Utilities	51,659	56,230	4,571	8.8
Other Services (except Public Administration)	460,805	500,823	40,018	8.7

Industry Title	Employment 2018	Employment 2028	Change	Percentage Change
Government, Except Postal Services, State and Local Education & Hospitals	700,502	736,032	35,530	5.1
Manufacturing	875,112	880,790	5,678	0.6
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	59,854	57,078	-2,776	-4.6

Data Source: Texas Industry Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, which contains industries that carry out activities requiring a high degree of expertise and training, including legal services, architectural and engineering services, and computer systems design and related services, surpassed the February 2020 pre-COVID employment level in only 10 months. According to Current Employment Statistics (CES) estimates, this industry reached a series-high employment level of 891,000 jobs in June 2021 and is projected to be the fastest growing Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) two-digit industry by 2028, with another 184,615 jobs added. Utilities is the smallest industry sector; however, it is still projected to add 4,571 jobs from 2018 to 2028, a change of 8.8 percent. This growth is likely due to the increased infrastructure needs for Texas' rapidly expanding population and, consequentially, great demand on the state's utility infrastructure.

Of the industries listed above, 13 represent a large cross-section of the Texas economy and are expected to increase in employment by double digit percentages. At 19.5 percent, Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation is expected to increase considerably. However, according to CES data, this industry stood at 80.9 percent of pre-pandemic employment.

The occupations within the Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services industry projected to add the most jobs that pay above the statewide median wage of $39,637 a year are listed below.

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change	Typical Education for Entry
15-1132	Software Developers, Applications	30,459	42,808	12,349	40.5	Bachelor's degree
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	42,448	54,243	11,795	27.8	Bachelor's degree
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	22,539	29,725	7,186	31.9	Bachelor's degree
41-3099	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	18,938	24,922	5,984	31.6	High school diploma or equivalent
23-1011	Lawyers	28,739	34,607	5,868	20.4	Doctoral or professional degree

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change	Typical Education for Entry
15-1121	Computer Systems Analysts	20,014	25,802	5,788	28.9	Bachelor's degree
13-1111	Management Analysts	12,724	18,381	5,657	44.6	Bachelor's degree
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	19,429	24,806	5,377	27.7	Associate's degree
15-1151	Computer User Support Specialists	18,138	23,410	5,272	29.1	Some college, no degree
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	7,993	12,278	4,285	53.6	Bachelor's degree

The Bureau of Labor Statistics assigns a typical entry-level education to all occupations. The assignment represents the typical education level that most workers will need to enter an occupation and can be useful in the planning of skills development and training.

Six of the 10 occupations listed above require a bachelor's degree; three require less than a four-year degree yet still earn considerably more than the statewide median annual salary.

Long-term projections data also points to the industries likely to have the largest absolute employment growth over the projected period. These "existing" industries are among the largest by estimated employment size.

The following industries in Texas are projected to experience the largest employment growth in the 2018–2028 period.

Largest NAICS Two-Digit Projected Employment Growth by Industry, 2018–2028

Industry Title	2018 Employment	2028 Employment	Change	Percentage Change
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,570,840	1,898,313	327,473	20.8
Accommodation and Food Services	1,209,953	1,425,745	215,792	17.8
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	783,315	967,930	184,615	23.6
Educational Services	1,203,973	1,326,956	122,983	10.2
Retail Trade	1,328,105	1,450,882	122,777	9.2
Construction	739,137	858,046	118,909	16.1
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and	811,161	913,202	102,041	12.6

Industry Title	2018 Employment	2028 Employment	Change	Percentage Change
Remediation Services				
Wholesale Trade	595,769	669,264	73,495	12.3
Finance and Insurance	534,991	602,995	68,004	12.7
Transportation and Warehousing	550,467	615,744	65,277	11.9
Other Services (except Public Administration)	460,805	500,823	40,018	8.7
Government, Except Postal Services, State and Local Education & Hospitals	700,502	736,032	35,530	5.1
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	244,410	275,893	31,483	12.9
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	221,519	249,781	28,262	12.8
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	144,521	172,744	28,223	19.5
Management of Companies and Enterprises	141,915	168,393	26,478	18.7
Information	135,441	147,569	12,128	9.05
Manufacturing	875,112	880,790	5,678	0.6
Utilities	51,659	56,230	4,571	8.84
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	59,854	57,078	-2,776	-4.6

Data Source: Texas Industry Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

Health Care and Social Assistance is expected to add 327,473 jobs by 2028, outpacing the second industry on the list, Accommodations and Food Services, by more than 100,000 jobs. The top seven industries on the list, accounting for just under 75 percent of all jobs added, are projected to add over 100,000 jobs each.

According to the CES program, Health Care and Social Assistance industry employment stood at 96.8 percent of pre-COVID employment in June 2021. Non-seasonally adjusted Social Assistance, which includes Child Day Care Services, lost 15.1 percent of employment over March and April 2020, while Ambulatory Health Care Services employment fell by 11.3 percent over the same period. Per Texas Labor Market Information's PROMIS database, Health Care and Social Assistance initial claims were the third-highest among NAICS two-digit industries from March 2020 through June 2021. This was likely due to multiple moratoriums on elective procedures and a majority of children learning remotely for the remainder of the 2020–2021 school year.

When comparing the same month in 2021 to the last non-COVID year, non-seasonally adjusted Nursing and Residential Care Facility employment was down 20,900 jobs from June 2019, followed by Social Assistance, with 13,500 fewer jobs than in June 2019. Employment for Hospitals was down 5,400 jobs, while Ambulatory Health Care Services surpassed June 2019 employment by 19,300 jobs.

Despite the effects of COVID, demand for health care workers in Texas is expected to continue to increase, as the state has growing populations of senior citizens and young people, both of whom are primary customers of health care and social assistance. This sector is also faced with training challenges, as employers require more highly educated workers due to market demand and industry expectations. Three out of the 10 Health Care Occupations adding the most jobs require less than a bachelor's degree, while two require a bachelor's degree and five require a postgraduate degree.

Top 10 Largest Projected Occupations Paying above Median Wage in Health Care and Social Assistance by Employment Change 2018–2028

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change	Typical Education for Entry
29-1141	Registered Nurses	185,291	217,668	32,377	17.5	Bachelor's degree
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	62,952	69,583	6,631	10.5	Postsecondary nondegree award
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	25,466	31,047	5,581	21.9	Bachelor's degree
29-2021	Dental Hygienists	12,670	17,459	4,789	37.8	Associate's degree
29-1171	Nurse Practitioners	10,567	14,290	3,723	35.2	Master's degree
29-1127	Speech-Language Pathologists	8,884	12,299	3,415	38.4	Master's degree
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	1,0951	14,164	3,213	29.3	Associate's degree
29-1021	Dentists, General	7,817	10,739	2,922	37.41	Doctoral or professional degree
29-1071	Physician Assistants	7,132	10,024	2,892	40.5	Master's degree
29-1123	Physical Therapists	1,4654	17,453	2,799	19.1	Doctoral or professional degree

Data Source: Texas Occupational Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

Long-term projections data is helpful in ranking occupations in Texas without reference to industry, in terms of both percentage growth and absolute growth between 2018 and 2028.

The following occupations are projected to experience the highest growth among all industries in 2018–2028.

Projected Fastest Growing Occupations 2018–2028 (Percent)

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
53-3041	Taxi Drivers and Chauffeurs	22,224	30,856	8,632	38.8
15-1122	Information Security Analysts	8,451	11,675	3,224	38.1
15-2031	Operations Research Analysts	11,077	15,270	4,193	37.9
29-1071	Physician Assistants	8,153	11,190	3,037	37.3
39-9021	Personal Care Aides	220,996	302,342	81,346	36.8
31-9091	Dental Assistants	30,722	41,711	10,989	35.8
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	3,691	4,998	1,307	35.4
29-2021	Dental Hygienists	14,179	19,144	4,965	35.0
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	30,609	40,776	10,167	33.2
25-3021	Self-Enrichment Education Teachers	21,162	28,110	6,948	32.8
29-1171	Nurse Practitioners	12,456	16,429	3,973	31.9
29-1127	Speech-Language Pathologists	14,887	19,618	4,731	31.8
29-1021	Dentists, General	9,977	13,139	3,162	31.7
15-1132	Software Developers, Applications	68,289	89,736	21,447	31.4
27-2022	Coaches and	15,136	19,804	4,668	30.8

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
	Scouts				

Data Source: Texas Occupational Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

NOTE: Occupations in this list must have had 2,500 or more employed in 2018.

The Conference Board Help Wanted OnLine (HWOL), an internet-based data series, provides timely monthly measures of labor demand using advertised vacancies at the national, regional, state, and metropolitan area levels.

The following table shows the specialized and baseline skills and certifications employers most commonly require for the occupations in the previous table.

Common Required Skills for Employment

Specialized Skills	Baseline Skills	Certifications
Scheduling	Communication Skills	Driver's License
Java	Teamwork/Collaboration	Certified Medical Assistant
Software Development	Problem-solving	First Aid Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Automated External Defibrillator (CPR AED)
Patient Care	Research	Basic Life Support (BLS)
SQL	Writing	Certified Public Accountant (CPA)

Source: Labor Insight (Burning Glass Technologies)

Specialized Skills:

- Scheduling—A schedule or timetable, as a basic time-management tool, consists of a list of times at which possible tasks, events, or actions are intended to take place or of a sequence of events in the chronological order in which such things are intended to take place.
- Java—Java is a set of computer software and specifications developed by Sun Microsystems and later acquired by the Oracle Corporation that provides a system for developing application software and deploying it in a cross-platform computing environment.
- Software Development—Software development is the process of computer programming, documenting, testing, and bug fixing involved in creating and maintaining applications and frameworks and resulting in a software product.
- Patient Care—Patient care refers to the services rendered by members of the health care profession and by nonprofessionals under their supervision for the benefit of the patient.
- SQL—SQL (ESS-kew-EL or SEE-kwl, Structured Query Language) is a domain-specific language used in programming and designed for managing data held in a relational

database management system (RDBMS) or for stream processing in a relational data stream management system (RDSMS).

Baseline Skills:

- Communication Skills-Communication skills refers to the ability to convey information effectively and efficiently.
- Teamwork/Collaboration—A collaboration is a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives.
- Problem-solving—Problem-solving consists of using generic or ad hoc methods in an orderly manner to find solutions to problems.
- Research—Research comprises creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge about humans, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications. It is used to establish or confirm facts, reaffirm the results of previous work, solve new or existing problems, support theorems, or develop new theories.
- Writing—Writing is a medium of human communication that represents language and emotion with signs and symbols.

Certifications:

- Driver's License—A driver's license is issued under governmental authority and permits the holder to operate a motor vehicle.
- Certified Medical Assistant Training—Training that designates a medical assistant who has achieved certification through an accredited board. Training can include human anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, coding and insurance processing, and laboratory techniques.
- First Aid CPR AED Training—Training to recognize and care for a variety of first aid emergencies such as burns, cuts, and scrapes, sudden illnesses, head, neck, and back injuries, heat and cold emergencies, and how to respond to breathing and cardiac emergencies for victims about 12 years and older.
- Basic Life Support (BLS) Training—Training that provides the type of care that first responders, health care providers, and public safety professionals deliver to anyone who is experiencing cardiac arrest, respiratory distress, or an obstructed airway.
- Certified Public Accountant (CPA)—An accountant who has met licensure requirements according to their state's board of accountancy.

Top 25 Occupations Projected to Add the Most Employment Growth 2018-2028

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
35-3021	Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	392,586	488,454	95,868	24.4
39-9021	Personal Care Aides	220,996	302,342	81,346	36.8

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
41-2031	Retail Salespersons	403,976	444,235	40,259	10.0
29-1141	Registered Nurses	216,124	252,330	36,206	16.8
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	201,052	235,280	34,228	17.0
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	210,473	244,020	33,547	15.9
35-2014	Cooks, Restaurant	111,414	144,001	32,587	29.2
47-2061	Construction Laborers	160,372	190,026	29,654	18.5
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	209,838	238,686	28,848	13.7
35-3031	Waiters and Waitresses	219,366	247,421	28,055	12.8
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	128,250	152,305	24,055	18.8
43-6013	Medical Secretaries	95,175	118,967	23,792	25.0
37-2011	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	178,990	201,752	22,762	12.7
43-4051	Customer Service Representatives	284,520	307,264	22,744	8.0
15-1132	Software Developers, Applications	68,289	89,736	21,447	31.4
43-5081	Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	168,080	187,954	19,874	11.8
41-3099	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	113,483	133,013	19,530	17.2
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	124,603	143,040	18,437	14.8

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	117,761	134,678	16,917	14.4
31-9092	Medical Assistants	60,957	77,619	16,662	27.3
35-1012	First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	86,095	101,252	15,157	17.6
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	135,400	149,970	14,570	10.8
47-1011	Supervisors of Construction and Extraction Workers	84,183	98,543	14,360	17.1
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	92,375	106,610	14,235	15.4
43-9061	Office Clerks, General	339,566	353,723	14,157	4.2

Source: Texas Occupational Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

The following table shows the skills employers most commonly require for the occupations in the previous table that are projected to add the most jobs in Texas during the reference period.

Common Required Skills for High Growth Employment

Specialized Skills	Baseline Skills	Certifications
Customer Service	Communication Skills	Driver's License
Sales	Teamwork/Collaboration	Registered Nurse
Scheduling	Physical Abilities	Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Class A
Cleaning	Organizational Skills	Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) Certification
Patient Care	Problem-solving	Basic Life Support (BLS)

Source: Labor Insight (Burning Glass Technologies)

Specialized Skills:

- Customer Service—Customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during, and after a purchase.
- Sales—Sales is activity related to selling or the amount of goods or services sold in a given time period.

- Scheduling—A schedule or a timetable, as a basic time-management tool, consists of a list of times at which possible tasks, events, or actions are intended to take place or of a sequence of events in the chronological order in which such things are intended to take place.
- Cleaning—Cleaning is the process of removing unwanted substances, such as dirt, infectious agents, and other impurities, from an object or environment.
- Patient Care—Patient care refers to the services rendered by members of the health care profession and by nonprofessionals under their supervision for the benefit of the patient.

Baseline Skills:

- Communication Skills—Communication skills refers to the ability to convey information effectively and efficiently.
- Teamwork/Collaboration—A collaboration is a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives.
- Physical Abilities—Physical abilities refers to the ability to quickly and repeatedly bend, stretch, twist, or reach out with the body, arms, and/or legs, which often requires strength, endurance, flexibility, balance, and coordination.
- Organizational Skills—Organizational skills refers to the ability to effectively use one's time, energy, resources, and so forth to accomplish desired goals.
- Problem-solving—Problem-solving consists of using generic or ad hoc methods in an orderly manner to find solutions to problems.

Certifications:

- Driver's License—A driver's license is issued under governmental authority and permits the holder to operate a motor vehicle.
- Registered Nurse—A registered nurse (RN) is a nurse who holds a nursing diploma or Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), has passed the NCLEX-RN exam administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), and has met all other licensing requirements mandated by his or her state's board of nursing. Employers may require RNs to prove their specialized competency by becoming certified in their specialty area through a nationally recognized certifying body.
- Class A Commercial Driver's License (CDL)—A CDL is a government-issued license that permits the holder to operate any combination of vehicles with a gross combination weight rating (GVWR) of 26,001 pounds or more, provided the GVWR of the vehicle or vehicles towed exceeds 10,000 pounds.
- Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) Certification—ACLS certification consists of training in basic life support skills including, but not limited to, effective chest compressions, use of a bag-mask device, and use of an AED, recognition and early management of respiratory and cardiac arrest, airway management, related pharmacology, and management of acute coronary syndrome (ACS) and stroke.
- Basic Life Support (BLS)—BLS training instructs in the type of care that first-responders, health care providers, and public safety professionals deliver to anyone who is experiencing cardiac arrest, respiratory distress, or an obstructed airway.

Current demand for labor can be measured using job posting analytics, as online job vacancies are a leading indicator of the labor market. Online labor demand has exceeded pre-pandemic levels. As of December 2021, Texas had more than 789,000 job postings, which is 67 percent higher than the February 2020 level.

https://twc.texas.gov/files/agency/csp-texas-seasonally-adjusted-monthly-job-ad-twc.jpg

Source: Labor Insight (Burning Glass Technologies), HWOL universe postings

Not seasonally adjusted, the Management Occupation family experienced the largest over-the-year increase in job demand ending in December 2021. This was followed by Computer and Mathematical and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupation families.

Jobs with the most demand in 2021:

Occupation	Job Postings
Registered Nurses	124,347
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	89,137
Retail Salespersons	86,845
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	76,752
Software Developers, Applications	76,421
Customer Service Representatives	68,823
Managers, All Other	60,261
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	59,780
Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	47,042
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	45,337

Source: Labor Insight (Burning Glass Technologies), HWOL universe postings, 2021

Nursing remains among the most in-demand jobs, increasing over 80 percent since February 2020. Many other health care and technical occupations showed similar growth. These included LPNs, LVNs, Nurse Practitioners, and Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians. During this time period, there has also been strong demand for Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations as well as Transportation and Material Moving Occupations, among others.

Employment and Unemployment

Texas Total Nonagricultural Employment peaked in February 2020, prior to COVID-19 and the measures taken to slow its spread, at 12,970,000 jobs. Employment in Texas and nationwide declined precipitously over the next two months. Since then, employment levels statewide and nationally have climbed back. As of June 2021, Texas had recovered to 97.4 percent of its pre-COVID peak employment, outpacing the U.S. recovery of 95.7 percent.

Three major industries in Texas fully recovered and surpassed their respective pre-COVID peak employment levels by June 2021. Trade, Transportation, and Utilities added 35,400 jobs;

however, only one of its three subsectors saw positive employment growth. Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities added 38,800 jobs from February 2020 to June 2021, offsetting losses of 2,800 jobs in Wholesale Trade and 600 jobs in Retail Trade. Financial Activities employment grew by 7,500 jobs since February 2020. Professional and Business Services added 23,500 jobs. Texas Mining and Logging employment was the farthest from full recovery in June 2021, at 80.5 percent. However, the industry showed signs of improvement, as its annual change rate went positive for the first time since July 2019, jumping to 6.9 percent in June 2021. Leisure and Hospitality, facing the steepest COVID-related employment declines among major industries, also lagged in recovery, at 91.3 percent in June 2021.

Texas Nonagricultural Employment by Industry February 2020–June 2021

Industry	February 2020	June 2021	Change	Percentage Recovery
Total Nonagricultural	12,970,000	12,627,400	-342,600	97.4
Total Private	10,970,000	10,666,500	-303,500	97.2
Goods Producing	1,925,800	1,789,600	-136,200	92.9
Service Providing	11,044,200	10,837,800	-206,400	98.1
Mining and Logging	234,900	189,200	-45,700	80.5
Construction	780,700	726,000	-54,700	93.0
Manufacturing	910,200	874,400	-35,800	96.1
Retail Trade	1,325,100	1,324,500	-600	100.0
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	595,900	634,700	38,800	106.5
Information	211,600	203,100	-8,500	96.0
Financial Activities	818,200	825,700	7,500	100.9
Professional and Business Services	1,833,700	1,857,200	23,500	101.3
Education and Health Services	1,775,800	1,720,900	-54,900	96.9
Leisure and Hospitality	1,416,400	1,293,100	-123,300	91.3
Other Services	453,800	406,800	-47,000	89.6
Government	2,000,000	1,960,900	-39,100	98.0

Source: Current Employment Statistics, Seasonally Adjusted

Post-COVID as pre-COVID, the Mining and Logging industry comprises a substantially larger share of employment in Texas than at the national level. The industry accounts for 1.8 percent of Texas employment, while accounting for 0.4 percent of jobs nationally. Texas has a significantly lower share of Education and Health Services jobs compared to the United States

(13.7 percent versus 16.1 percent). At the national level, no major industries have fully recovered to pre-pandemic employment levels, compared to the three in Texas already mentioned. In addition to the three fully recovered industries, of the 11 major industries, seven were approaching pre-COVID employment levels faster in Texas than nationally, including Information, Education and Health Services, Leisure and Hospitality, and Government. As of June 2021, all three Goods Producing sector industries—Mining & Logging, Construction, and Manufacturing—were recovering faster nationally than in Texas. The same was true of the Other Services industry, which includes repair and maintenance jobs, personal and laundry services, and religious, grantmaking, civil, and professional organizations.

Comparing Texas to US Industry Percent Share and Recovery, February 2020–June 2021

Industry	Texas Share (percent)	US Share (percent)	Texas Recovery (percent)	US Recovery (percent)
Total Nonagricultural	100.0	100.0	97.4	95.7
Total Private	84.6	85.1	97.2	95.7
Goods Producing	14.8	14.0	92.9	96.4
Service Providing	85.2	86.0	98.1	95.5
Mining and Logging	1.8	0.4	80.5	91.6
Construction	6.0	5.1	93.0	96.9
Manufacturing	7.0	8.5	96.1	96.4
Wholesale Trade	4.7	3.9	99.5	96.8
Retail Trade	10.2	10.5	100.0	98.4
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	4.6	3.9	106.5	98.5
Information	1.6	1.9	96.0	93.5
Financial Activities	6.3	6.0	100.9	99.2
Professional and Business Services	14.1	14.3	101.3	97.1
Education and Health Services	13.7	16.1	96.9	95.8
Leisure and Hospitality	10.9	10.1	91.3	87.5
Other Services	3.5	3.9	89.6	95.4
Government	15.4	14.9	98.0	95.5

Data Source: Current Employment Statistics, Seasonally Adjusted

Since peaking at 12.9 percent in April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for Texas has dropped considerably. Texas, for a variety of economic and demographic reasons, weathered the worst of the pandemic better than many

other states. In June 2021 the unemployment rate in Texas stood at 6.5 percent. This was six tenths of a percentage point higher than the 5.9 percent national unemployment rate, as shown in the Unemployment Rate chart below. In December 2021, the unemployment rate dropped to 5.0 percent after nine consecutive decreases. Because the unemployment rate is a relatively simple measure of labor surplus representing the fraction of the total labor force that is not employed but is looking for work, many experts consider the labor force participation rate (LFPR) a better gauge of labor market conditions. The LFPR is the percentage of the total civilian population that is either employed or unemployed—that is, either working or actively seeking work. In June 2021, 62.2 percent of Texas' civilian noninstitutional population participated in the labor force. The United States had a slightly lower participation rate—61.6 percent—during the same period. As can be seen in the Labor Force Participation Rate chart below, participation rates have been declining over time for both Texas and the United States. This decline can be attributed to a variety of factors, including an aging population, an increase in young people who are delaying work to pursue higher education, and, more recently, to the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Texas and United States Labor Unemployment Rates (Seasonally Adjusted)

https://twc.texas.gov/files/agency/tx-us-unemployment-rates-graph-twc.docx

Texas and United States Labor Force Participation Rates (Seasonally Adjusted)

https://twc.texas.gov/files/agency/labor-force-participation-rates-graph-twc.docx

Labor Market Trends

The predominant industry across Texas, Health Care and Social Assistance, is the largest industry in 21 of 28 local workforce development areas in the state. The industry increased by slightly more than 48,000 jobs from the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021. Generally, this industry has shown to be resilient in Texas during slower economic times due to the population of aging residents, including retirees. However, claims filed indicate that this industry was heavily affected by layoffs related to elective procedures as the state battled COVID-19. The population of Texas continues to increase, with Health Care displaying long-term employment growth through early 2021.

Manufacturing continues to dominate the Panhandle and South East Texas workforce areas. Often very closely connected with the Oil and Gas industry, Manufacturing still picked up more than 5,800 jobs over the year from first quarter 2020 to first quarter 2021. The Retail Trade industry dominates the North Central Texas and Rural Capital workforce areas, each of which surround large metro urban counties. The industry has changed considerably over the last two years as Retail shifts from brick-and-mortar stores to online retail. The industry is recovering from jobs lost during COVID-19, with close to 103,000 jobs gained from first quarter 2020 to first quarter 2021. Because of Texas A&M University, Educational Services continues to dominate the Brazos Valley workforce area. Finally, Professional and Technical Services continues to dominate the Capital Area, driven by Computer Systems Design and Related Services and attracting more and more tech companies over the last few years.

Top Industry by Employment, 1990 to 2020

https://twc.texas.gov/files/agency/top-industry-replacements-graph-twc.docx

Data Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

When analyzing employers by employment levels, we find that all private unemployment insurance (UI) accounts have grown for all size classes since 2013, with the exception of the

most recent four quarters experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the period April 2020 to March 2021, all UI accounts for small employers (fewer than 10 employees) increased, while UI accounts for larger employers (greater than 10 employees) decreased. UI accounts with one to four employees grew by 2.8 percent, while accounts with five to nine employees increased by 2.9 percent. Employment with small employers increased from April 2020 to March 2021. The largest employment increase occurred for employers with one to four employees, at 1.4 percent, and employers with five to nine employees increased by 0.9 percent. From April 2020 to March 2021, wages with employers with fewer than 50 employees increased, while all other size classes decreased.

The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) provides insight into wages paid by industry as well as by ownership type, identifying public and private employers. From second quarter 2020 to first quarter 2021, 14.4 percent of all wages in Texas were paid to government employees, an increase of 0.7 percentage points from the previous equivalent time frame. Private sector employees were paid 85.6 percent of wages, a decrease of 0.7 percent. In comparison, the nation paid a slightly larger share of wages to government employees, with 14.9 percent, and a lower share of wages to private employers, with 85.1 percent. In the private sector, the highest percentage of Texas wages in the year ending with first quarter 2021 were paid to Professional and Business Services (19.1 percent), followed by Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (18.3 percent), Education and Health Services (11.3 percent), Financial Activities (9.7 percent), and Manufacturing (9.2 percent). Furthermore, the two private industries of Trade, Transportation, and Utilities and Natural Resources and Mining paid a significantly higher percent of wages in Texas than nationwide (18.3 percent and 3.5 percent in Texas, respectively, versus 15.6 percent and 1.2 percent in the United States).

Educational and Skill Levels of the Workforce

- Based on data from the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey, 84.6 percent of Texans age 25 years and older had attained an educational level of high school graduate or higher, compared to 88.6 percent nationwide. The percentage of Texans who had attained a bachelor's degree or higher stood at 30.8 percent, compared to 33.1 percent for the nation.

- Based on Census Bureau data from 2019, 9.4 percent of Texans 18–64 years old were classified as having a disability, a figure that was slightly lower than the rate of

10.3 percent for the United States.

- Based on data from the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey, only 4.8 percent of veterans age 25 and older in Texas had attained less than a high school degree, compared to 16.3 percent of the same age cohort of Texas nonveterans. Similarly, 72.8 percent of Texas' veterans over the age of 24 had attained at least some college education, as compared to 58.2 percent of Texan nonveterans of that age group.

See the following tables for additional information on key Texas population characteristics, including educational attainment for the general population and for veterans.

Key Texas Population Characteristics:

- According to the 2020 decennial Census, the Texas population is 29,145,505.

- As of June 2021, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated the Texas seasonally adjusted civilian labor force at 14,068,729 individuals, second only to California among US states.

- As of June 2021, Texas' seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 6.5 percent stood 0.6 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for the United States, 5.9 percent.

Educational Attainment for the Population

Texas Population 18 to 24 Years	Percentage
Less than high school diploma	13.9
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	34.6
Some college or associate's degree	42.1
Bachelor's degree or higher	9.5

Texas Population 25 Years and Older	Percentage
Less than ninth grade	7.7
Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	7.7
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	25.2
Some college, no degree	21.2
Associate's degree	7.5
Bachelor's degree	20.0
Graduate or professional degree	10.8

Source: US Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table S1501

Veteran Status by Educational Attainment

Texas Veterans 25 Years and Older	Percentage
Less than high school diploma	4.8
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	22.3
Some college or associate's degree	40.4
Bachelor's degree or higher	32.4

Source: US Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B21003

Based on Census Bureau data from 2019, there were an estimated 690,529 Texans between the ages of 18 and 64 at work with disabilities, or 5.3 percent of all employed Texans of that age. The estimated number of unemployed Texans with disabilities over this period was 70,619 individuals, which represented 12.2 percent of the total number of unemployed in Texas.

Finally, the Census Bureau estimate from this period indicated that 22.5 percent of Texans 18 to 64 years old who were not in the labor force had some type of disability, an estimated 888,367 individuals.

Texas Employment Status by Disability Status and Type

Employment and Disability Status	**Estimate**
Total number of Texans 18-64 years old:	17,475,065
In the labor force:	13,524,308
Employed:	12,943,477
With a disability:	690,529
With a hearing difficulty	191,183
With a vision difficulty	178,093
With a cognitive difficulty	221,960
With an ambulatory difficulty	216,922
With a self-care difficulty	52,965
With an independent living difficulty	109,093
No disability	12,252,948
Unemployed:	580,831
With a disability:	70,619
With a hearing difficulty	9,600
With a vision difficulty	14,335
With a cognitive difficulty	37,783
With an ambulatory difficulty	24,661
With a self-care difficulty	7,504
With an independent living difficulty	20,209
No disability	510,212
Not in labor force:	3,950,757
With a disability:	888,367
With a hearing difficulty	129,978
With a vision difficulty	172,767
With a cognitive difficulty	439,817
With an ambulatory difficulty	501,528
With a self-care difficulty	244,308
With an independent living difficulty	446,154
No disability	3,062,390

Source: US Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B18120

Skills Gaps

One way to measure the skills gap is using the recently released Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) state data, which sheds some light on the size of the gap between job openings and job hires. The difference between the two data sets does not exclusively identify a shortage due to skills gaps, since other forces are at work that affect changes in labor force participation, but it may be used as a yardstick over time to identify whether the skills gap is widening or closing.

According to seasonally adjusted JOLTS data for Texas, job hires stood at 536,000 in June 2021, down 28,000 from June 2020. Since the pandemic began to affect the economy, in March 2020, job hires averaged 537,000 per month, with a low point of 322,000 in April 2020 followed immediately by a series high, dating back to 2011, of 727,000. Job openings, on the other hand, stood at a series high 902,000 in June 2021, having risen by 450,000 from June 2020. This annual movement represented the second largest year-over-year increase for the series, with the four largest increases on record occurring over the last four months. The latest swell in job openings contributed to the largest difference between the two data sets, of 366,000 more job openings than job hires, in June 2021. This void helps to illustrate the current difficulty employers encounter in finding enough workers to fill much-needed roles. To help employers get the workers they need and fulfill part of TWC's mission, the agency is finding ways to identify and address the growing demand for workers who have more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree, with a few occupational exceptions. TWC took on a middle skills initiative categorizing these occupations that are expected to be in demand. This list includes close to 400 occupations and represents over 42.0 percent of total employment by 2028, according to long-term occupational projections data.

These occupations consist of a broad range of work and are led by Production occupations, at 22.9 percent of all middle skills occupations, followed by Construction & Maintenance Occupations at 20.4 percent. Due to typical education requirements, Health Care Occupations represent 9.7 percent of all middle skills occupations but 14.9 percent of employment in 2028, while Computer, Engineering, & Science occupations represent 6.1 percent of occupations and 3.3 percent of employment. Office & Administrative Support workers led in terms of projected employment with 28.7 percent of all middle skills jobs.

Projections by Occupational Family 2018–2028

Occupational Family	Number of Occupations	Occupational Family Percentage	2028 Projected Employment	2028 Projected Employment Percentage
Management, Business, and Financial	5	1.3	38,520	0.6
Computer, Engineering & Science	24	6.1	208,912	3.3
Education, Legal, Community Service, & Arts	20	5.1	273,106	4.3
Health Care	38	9.7	946,645	14.9
Service	45	11.5	547,297	8.6
Sales	6	1.5	383,742	6.0

Occupational Family	Number of Occupations	Occupational Family Percentage	2028 Projected Employment	2028 Projected Employment Percentage
Office & Administrative Support	50	12.7	1,826,752	28.7
Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	6	1.5	1,485	0.0
Construction & Maintenance	80	20.4	929,186	14.6
Production	90	22.9	576,263	9.0
Transportation & Material Moving	29	7.4	639,699	10.0
Grand Total	**393**	**100.0**	**6,371,607**	**100.0**

Data Source: Texas Occupational Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

The following middle skills occupations are expected to add the most jobs by 2028.

	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
29-1141	Registered Nurses	216,124	252,330	36,206	16.8
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	210,473	244,020	33,547	15.9
43-6013	Medical Secretaries	95,175	118,967	23,792	25.0
43-4051	Customer Service Representatives	284,520	307,264	22,744	8.0
43-5081	Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	168,080	187,954	19,874	11.8
41-3099	Sales Representatives, Services, All Other	113,483	133,013	19,530	17.2
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	124,603	143,040	18,437	14.8
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	117,761	134,678	16,917	14.4
31-9092	Medical Assistants	60,957	77,619	16,662	27.3
43-9061	Office Clerks, General	339,566	353,723	14,157	4.2

	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
31-1011	Home Health Aides	72,403	85,892	13,489	18.6
15-1151	Computer User Support Specialists	61,572	73,179	11,607	18.9
31-9091	Dental Assistants	30,722	41,711	10,989	35.8
31-1014	Nursing Assistants	91,226	101,789	10,563	11.6
53-3033	Light Truck or Delivery Services Drivers	71,735	82,290	10,555	14.7
25-9041	Teacher Assistants	89,781	99,907	10,126	11.3
47-2111	Electricians	68,009	77,578	9,569	14.1
43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks	143,878	152,300	8,422	5.9
47-2031	Carpenters	54,725	63,129	8,404	15.4
39-9011	Childcare Workers	80,206	88,580	8,374	10.4
33-9032	Security Guards	89,591	97,907	8,316	9.3
41-9022	Real Estate Sales Agents	43,099	51,342	8,243	19.1
47-2152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	49,483	57,686	8,203	16.6
39-5012	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists	52,757	60,873	8,116	15.4
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	74,389	82,343	7,954	10.7

Data Source: Texas Occupational Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

Common Required Skills for Middle Skill Occupations Projected to Add the Most Jobs

Specialized Skills	Baseline Skills	Certifications
Customer Service	Communication Skills	Driver's License
Patient Care	Teamwork/Collaboration	Registered Nurse
Sales	Computer Literacy	CDL Class A
Scheduling	Organizational Skills	Basic Life Support (BLS)
Treatment Planning	Physical Abilities	Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) Certification

Baseline Skills

Communication Skills—Communication skills refers to the ability to convey information effectively and efficiently.

Teamwork/Collaboration—A collaboration is a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives.

Computer Literacy— Computer literacy refers to basic knowledge about and ability to use a device that can be instructed to carry out arbitrary sequences of arithmetic or logical operations automatically.

Organizational Skills—Organizational skills refers to the ability to effectively use one's time, energy, resources, and so forth, to accomplish desired goals.

Physical Abilities—Physical abilities refers to the ability to quickly and repeatedly bend, stretch, twist, or reach out with the body, arms, and/or legs, which often requires strength, endurance, flexibility, balance, and coordination.

Specialized Skills

Customer Service—Customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during, and after a purchase.

Patient Care—Patient care refers to the services rendered by members of the health care profession and by nonprofessionals under their supervision for the benefit of the patient.

Sales—Sales is activity related to selling or the amount of goods or services sold in a given time period.

Scheduling—A schedule or timetable, as a basic time-management tool, consists of a list of times at which possible tasks, events, or actions are intended to take place or of a sequence of events in the chronological order in which such things are intended to take place.

Treatment Planning—Treatment planning refers to the drafting of a detailed plan with information about a patient's disease, the goal of treatment, the treatment options for the disease and possible side effects, and the expected length of treatment.

Certifications

Driver's License—A driver's license is issued under governmental authority and permits the holder to operate a motor vehicle.

Registered Nurse—A registered nurse (RN) is a nurse who holds a nursing diploma or Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), has passed the NCLEX-RN exam administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), and has met all the other licensing requirements mandated by his or her state's board of nursing. Employers may require RNs to prove their specialized competency by becoming certified in their specialty area through a nationally recognized certifying body.

Class A Commercial Driver's License (CDL)—A CDL is a government-issued license that permits the holder to operate any combination of vehicles with a gross combination weight rating (GVWR) of 26,001 pounds or more, provided the GVWR of the vehicle or vehicles towed exceeds 10,000 pounds.

Basic Life Support (BLS) Training—BLS training provides the type of care that first responders, health care providers, and public safety professionals deliver to anyone who is experiencing cardiac arrest, respiratory distress, or an obstructed airway.

Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) Certification—ACLS certification consists of training in basic life support skills, including but not limited to effective chest compressions, use of a bag-mask device, and use of an AED, recognition and early management of respiratory and cardiac arrest, airway management, related pharmacology, and management of ACS and stroke.

The following middle skills occupations are expected to have the highest growth rates from 2018–2028.

Top 25 Middle Skills Occupations Projected to Add Jobs at Highest Rate 2018–2028

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
31-9091	Dental Assistants	30,722	41,711	10,989	35.8
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants	3,691	4,998	1,307	35.4
29-2021	Dental Hygienists	14,179	19,144	4,965	35.0
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	7,812	10,091	2,279	29.2
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	11,573	14,894	3,321	28.7
31-9011	Massage Therapists	13,579	17,406	3,827	28.2
31-9092	Medical Assistants	60,957	77,619	16,662	27.3
49-9052	Telecommunications Line Installers and Repairers	8,288	10,518	2,230	26.9
31-9097	Phlebotomists	9,405	11,890	2,485	26.4
29-2032	Diagnostic Medical Sonographers	4,977	6,278	1,301	26.1
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	25,544	32,067	6,523	25.5
39-2021	Nonfarm Animal Caretakers	22,567	28,310	5,743	25.4
31-2022	Physical Therapist Aides	5,061	6,344	1,283	25.4
43-6013	Medical Secretaries	95,175	118,967	23,792	25.0
49-3043	Rail Car Repairers	2,859	3,554	695	24.3
43-5011	Cargo and Freight Agents	9,612	11,947	2,335	24.3
19-4091	Environmental Science and Protection Technicians, Including Health	2,937	3,648	711	24.2
39-9031	Fitness Trainers and	22,562	27,709	5,147	22.8

Occupation Code	Occupation Title	2018 Empl.	2028 Empl.	Change	Percentage Change
	Aerobics Instructors				
29-2057	Ophthalmic Medical Technicians	5,708	6,991	1,283	22.5
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	12,329	15,043	2,714	22.0
31-9096	Veterinary Assistants and Laboratory Animal Caretakers	5,609	6,838	1,229	21.9
51-9083	Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians	3,234	3,916	682	21.1
15-1134	Web Developers	9,780	11,822	2,042	20.9
43-4011	Brokerage Clerks	4,735	5,710	975	20.6
27-4011	Audio and Video Equipment Technicians	6,482	7,807	1,325	20.4

Data Source: Texas Occupational Projections, Long-Term 2018–2028

Common Required Skills for Middle Skill Occupations Projected to Add Jobs at the Highest Rate 2018–2028

Specialized Skills	Baseline Skills	Certifications
Scheduling	Communication Skills	Certified Medical Assistant
Patient Care	Teamwork/Collaboration	Basic Life Support (BLS)
Customer Service	Detail-Oriented	First Aid CPR AED
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	Organizational Skills	Driver's License
Appointment Setting	Computer Literacy	Basic Cardiac Life Support Certification

Baseline Skills

Communication Skills—Communication skills refers the ability to convey information effectively and efficiently.

Teamwork/Collaboration—A collaboration is a purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically choose to cooperate in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives.

Attention to Detail—A detail-oriented person naturally pays close attention to detail and makes a conscious effort to understand underlying causes instead of just observing effects.

Organizational Skills—Organizational skills refers to the ability to effectively use one's time, energy, resources, and so forth to accomplish desired goals.

Computer Literacy—a device that can be instructed to carry out sequences of arithmetic or logical operations automatically.

Specialized Skills

Scheduling—A schedule or a timetable, as a basic time-management tool, consists of a list of times at which possible tasks, events, or actions are intended to take place or of a sequence of events in the chronological order in which such things are intended to take place.

Patient Care—The services rendered by members of the health care profession and nonprofessionals under their supervision for the benefit of the patient.

Customer Service—Customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during, and after a purchase.

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)—CPR is an emergency procedure that involves chest compression, often in combination with artificial ventilation, in an effort to manually preserve intact brain function until further measures can be taken to restore blood circulation and breathing in a person who is in cardiac arrest.

Appointment Setting—Appointment setting involves contacting individuals to generate and schedule appointments.

Certifications

Certified Medical Assistant—Training that designates a medical assistant who has achieved certification through an accredited board. Training can include human anatomy and physiology, medical terminology, coding and insurance processing, and laboratory techniques.

Basic Life Support (BLS)—Training that provides the type of care that first responders, health care providers, and public safety professionals deliver to anyone who is experiencing cardiac arrest, respiratory distress, or an obstructed airway.

First Aid CPR AED—Training to recognize and care for a variety of first aid emergencies such as burns, cuts, scrapes, sudden illnesses, head, neck, and back injuries, heat and cold emergencies, and how to respond to breathing and cardiac emergencies for victims about 12 years and older.

Driver's License—A driver's license is issued under governmental authority and permits the holder to operate a motor vehicle.

Basic Cardiac Life Support (BCLS) —Training for emergency lifesaving interventions such as CPR, operating an automated external defibrillator (AED), and responding when a person is choking.

2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

For the Texas economy to grow and prosper, employers must convey to job seekers the skills their businesses need. Conversely, job seekers must recognize and promote the skills they possess or obtain new or upgraded skills to meet businesses' needs. The state's market-driven workforce development system plays a vital role in this process, acting as a hub for sharing information related to jobs and skills, facilitating connections between businesses and job seekers, and aiding with job search and training needs. Boards and their contractors work collaboratively to ensure that these services and assistance are available to all employers and job seekers, including veterans, individuals with disabilities, older adults, and others.

TWC and its workforce development partners will continue to collaborate with community and industry partners to expand these opportunities and find new ways to achieve positive results.

The development of innovative workforce services to meet the needs of employers and workers is vital to the success of the workforce system.

As businesses expand their operations and new employers emerge during this period of rapid technology advances, there is a growing opportunity to assist with workforce skills development and training. The gap between in-demand skills and available labor force skills must be addressed at all levels. This includes the availability of technical training opportunities as well as efforts to increase the number of skilled craft specialists. Increased development of regional collaborations with employers, Boards, community colleges, and other training providers will be engaged to address this opportunity.

TWC uses long-term projections data to identify industries likely to grow the fastest. Growth assumes, in part, an adequate supply of workers with relevant skills. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), however, foresees that a combination of slower growth of the civilian noninstitutional population and falling participation rates of youths and prime-age workers will lower national labor force growth to nearly 0.5 percent annually. In Texas, growth is sustained by improving programs for individuals with barriers to employment by identifying transferable skills valued by employers, as well as providing education and training to upscale their skills in high-growth sectors.

The following statewide goals and benchmarks issued by the Office of the Governor are related to the state's workforce development, education, and training activities:

Education—Public Schools

Priority Goal

To ensure that all students in the public education system acquire the knowledge and skills to be responsible and independent Texans by:

- ensuring students graduate from high school and have the skills necessary to pursue any option including attending a university, a two-year institution, or other postsecondary training; serving in the military; or entering the workforce;
- ensuring students learn English, math, science, and social studies skills at the appropriate grade level through graduation; and
- demonstrating exemplary performance in foundation subjects.

Benchmarks

- Percentage of recent high school graduates enrolled at a Texas college or university
- Number of prekindergarten-age students served through the Texas Early Education Model

Education—Higher Education

Priority Goal

To prepare individuals for a changing economy and workforce by:

- providing an affordable, accessible, and quality system of higher education; and
- furthering the development and application of knowledge through teaching, research, and commercialization.

Benchmarks

- Percentage of nursing graduates employed or enrolled in nursing graduate programs in Texas

Health and Human Services

Priority Goal

To promote the health, responsibility, and self-sufficiency of individuals and families by making public assistance available to those most in need through an efficient and effective system while reducing fraud.

Benchmarks

- Percentage of Texans receiving TANF cash assistance
- Percentage of adult welfare participants in job training who enter employment

Economic Development

Priority Goal

To provide an attractive economic climate for current and emerging industries and market Texas as a premier business expansion and tourist destination that fosters economic opportunity, job creation, and capital investment by:

- promoting a favorable business climate and a fair system to fund necessary state services;
- addressing transportation needs;
- maintaining economic competitiveness as a key priority in setting state policy; and
- developing a well-trained, educated, and productive workforce.

Benchmarks

- Number of employees in targeted industry sectors
- Number of new small businesses created
- Number of new nongovernment, nonfarm jobs created
- Texas unemployment rate
- Number of Texans receiving job-training services

Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy

The following activities support WIOA core programs and align with the state's strategies, as previously described.

TWC administrates the development and integration of workforce services in tandem with the Board's oversight and planning efforts. Service delivery is executed through Texas Workforce Solutions, which may contract with one-stop providers to operate a variety of program components. This network gives customers local access to workforce solutions and statewide services at approximately 200 Workforce Solutions Offices, four UI Tele-Centers, and numerous partner locations.

WIOA has reinforced Texas' progress toward integrating services for customers. WIOA

§193(a)(3) provides that Boards' contracted workforce service providers and community partners are defined under prior consistent state law.

Sections 302.021 and 302.062 of the Texas Labor Code set forth the job training, employment, and employment-related educational programs and functions consolidated under the authority of TWC. In Texas, prior consistent state law defines the Boards' responsibility to develop, implement, and modify a plan for convening all relevant programs, identified as one-stop required-partner programs, including:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, formerly Workforce Investment Act (WIA))
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service (ES)
- Unemployment Insurance (UI) Benefits Information
- Choices, the TANF employment and training program
- Child Care Services program
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)
- Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) (WIOA, Title IV) programs
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Employment and Training (SNAP E&T)

Prior consistent state law further defines the following as required one-stop partner programs. Other than UI compensation, which is administered by TWC, the programs are not under the direct oversight of the Boards; therefore, Boards are required to establish memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with:

- AEL (WIOA, Title II);
- Apprenticeship programs;
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)
- Texas Veterans Commission programs

Boards may also enter MOUs with the following optional partner activities:

- National and Community Services Act Program;
- Non-Certificate Postsecondary Career and Technology Training programs;
- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Act of 2006
- Education and vocational training program through Job Corps administered by DOL
- Native American programs authorized under Title I of WIOA
- Employment and training programs administered by Historically Underutilized Business (HUB)
- Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act
- Reintegration of offenders programs authorized under the Second Chance Act, 2007

Additionally, Boards are encouraged to continually expand and enhance their network by forming partnerships outside of the Workforce Solutions Offices. Some agencies and services with which Boards establish additional cooperative relationships include the following:

- Local boards of education
- Local-level vocational education agencies
- Community-based Organizations (CBOs)
- Faith-based Organizations (FBOs)
- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)
- Other appropriate training and employment agencies and services to expand local presence

Pay-for-Performance Contract Strategy

TWC and Boards will maintain, where applicable, performance-based contracts. As in the past, however, TWC and Boards will consider developing, with stakeholder input, a WIOA pay-for-performance contracting strategy applicable to Title I programs, as defined in WIOA §3(47).

The development of a performance-based contract is contingent on the pay-for-performance contract strategy, which establishes specific benchmarks that must be achieved in order for the contractor to receive payment. WIOA calls for the benchmarks to be tied to the prime indicators of performance and adjustments thereof related to economic conditions and the population demographics.

TWC intends for pay-for-performance contract strategies to be implemented in accordance with further guidance regarding WIOA performance requirements. Additionally, DOL's guidance is sought for both state and local areas in developing the broader pay-for-performance contract strategy, including the scope and minimum requirements of the required feasibility study, as presented in the Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) (document no. 2015-05530).

TWC will continue to allow Boards to use performance-based contracts that are not WIOA pay-for-performance contracts. Furthermore, TWC will maintain the latitude provided for in WIOA to consider the development of a pay-for-performance contract strategy as guidance is issued.

1. The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities

The strengths of operating an integrated workforce development system are significant. Texas' implementation of WIOA's six core programs supports a service delivery system that meets the needs of employers and works to ensure that relevant training and employment assistance is available for job seekers, including those with disabilities—regardless of the funding source.

However, the potential for funding reductions—particularly for programs with specific eligibility and use criteria—are likely to challenge the system. Boards work individually, together, and with other stakeholders to achieve cost efficiencies and a seamless service delivery system. Models exist that, if replicated or expanded, could significantly enhance participant access to a range of workforce and associated support services. Collaborative efforts aid in providing an adequate supply of workers that meet the skills requirements of available jobs, thus assisting the state's employers with retaining and enhancing a competitive economic advantage.

2. State Workforce Development Capacity

TWC has emerged as a national leader in workforce development activities by fostering a locally determined workforce system—fundamental to putting Texans back to work and spurring the

state's economic competitiveness. Texas is experiencing growth in new jobs and the labor market overall, and the need to strategically strengthen the workforce development system championed by TWC remains clear.

TWC aligns workforce development activities by establishing rigorous strategic planning requirements coupled with common performance accountability measures, and requirements governing Texas' one-stop delivery system. TWC coordinates and collaborates with the 28 Boards and their contracted workforce service providers and community partners. Collectively known as Texas Workforce Solutions, this network offers local access to integrated and statewide services to all employers, workers, and job seekers and youth, including individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

Congressional action to reauthorize and reform WIA—now WIOA—allows the Boards to continue to apply and improve upon an integrated strategy for serving the Texas labor market. Texas has implemented many programmatic changes mandated by WIOA, such as providing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants with training and placement services by ES staff and using common performance measures across core programs for both adults and youth. WIOA clearly recognizes Texas' integrated workforce system by the inclusion of the permissible alternate entity language.

Recognizing that innovative, progressive services promote a stronger Texas, the Texas Workforce Solutions network has continued its strategy of providing value-added services, which improve customers' opportunities for growth.

Meeting the Needs

TWC is aware of the state's changing demographics and skills gaps and continues to design programs to meet increasingly complex workforce needs. Through the Texas Workforce Solutions network, TWC connects job seekers and other populations with barriers to employment to numerous career and training resources to prepare them to enter or reenter the workforce of high-growth industry sectors. Although the service is targeted, its delivery is uniformly applied.

Leveraging an integrated workforce system, TWC also strives to create a seamless approach that attracts and retains in-demand employers. The agency understands that an employer may not care which funding source or program is covering the service it is receiving. By creating specific Business Service Units (BSUs) at each Board, the workforce system rallies a group of dedicated individuals to meet employer needs and present employers with services in ways that are beneficial and easy to understand. BSUs are Boards' frontline business advocates, often having strong ties to the local business communities. Furthermore, because Boards are predominantly composed of local business leaders, TWC taps a continuous flow of current and relevant information from employers. Board members can shape local policies and procedures to best fit the local marketplace.

Additionally, Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS) Business Relations staff help employers fill open positions with qualified job seekers with disabilities, provide training and accommodation assistance, and assess the workplace, job descriptions, and recruitment and application processes to remove barriers. Business Relations staff can also provide disability awareness training to businesses and their employees, and assist with business symposia, expos, and job and career fairs.

B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

1. Vision

Mission

TWC's mission is to promote and support a workforce system that creates value and offers employers, individuals, and communities the opportunity to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

Vision

TWC and its Texas Workforce Solutions partners will maximize the power of innovation and partnerships to boost superior business outcomes and realize a competitive advantage for all Texans in the global economy.

2. Goals

TWC's vision is rooted in five strategic goals that take into account the state's economic conditions, workforce, and workforce development activities. The following five goals are intended to address critical populations, including claimants, youth, individuals with barriers to employment, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. Specific actions for achievement are listed under each goal.

1.

a. Support a Workforce System that allows employers and workers to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

    i. Expand workforce training, recruiting and hiring services for employers to ensure that a skilled and ready workforce is available to meet the diverse needs of business.

    ii. Enhance workforce services and resources to help job seekers access information about in-demand occupations, gain the skills needed by Texas employers, and find and retain employment.

b. Promote employers' access to the talents and abilities of individuals with a disability. Accommodate such workers in the workplace and assist with maintaining and advancing their careers successfully.

    i. Continued integration of the state's vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities within Texas Workforce Solutions so that local service delivery works in concert with other workforce services, and resources can be shared to better serve the needs of job seekers and workers with disabilities.

    ii. Expand the network of employers that recruit, train, and employ the talents and skills of individuals with disabilities through Texas Workforce Solutions business service representatives, Vocational Rehabilitation Services business relations staff and Board partnerships with economic development and industry groups.

c. Prepare individuals for employment by supporting education and training that equips individuals with in-demand skills as identified by employers.

    i. Continue ongoing support of education programs for students in Texas that inform them and prepare them for high-skill, high-demand jobs through identification and allocation of available state and federal programs and resources.

    ii. Address the workforce training needs of employers by leveraging Skills Development Fund grants and other available resources to support in-demand job training. Continue to support work-based learning

opportunities through internships, mentorships, apprenticeships and job shadowing.

iii. Continue to coordinate and collaborate with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency to support and develop objectives for increasing the percentage of Texans with postsecondary degrees or certifications.

d. Accelerate employment pathways for veterans, service members, and their spouses as they transition to civilian occupations in Texas.

i. Provide an accelerated pathway and demonstrate new approaches for transitioning military service members to gain acknowledgement of their military training and quickly transition to employment in Texas through ongoing expansion of programs such as Texas Operation Welcome Home, College Credit for Heroes, veterans training, and the Texas Veterans Leadership peer mentorship.

ii. Identify gaps in service to Texas veterans and advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities to ensure seamless transition into the Texas workforce for veterans and their spouses.

e. Maintain the highest levels of integrity, accountability, and efficiency in all workforce systems and TWC programs. Through continuous improvements, develop a system that minimizes fraud, waste, and abuse with TWC and all programs it administers.

i. Monitor and evaluate compliance of local area service delivery for fiscal accountability and program effectiveness.

ii. Make technology and system improvements to leverage current resources and improve oversight and monitoring of programs.

iii. Investigate and resolve findings or questioned costs and track each resolution and recovery of disallowed costs.

The Texas workforce development system's market-driven approach incorporates all potential customers, including employers and job seekers, as well as workforce service providers, economic development entities, universities, community colleges, and training providers. This approach ensures that all workforce system customers are valued, informed contributors to and drivers of the system, thus allowing state and local policymakers to strategically plan for the current and future needs of the state.

Texas Workforce Solutions continuously monitors and analyzes the needs of the state's workforce and businesses to ensure a solid approach that enables job growth, promotes a well-trained workforce, and ensures Texas' ability to compete on a global level.

3. Performance Goals

Table 1. Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
Adults				

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
	70.00%	70.00%	71.00%	70.00%
Dislocated Workers	71.00%	71.00%	72.00%	71.00%
Youth	69.00%	72.00%	70.00%	72.00%
Adult Education	37.00%	37.00%	39.00%	39.00%
Wagner-Peyser	61.00%	61.00%	62.00%	61.00%
Vocational Rehabilitation	57.8%	57.8%	58.2%	58.2%

Table 2. Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
Adults	64.00%	67.00%	65.00%	67.00%
Dislocated Workers	72.50%	72.50%	73.50%	72.50%
Youth	70.00%	70.00%	71.00%	70.00%
Adult Education	36.00%	36.00%	38.00%	38.00%
Wagner-Peyser	61.00%	63.00%	62.00%	63.00%
Vocational Rehabilitation	54.4%	54.5%	54.9%	55.5%

Table 3. Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

Program	PY2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
Adults	$5,400	$5,400	$5,500	$5,400
Dislocated	$8,700	$9,134	$8,750	

Program	PY2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
Workers				$9,134
Youth	$3,200	$3,200	$3,250	$3,200
Adult Education	$5,150	$5,150	$5,200	$5,200
Wagner-Peyser	$5,900	$6,300	$5,950	$6,300
Vocational Rehabilitation	$5,500	$5,500	$5,600	$5,600

Table 4. Credential Attainment Rate

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated / Adjusted Level
Adults	73.00%	73.00%	74.00%	73.00%
Dislocated Workers	75.00%	75.00%	76.00%	75.00%
Youth	60.00%	60.00%	61.00%	60.00%
Adult Education	35.00%	35.00%	41.00%	41.00%
Wagner-Peyser	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Vocational Rehabilitation	44.00%	44.00%	45.00%	45.00%

Table 5. Measurable Skill Gains

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
Adults	67.50%	67.50%	68.00%	67.50%
Dislocated Workers	70.00%	70.00%	70.00%	70.00%
Youth		55.00%		55.00%

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
	57.50%		58.00%	
Adult Education	43.00%	43.00%	45.00%	45.00%
Wagner-Peyser	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Vocational Rehabilitation	43.00%	43.00%	44.00%	44.00%

Table 6. Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Program	PY 2022 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level	PY 2023 Proposed/ Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated/ Adjusted Level
Adults	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Dislocated Workers	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Youth	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Adult Education	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Wagner-Peyser	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Vocational Rehabilitation	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

4. Assessments

Texas Government Code §2308.101 requires the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC)—the state board—to monitor the state's workforce investment system. As part of that responsibility, TWIC annually reports to the governor and the legislature on the degree to which the system is achieving state and local workforce goals and objectives. In January 2016, TWIC released the Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2016–2023 (FY'16–'23) 2020 Update, available at https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/twic/System-Strategic-Plan-Update.pdf.

State statutes require that TWIC evaluate six elements in the workforce system, as follows:

- Workforce agency program performance and alignment
- Formal and Less Formal performance measures
- Implementation of the system strategic plan

- Adult education actions and achievements
- Board activities and alignment
- Workforce development programs that focus on welfare-to-work initiatives

A primary focus of TWIC is the implementation of the workforce system strategic plan, which was approved by the governor in early 2020, and the continuation of the plan's balanced scorecard approach to support system evaluation. TWIC will continue to produce studies and reports to support the implementation of the system strategic plan and to design and launch system projects to strengthen the three imperatives that form the foundation of the strategic plan: customer services and satisfaction, data-driven program improvement, and continuous improvement and innovation.

TWIC will continue to evaluate programs to identify gaps and duplication that adversely affect the seamless delivery of TWIC services and other programs. Problems, and the results of measures taken by TWIC to address those problems, will be included in the annual report on strategic plan implementation.

Program data and other data from across the workforce system are critical in evaluating the extent to which workforce system programs, services, and products are meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders. The collection of key data, as well as the reporting and analysis of that data—in a consistent and useful manner—is essential in demonstrating outcomes, determining if changes are required or desired, and establishing benchmarks for future performance.

Under the system strategic plan, TWIC will continue to work with system partners to build upon process improvements to implement workforce programs, services, and initiatives designed to achieve the system objectives and goals.

C. STATE STRATEGY

Overview

In May and June 2019, Texas achieved a record-low unemployment rate of 3.4 percent before increasing to 3.7 percent in February 2020. In March, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. April 2020 saw a record-high unemployment rate of 12.9 percent due to the disease and efforts to slow its spread. Over the last 14 months the unemployment rate decreased 11 times to reach 6.5 percent in June 2021. Texas experienced positive, total nonfarm annual job growth for 119 consecutive months from May 2010 to March 2020 before a record annual loss of more than 1.2 million jobs in April 2020. June 2021 marked the third month of positive annual growth following 12 months of decreases. Employment increased on a monthly basis for 13 of 14 periods following declines in March and April 2020. As of June 2021, three major industries surpassed 100 percent of their February 2020 employment.

Texas operates a complex, integrated workforce system comprising numerous programs, services, and initiatives administered by state agencies and Boards, TWIC, independent school districts, community and technical colleges, and local adult education providers. System partners are responsible for delivering a wide range of workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement.

The system is interrelated because the programs and agencies serve either a common customer or are charged with achieving similar employment and education outcomes for their targeted customer groups. Therefore, the strategic planning process is designed to identify and focus on systemic issues that affect multiple parts of the system—either programs or agencies—and that

address broad, big-picture workforce issues. TWIC and its system partners completed a year-long planning process, culminating with the development of the system strategic plan for fiscal years 2016–2023. Because the system strategic plan focuses on issues that span agencies and programs, it fulfills a unique and complementary role in the workforce system and does not duplicate the purpose or scope of other agency or program plans.

The system plan identifies several priority issues that system partners have addressed, are addressing, and will address during the strategic plan period. In identifying these issues, TWIC examined both program and participant outcomes that are critical to Texas' workforce and competitiveness, in addition to the critical issues and interdependencies that cross agencies.

The most recent update of the plan is available at https://gov.texas.gov/organization/twic/workforce_system.

TWC Strategies

The Texas workforce system has matured significantly since 1995, when the Texas legislature merged staff and programs from 10 different state agencies to create TWC. In 1993, the legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 642—the Workforce and Economic Competitiveness Act—the purpose of which was to transform the state's fragmented workforce development system into an integrated service-delivery network, thus improving the quality and effectiveness of services.

In 1995, Texas' workforce programs began to consolidate into a single, integrated system. That system is known today as Texas Workforce Solutions. It allows coordination of workforce activities among partners at the state and local levels. When House Bill (HB) 1863 took effect in

September 1995, it merged 28 workforce programs across several state agencies into a singular agency, TWC.

In July 1999, TWC became the state entity charged with implementing the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. In recognition of the work Texas had already done to establish the framework of an integrated workforce system, WIA provided for several "grandfather" provisions allowing Texas to continue certain provisions under prior consistent state law. One of those provisions was specific to the designation of workforce areas. This provision allowed Texas' Boards to continue as long as they performed successfully and maintained sustained fiscal integrity.

In July 2014, when WIOA was enacted, Congress again recognized Texas' workforce system with WIOA maintaining the provisions that allow Texas to continue under prior consistent state law. Absent any new direction from the Texas legislature, Texas will continue to operate under prior consistent state law.

TWC has emerged as a national leader in workforce development activities by fostering a locally driven workforce system, which is fundamental to putting Texans back to work and spurring the state's economic competitiveness. Texas has been experiencing record-low unemployment and exceptional growth in new jobs and the labor market overall. The need to continue strategically strengthening the workforce development system championed by TWC remains clear.

TWC aligns workforce development activities by establishing rigorous strategic planning requirements coupled with common performance accountability measures and requirements governing Texas' one-stop delivery system. TWC coordinates and collaborates with the state's 28 Boards and their contracted workforce service providers and community partners.

Collectively known as Texas Workforce Solutions, this network offers local access to integrated and statewide services to all employers, workers, job seekers, and youth, including individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

TWC anticipates the next five years to be an era of service to an expanding Texas workforce whose diversity and skills are rapidly changing in a world in which our employers and industry engage in innovation and technology to advance their competitiveness. Texas employers, workers and job seekers have the opportunity to benefit from the resiliency of the Texas economy, the diversity of Texas industries, and our solid economic foundation keeping our economy strong. The Texas workforce is now at more than 14 million individuals whose skills are world-class and ready to meet the needs of more than 580,000 private employers. Through the Governor's Tri-Agency Partnership, our work with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and in collaboration with key stakeholders across the state's workforce and educational systems aligns current and future industry needs. The strategies will help equip Texans with the skills, education and training needed to be competitive for the jobs of today and in the future.

Meeting the Needs

Through the Texas Workforce Solutions network, TWC connects job seekers and other populations with barriers to employment to numerous career and training resources to prepare them to enter or reenter the workforce in high-growth industry sectors. Although the service is targeted, its delivery is uniformly applied.

TWC also strives to ensure that the state's integrated workforce system attracts and retains in-demand employers. Each Board has a dedicated Business Service Unit (BSU). BSUs are the

Boards' frontline business advocates, offering a full range of services designed to connect employers with qualified job seekers. BSU team members often have strong ties to the local business communities, which allows them to effectively meet an employer's specific needs and present services in ways that are beneficial and easy to understand. Furthermore, because Boards are predominantly comprised of local business leaders, TWC taps a continues flow of current and relevant information from employers. These interactions allow Board members to shape local policies and procedures to best fit their local marketplace.

Additionally, system partners deliver vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs which play a critical role by enabling individuals with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment through a variety of services ranging from career counseling to support for postsecondary education. Services are customized to an individual's specific needs and may include assessments, counseling, medical treatment, assistive devices, vocational training for job skills, job search and placement assistance, and other services that will prepare the individual for competitive integrative employment. The VR program also provides services to help businesses hire, train and retain qualified individuals with disabilities.

Targeted Service Populations

Employers

Texas' strong economic foundation is largely a credit to the diversity and stability of its private-sector businesses. The state boasts an estimated 580,000 total employers representing hundreds of industries. The overwhelming majority (97.7 percent) of Texas employers are small businesses employing fewer than 100 workers. However, the largest percentages of jobs (62.3 percent) are with companies that employ 100 or more workers. It is vital that TWC and its workforce partners continue collaborating with local economic development entities to equip Texas employers of all sizes with a highly skilled workforce that will keep jobs in Texas and help companies remain competitive in the global marketplace.

Communities

Texas Workforce Solutions provides locally customized services that address the needs of each region of the state. The Boards are comprised of a cross section of local officials and

businesspeople who form partnerships with local entities to deliver integrated services that address each community's unique needs.

The workforce system continues to support local delivery of adult education and literacy (AEL) services to assist individuals who need education and training to obtain the basic skills that will enable them to gain sustainable employment and become self-sufficient.

The workforce system also delivers vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, find, or maintain employment, or prepare for educational opportunities. VR also helps employers recruit, retain, and accommodate employees with disabilities.

Job Seekers

Providing employment services and developing innovative strategies to help individuals find employment opportunities in high-growth, high-wage industries are central to TWC's mission. TWC and its workforce partners offer services that lead to hundreds of thousands of job seekers entering employment each year. Services include job search assistance, labor market and career planning information, training and education opportunities, and unemployment benefits to those who lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

Workers

With a workforce of nearly 14 million eligible workers, TWC aims to help all Texans achieve and succeed in a quality work environment. With an emphasis on engaging underserved populations, such as ex-offenders and foster youth, TWC plans to eliminate barriers to employment and extend services to everyone. The agency provides workforce development and training, apprenticeship programs, and employment support services for members of its labor force. The agency promotes long-term self-sufficiency by enabling parents to work or attend education and training to launch a career pathway, while their children receive quality child care. TWC also investigates wage claims, child labor law violations, and employment discrimination claims to ensure that workers receive fair treatment and proper compensation for their work.

Unemployment Insurance Claimants

TWC strongly encourages Boards to design services that provide early intervention with unemployment insurance (UI) claimants. The longer individuals draw UI, the more likely they are to exhaust their benefits; therefore, Boards promote continued comprehensive claimant services throughout the life of their claim cycle. Boards dedicate staff to claimants and establish claimant protocols that include ongoing one-on-one reemployment services.

Veterans

Veterans are a priority population for TWC. The agency's own workforce is made up of more than 11 percent veterans, compared to an average of about 4.5 percent in most other state agencies. The Texas Veterans Commission recognized TWC's dedication to hiring veterans in September 2015 with the Public Entity (Government Agency) Large Employer of the Year award. TWC promotes the hiring of veterans by others through several initiatives, including services and programs for US armed service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

TWC provides services and programs for US armed service members returning from missions. The Texas Veterans Leadership Program employs peer mentors called Veterans Resource and Referral Specialists to direct returning veterans to resources and services that can help them reenter civilian life and the civilian workforce. Services include job search and employment assistance and identification of education and training resources. Veterans receive preference for jobs posted on TWC's online job matching website, WorkInTexas.com. Veterans can search for jobs, receive priority of service at Texas Workforce Solutions offices and access information

on transition assistance and benefits. TWC maintains the Just for Veterans resource on the TWC website that provides information on services specifically for Veterans. Additionally, TWC's College Credit for Heroes initiative assists veterans by awarding college credit for experience gained and training completed during military service.

Individuals with Disabilities

Approximately 12 percent of the Texas population is estimated to have some type of disability. TWC is committed to providing services to this population. The agency promotes competitive employment of individuals with disabilities coupled with the expectation that they can meet the same employment standards and responsibilities as other working-age adults. All working-age individuals with disabilities, including young adults, are offered information regarding employment as an individual with a disability, including the relationship between an individual's earned income and the individual's public benefits.

The VR program helps individuals with disabilities prepare for, find, and keep jobs, and helps students with disabilities plan the jump from school to work. Work-related services are individualized and may include counseling, training, medical treatment, assistive devices, job placement assistance, and other services.

TWC additionally promotes partnerships with employers to overcome barriers to meeting workforce needs through the creative use of technology and innovation. TWC takes steps to ensure that the staff of public schools, vocational service programs, and community-based organizations are trained and supported to assist all individuals with disabilities in achieving competitive employment. TWC also promotes the availability and accessibility of individualized training designed to prepare an individual with a disability for the individual's preferred employment. To this end, individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to understand and explore options for education and training, including postsecondary, graduate, and postgraduate education, vocational or technical training, or other training, as pathways to employment.

Foster Youth

Foster youth are another priority population. TWC funds transition centers serving both current and former foster youth. The centers address critical life barriers facing youth who have or will soon age out of the foster care system. They provide access to education, employment training and services, life skills classes, mentoring opportunities, and appropriate support services.

Ex-Offenders

TWC received a grant from DOL to implement a demonstration project to assist ex-offenders with reintegrating into the workforce. Known as Texas Pathways to Reentry, the project creates employment opportunities for individuals who committed violent and non-violent offenses, including registered apprenticeship programs in high-demand sectors, such as healthcare, manufacturing, construction and automotive repair. To provide tailored services to eligible program participants, this project will be implementing promising practices from the "Integrated Reentry and Employment Strategies" white paper, by using a resource-allocation and service matching tool. This tool combines results from a validated corrections assessment and a workforce-based job readiness assessment. Participants then proceed into one of three customized career pathways related to the individual's specific education, employment and training needs.

Pathways are:

- Basic Skills Deficient
- High School Diploma or GED

- Existing Credentials or Certifications

The Texas Pathways to Reentry partnership focuses on the right people with criminal records, at the right time, and with the right interventions, can help reduce recidivism and improve the likelihood that individuals will successfully reconnect to the workforce.

Students and Their Parents

Providing today's youth with education, training, and workplace opportunities is essential to the state's future growth and success. To ensure that young people have the skills necessary to meet future workforce needs, Texas must support programs that steer students toward in-demand careers beginning at an early age. TWC supports programs that identify educational and career pathways for students, including vocational and technical training, as well as those that require two-year, four-year, and higher education levels.

Through the Tri-Agency Partnership, which supports our next generation workforce, the "Jobs Y'all: Your Career. Your Story" campaign raises awareness among Texans ages 14–24 about the opportunities in Texas industries with the goal of inspiring young Texans to explore careers and understand the education and training needed for in-demand jobs.With participation from employers, industry association representatives, workforce developers, other stakeholders, parents, and counselors, the campaign launched a website featuring eight in-demand industry sectors; career resources including Texas Career Check, Texas Reality Check, the Texas Internship Challenge, and Texas OnCourse; and links to industry career information. The campaign has generated more than 150 million impressions and more than 2.5 million video views. TWC's Education Outreach team presents the website to thousands of students each year during virtual and in-person career exploration presentations, resulting in 30,000+ page views a year and serving as the number two referring source to Texas Career Check and a top referring source to Texas Reality Check and the Texas Internship Challenge. In 2022, the site is scheduled for a refresh of industry data with a focus on middle skills occupations. It will also feature additional landing pages and information tailored to students with disabilities and foster youth, as well as more support and application resources for internship programs, such as Summer Earn and Learn and THECB's TX Works.

TWC's Outreach & Employer Initiatives Division and the Labor Market Information Department develop and distribute educational materials and online tools that help parents, educators, and students identify career pathways. TWC has worked closely with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to help communities, schools, and students transition to the career-focused initiatives set forth in House Bill 5, passed by the 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2013.

TWC approved a two-year initiative in July 2018, totaling $4,000,000, called "Workforce Career & Technical Education Outreach Specialist Pilot Program" to ensure students and their parents were aware of career resources to empower students to gain degree certifications, graduate with marketable skills, and minimize student debt in the future. The grant awards that resulted from the competitive two-year Workforce Career & Technical Education Outreach Specialist Pilot Program ended in August 2021. However, due to the success of the pilot, Boards are now able to use their TANF allocations to implement a Workforce Career and Education Outreach program.

Upon completion of the pilot, the seven teams participating in the program provided 10,046 individual sessions to students and teachers across the state as well as 4,165 presentation sessions to industry, college, or community partners. In total, 381,935 individuals (308,409 of which were students) attended sessions in which the teams facilitated presentations, workshops, or tool trainings. In these sessions, the teams educated the future workforce of Texas about the career pathways available beyond high school, provided information about registered apprenticeship programs, and led workshops on career readiness skills and labor

market data. After having seen a specialist presentation, students, teachers, and parents requested 11,247 individual one-on-one sessions. Finally, these pilot teams helped 2,278 students enter an internship.

As the pilot program ended and Boards were given the flexibility to apply TANF funds to support Education Outreach work, all seven of the pilot teams recommitted to continue the work of the program, and seven additional Boards submitted Letters of Intent to grow their own regional teams. With the addition of one state-level Education Outreach team, these 15 teams continue to work in partnership to leverage best practices, share resources, and support one another whenever possible. The teams meet monthly for continued booster training sessions and to foster discussions on topics relevant to the work and the customers they serve.

The Workforce Career & Technical Education Outreach Specialist program places local Workforce Career and Education Outreach Specialists in area school districts to provide career guidance and workforce information to students and their parents regarding: 1) high growth, high demand occupations; 2) opportunities and training in middle-skills jobs; 3) apprenticeship training programs; 4) internships; and 5) community and technical colleges.

This program supports the achievement of Texas' goals outlined in the November 2016 Tri-Agency (TWC, TEA, and THECB) Report. A key component of the program includes training for the Workforce Specialists by TWC's LMCI team. The training will cover all of TWC's online labor market tools including Texas Reality Check.

Targeted Economic and Workforce Development Opportunities

TWC's workforce development efforts align with the governor's economic strategies by allocating resources to support opportunities in vital industry clusters. The agency proactively supports science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education and training to ensure that the future workforce is equipped with the knowledge and skills that Texas employers demand. TWC is also committed to supporting job growth in Texas' diverse industries. Energy remains a significant industry in Texas, although the annual growth rate for mining and logging has slowed to single digits beginning February 2019, which coincides with a drop in the price per barrel of West Texas Intermediate crude oil. Other industries in the state experiencing employment growth include manufacturing, construction, and education and health services—all of which require a highly skilled workforce.

TWC continues to partner with the Office of the Governor in conducting small business forums throughout the state. These forums present an opportunity for TWC to connect to small business owners and listen to their concerns and ideas. The forums also provide a chance for TWC representatives and Board staff to assist businesses by introducing new programs or explaining updates to existing programs. These forums have proven highly successful and have occurred all over the state.

Furthermore, TWC is a diligent and responsible steward of available public resources. The Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund remains in good condition through an efficient bond strategy that keeps employer taxes predictable and stable. TWC continues to seek ways to effectively leverage state and federal funding options to improve current programs and provide additional services.

To provide needed services, TWC consistently leverages multiple funding sources. Federal funds make up the clear majority (85 percent) of TWC's budget. The remaining 15 percent comes from state sources. TWC receives federal funds from DOLETA, the US Department of Health and Human Services, the US Department of Agriculture, and the ED.

Through prior consistent state law set forth in Texas Labor Code §302.061 and §302.062, TWC sources block grants from multiple funding streams to workforce areas to administer programs such as WIOA, TANF/Choices employment services, SNAP E&T, and subsidized child care under

the federal Child Care and Development Fund. Block grants allow Boards to provide integrated services across programs and to also provide integrated case management. Boards are given the autonomy to use the block grants as needed, to determine the number of staff and Workforce Solutions Offices, and make other decisions necessary to best serve their workforce areas.

Crafting a cohesive workforce system requires an integration of diverse programs coupled with linkages to facilitate delivery of a full range of services to employers, workers, and job seekers.

Skills Development Fund

Texas is fortunate to have state funding to provide for the Skills Development Fund. As one of the state's premier economic development tools, the fund serves as an incentive to attract new firms to locate in Texas or to help existing companies expand. The Skills Development Fund successfully merges employer needs and local job training opportunities into a winning formula that benefits employers and provides needed skills to workers. Skills grants help incumbent workers upgrade their skills, or help create high-skill, high-wage jobs. The use of these grants for skills development is particularly significant because, unlike formula funding, these funds are not required to serve categorical populations; that is, the funds can be used to target the workers whom employers identify as needing enhanced skills.

Adult Education and Literacy Program

TWC's three-member Commission (Commission) adopted a program goal for AEL to support increases in employment, higher education transition, skill gains, and secondary completion through demonstrated approaches that integrate system services and leverage community partnerships as part of TWC's Strategic Plan for Adult Education and Literacy for Fiscal Years 2021–2026. To meet this goal, AEL grantees have implemented a diversified service delivery system that delivers both foundational skills and career pathway transitions needed to support and prepare Texans to support their families, careers, and communities.

Under WIOA, Boards engage and are expected to support AEL grant recipients in various activities that promote student success in career and higher education goals. Finding ways to innovate adult education and literacy and leverage education, training, support, and career development resources continues to be critical in fostering student and system success. AEL and its Texas workforce partners share the goal of building a wider and more valuable array of services that better assist their mutual customers in attaining educational goals that support career development and higher education transition and help strengthen families and communities

Vocational Rehabilitation

In accordance with Senate Bill 208, 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2015), the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program transferred from the Department of Assistance and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) transferred to TWC. Additionally, two designated state units—the Division for Blind Services and the Division for Rehabilitation Services—were combined into a single designated unit.

Since the transfer of the VR program to TWC, VR has collaborated with other workforce partners to maximize opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Examples include:

- Summer Earn and Learn, which is a collaboration between VR and each of the 28 Boards to provide work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities;
- Enhanced coordination with TWC's Texas Veterans Leadership Program to improve information sharing and access to services for veterans with disabilities; and

- Collaboration with VR's business relations coordinators (BRCs) and the local Workforce Solutions business services unit (BSU) staff to increase outreach to employers and coordinate provision of information about services that can be provided to them.

Continued Flexibility through Waivers

The Texas workforce system and its customers have benefited from DOLETA's authority to waive certain WIOA provisions. Texas has requested federal waiver opportunities seeking relief from provisions that restrict flexibility and innovation or that make inefficient use of staffing resources. With input from Boards and other stakeholders, Texas has developed waiver requests covering several workforce issues, including:

- increased local control of program delivery;
- improved Board ability to respond quickly to changing needs within the workforce area;
- increased flexibility at the local level to serve business and industry;
- elimination of duplication with streamlined administrative processes to free up money for services; and
- increased accountability at the state, local and service-provider levels

Alignment of Workforce Programs

Following WIOA implementation, TWC has not made significant changes to its strategies. The strategies in place continue to prove successful. For this reason, no significant changes are planned that would impact TWC's strategies for the next two years.

Texas is a recognized national leader in strategically integrating numerous, complex workforce programs, services, and initiatives. Integration among partners enables the Texas Workforce System to operate in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible, while remaining flexible, adaptable, and most important, market-based and customer-focused. Nonetheless, TWC and the Boards continue to refine and improve Texas' structure for aligning core and optional programs under WIOA and other available resources to realize the state's vision and achieve its goals.

Improved access and efficiency, along with value-added services, are a few of the many benefits customers receive from the state workforce system. System partners are responsible for the delivery of 27 workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement, and employer services to support those providing job opportunities. Strategically, the programs and agencies serve either a common customer or are charged with achieving similar employment and education outcomes for their targeted customer groups, including:

- providing services that facilitate the match between employers and job seekers;
- providing employment, training, and retention services for eligible WIOA participants and prioritizing services to recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals and individuals who are disabled and/or basic skills deficient, to spur financial self-sufficiency;
- developing adult education and family literacy programs that ensure all adults have the basic education skills they need to contribute to their families and communities;
- providing employment, training, and retention services to individuals with barriers to employment, including veterans, individuals with disabilities, trade-affected individuals, older individuals, ex-offenders, homeless individuals, long-term unemployed individuals, and youth;

- encouraging the use of training services that provide portable, transferable credit and credentials;
- providing support services, such as child care, UI, and transportation to enable eligible individuals to work or participate in employment and training activities;
- monitoring and evaluating compliance of local area service delivery for fiscal accountability and program effectiveness; and
- providing technical assistance to local Boards and training providers to ensure the most effective delivery of workforce services.

As frontline partners in the workforce system, the 28 Boards provide programs and services through the network of Workforce Solutions Offices. Boards work together and collaborate with business, economic development, educational, and other entities to provide services funded by WIOA and other state and federal sources.

Elements of the Local Delivery Structure

- Board members and staff operate under prior consistent state law; as such, members and staff are primarily private-sector employers, with some representing local education agencies, labor organizations, community-based organizations, economic development councils, and one-stop partners, such as AEL and VR. Each Board develops a strategic and operational plan, with local plans subject to review by TWC and TWIC and approval by the governor. Boards designate one-stop partners, identify providers of training services, and monitor system performance against performance accountability measures.
- Board staff conducts the Board's day-to-day administrative operations. Boards operate with a high degree of local flexibility for service delivery design and partner with local training and educational institutions to ensure employment and training opportunities meet area employment needs.
- Workforce Solutions Offices provide a variety of online, in-house, and on-site services, including employer services, job search resources, labor market information, and referrals for customized training. In addition to traditional brick-and-mortar offices, mobile workforce units are a moving extension of the Workforce Solutions Office, offering on-site, rapid response assistance to area employers and communities.
- BSUs address the ever-increasing need for skilled workers in high-demand fields by offering job search assistance, skills training, and other workforce development services. Supported by state and federal funds, most basic services are provided free of charge to employers registered with the state and federal government. Some Boards also provide certain services, including workshops and seminars, at nominal fees. BSUs within an integrated workforce system offer a unique opportunity to ensure that all workforce services are structured to ensure that the business needs are considered when delivering services to job seekers and consumers.
- Texas Association of Workforce Boards (TAWB)—TAWB is a not-for-profit association representing Texas' Boards and more than 750 of the business, education, and community leaders who serve on the Boards. TAWB facilitates communication among the business community, educational providers, and state and federal officials, and provides a forum for members to share best practices.

The Boards are allocated funding from federal, state, and local sources to provide programs and services designed to meet the needs of employers, incumbent workers, and job seekers.

Current Activity

The Boards will develop new local plans under WIOA to align local goals and objectives set forth in the state's plan and describe collaboration strategies with system partners.

To address limited financial resources yet still meet the needs of Texas' employers, Boards:

- leverage additional funding sources;
- develop, analyze, and share labor market information and regional economic studies;
- engage in planning and service delivery across workforce areas and/or with other workforce and community partners;
- incorporate new, and adapt current delivery strategies, such as the use of mobile units and modern technologies that make service more accessible; and
- strive for integrated, effective service delivery by sharing, modifying, and replicating effective training models and processes.

Events and projects provide the opportunity for Boards and system stakeholders to collaborate, innovate, and streamline services to improve workforce service delivery. Continuous improvement efforts by the Boards are facilitated and encouraged through activities such as:

- sharing best practices and other information at TWC's annual conference, workforce forums, and regional and local meetings; and
- maintaining user-friendly, online resources for topics including:
    - integrated workforce processes;
    - performance measures; and
    - program-specific monitoring toolkits, through the ongoing work of the Quality Assurance Network (QAN, a committee of the Texas Workforce Executive Director's Council that coordinates educational and networking activities for all 28 Texas Boards).

State Leadership in Workforce Initiatives

States have proven to be effective laboratories for innovative workforce initiatives. In Texas, TWC and the Boards can best serve the needs of Texas job seekers, employers, and communities. Boards are most familiar with local needs and opportunities through first-hand knowledge of local partners, and baseline community assessments that ensure extensive local one-stops and the system's initiatives deliver the maximum possible value. Texas believes that federal rules, grants, and base funding should emphasize state roles and maximize a state's flexibility to design effective and comprehensive initiatives.

TWC uses the governor's reserve statewide funding and AEFLA state leadership funding, in conjunction with other funding where feasible and appropriate, to encourage innovation at the local level through grants to Boards, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, and other suitable entities. TWC prioritizes programs that assist specific populations and initiatives: veterans, youth, and STEM programs. TWC undertakes projects that encourage and improve growth industries, the earning capabilities of job seekers facing barriers to employment, and the effectiveness of Texas Workforce Solutions. Detailed information on strategic initiatives can be found in the operational section of the plan.

Concluding Comments

The strengths of operating an integrated workforce development system are significant. Texas' implementation of WIOA's six core programs supports a service delivery system that meets the

needs of employers and then works to ensure that relevant training and employment assistance is available for job seekers, including those with disabilities, regardless of the funding source.

However, the potential for funding reductions—particularly for programs with specific eligibility and use criteria—are likely to challenge the system. Boards work individually, together, and with other stakeholders to achieve cost efficiencies and a seamless service delivery system. Models significantly enhance participant access to a range of workforce and associated support services. Collaborative efforts aid in providing an adequate supply of workers that meet the skills requirements of available jobs, thus assisting the state's employers with retaining and enhancing a competitive economic advantage.

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

TWIC was created by the 73rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (1993). TWIC's purpose is to promote the development of a highly skilled and well-educated workforce for Texas and to assist the governor and the legislature with strategic planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system.

The scope of TWIC's work is "workforce development," which is defined in state statutes that pertain to TWIC as "workforce education and workforce training and services." Workforce education includes articulated career path programs and the constituent courses of those programs that lead to a sub-baccalaureate license, credential, certificate, or degree.

Texas statute assigns TWIC five primary functions in the Texas workforce system, as follows: "1) strategic planning, 2) evaluation and performance measurement, 3) research and continuous improvement, and 4) review of state and local workforce plans and reports to ensure alignment with statewide goals and objectives; and 5) maintain the Texas Skills Standards system."[1]

TWIC also serves as the state workforce investment board (state board) as required under federal workforce law. As the state board, TWIC operated under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) (Public Law 105-220) since Texas' implementation of the Act in 1999. On July 22, 2014, President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) (Public Law 113-128) into law, thereby establishing new federal workforce law and repealing WIA. TWIC continues to serve as the state board under WIOA.

In some states, prior consistent state law has determined that the state board will be largely responsible for system strategic planning and evaluation and that the state workforce agency will be responsible for program administration.

Because of the significant workforce system reform initiated by the Texas legislature in 1993 and 1995, WIOA contains provisions that allow Texas to retain—or grandfather—major elements of its workforce system that are consistent with WIOA, including TWIC's composition and roles. As a result, the duties assigned to the state board under WIOA are implemented in a manner that is consistent with TWIC's role under state legislation enacted before WIOA. Accordingly, TWIC does not operate programs, nor does it directly manage the flow of state and federal funding to the system's state agencies. Rather, TWIC's focus is strategic; its functions are guided by the duties and responsibilities established for TWIC by the Texas legislature.

Because TWIC is the state board, federal agencies periodically engage it in the federal system oversight role to participate in program reviews. For example, in the past, TWIC has participated in program reviews and site visits conducted by the DOL Region IV Office, the DOL Office of Inspector General, the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the ED Office of Adult and Vocational Education, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

One of TWIC's key responsibilities is the development of an overarching strategic plan for the Texas workforce system. The state's workforce system is composed of various programs, services, and initiatives administrated by agencies and Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), as well as independent school districts, community and technical colleges, and local adult education providers. System partners are responsible for the delivery of more than 23 workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as educational programs that support career preparation and advancement.

TWIC member agencies[1], which are specified in state statute, include the:

- Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism
- Texas Education Agency
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
- Texas Workforce Commission

TWIC is required to meet quarterly and at other times deemed necessary by the Chair. All meetings of TWIC and its committees are posted in the *Texas Register* in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act. The chair is authorized to appoint subcommittees and technical advisory committees to inform the work of the Council and to assist TWIC in fulfilling its legislative mandates. Current TWIC committees include the Executive Committee and the Apprenticeship and Training Advisory Committee. A recommendation from any committee must be considered by TWIC and is not considered an approved action until TWIC conducts a vote. A recommendation or action must be approved by a majority of the quorum present at the meeting.

TWIC appoints an executive director, who is responsible for the daily operations of TWIC. The executive director establishes administrative and personnel policies and procedures on behalf of TWIC, hires staff to address TWIC's duties and responsibilities, and provides periodic and annual reports to TWIC, the governor, and the legislature. TWIC is responsible for developing and implementing policies that clearly separate its policy-making responsibilities from the management responsibilities of the executive director and staff.

1. Governor's website/TWIC. Accessed June 13, 2019, at https://gov.texas.gov/organization/twic/purpose.

2. Ex officio members; Texas Government Code, Chapter 208. Workforce Investment Act.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

A. CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE STATE'S STRATEGY

TWC is the state agency in Texas responsible for the administration of all WIOA core and partner programs. TWC and a statewide network of 28 Boards for regional planning and service delivery, their contracted service providers and community partners, and the TWC unemployment benefits tele-centers comprise Texas Workforce Solutions.

Texas Workforce Solutions provides workforce development services that help workers find and keep good jobs, and help employers hire the skilled workers they need to grow their businesses. Our workforce partners include community colleges, adult basic education providers, local independent school districts, economic development groups, businesses, and other state agencies. Collaboration and coordination among all partners play a critical role in the success of the Texas workforce system.

Boards are responsible for strategic planning of workforce services for employers and job seekers. The integrated workforce delivery system maximizes funding and productivity while eliminating duplicate efforts. Through performance-based contracts, TWC monitors and holds the Boards accountable for program performance and provides technical assistance.

TWC continues to cultivate emerging industries, support existing businesses, and enhance the skills development of the Texas workforce, taking advantage of strategic opportunities provided by economic change. TWC is dedicated to leading a market-driven workforce system that meets the needs of employers and workers and helps Texans prosper.

Texas has enjoyed efficiencies in providing services to employers, job seekers, and special population groups, including low-income and basic skills deficient individuals, as well as veterans, by colocating core programs. These efficiencies include the following:

- Providing comprehensive and seamless workforce and support services
- Elimination of duplicative effort and effective management of program funds
- Systemic approach for providing guidance and technical assistance consistently across programs
- Colocating and integrating Texas Workforce Solutions and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS) business relations staff to help employers fill open positions with qualified job seekers with disabilities, thus enhancing the one-stop service delivery model
- Using labor market information to inform targeted business development, explore industry and economic trends, and research and track emerging and evolving occupations in Texas

Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy

The following activities support WIOA core programs and align with the state's strategies, as previously described.

TWC administrates the development and integration of workforce services in cooperation with the Board's oversight and planning efforts. Service delivery is provided through Texas Workforce Solutions, which may contract with one-stop providers to operate a variety of program components. This network gives customers local access to workforce solutions and statewide services at approximately 180 Workforce Solutions Offices, four UI tele-centers, and numerous partner locations.

WIOA continues to support Texas' progress toward integrating services for customers. WIOA §193(a)(3) provides that Boards' contracted workforce service providers and community partners are defined under prior consistent state law.

Texas Labor Code §302.21 sets forth the job training, employment, and employment-related educational programs and functions consolidated under the authority of TWC. In Texas, prior consistent state law defines the Boards' responsibility to develop, implement, and modify a plan for convening all relevant programs, identified as one-stop required-partner programs, including the following:

- WIOA, formerly WIA
- ES
- UI benefits information
- Choices, the TANF employment and training program

- SNAP E&T
- Child Care Services
- TAA
- AEL programs

The 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2015), amended the Texas Labor Code by adding Title 4, Subtitle 4, which transferred the following programs to TWC:

- VR (WIOA, Title IV) programs
- Business Enterprises of Texas
- Grant for Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind
- The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center

Prior consistent state law further defines the following as required one-stop partner programs. Other than UI compensation, which is administered by TWC, the programs are not under the direct oversight of the Boards; therefore, Boards are required to establish memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with:

- Adult Education and Literacy (WIOA, Title II);
- Apprenticeship programs;
- National and Community Services Act programs;
- Non-Certificate Postsecondary Career and Technology Training programs; and
- Senior Community Services Employment Program.

TWC also recommends that Boards establish MOUs with the following optional partner activities:

- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Act of 2006
- Job counseling, training, and placement services for veterans, 38 USC 41
- Education and vocational training program through Job Corps administered by DOL
- Native American programs authorized under Title I of WIOA
- HUB-administered employment and training programs
- Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act
- Reintegration of offenders programs authorized under the Second Chance Act, 2007
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs authorized under Title I of WIOA

Additionally, Boards are encouraged to continually expand and enhance their network by forming partnerships outside of the Workforce Solutions Offices. Some agencies and services with which Boards have established additional cooperative relationships include the following:

- Local boards of education
- Local-level vocational education agencies

- Community-based Organizations (CBOs)
- Faith-based Organizations (FBOs)
- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)
- Other appropriate training and employment agencies and services to expand local presence

Texas state law requires TWC and HHSC to jointly develop a MOU establishing guidelines for a coordinated interagency case management plan. Additionally, TWC requires in the contracts between TWC and the Boards that the Boards, in cooperation with HHSC local offices, develop and implement a coordinated interagency case management plan.

Pay-for-Performance Contract Strategy

WIOA provides TWC and Boards the ability to implement a pay-for-performance contracting strategy in addition to established performance-based contracts for service providers. Pay-for-performance contracts require established performance benchmarks tied to the six primary indicators of performance in WIOA. Contractors must achieve these benchmarks to receive payment. TWC will further refine pay-for-performance contracting as additional guidance regarding WIOA performance requirements becomes available.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship training is designed to prepare and train individuals for careers in the skilled trades and crafts. Apprenticeship combines on-the-job training supervised by experience journey workers with job-related classroom instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation.

The purpose of TWC's apprenticeship training program is to stimulate and assist industry in developing and improving apprenticeship and other training programs designed to provide skilled workers needed to compete in a global economy. As authorized in the Texas Education Code, Chapter 133, TWC provides funding to local education agencies (LEAs) and apprenticeship committees to support a portion of the costs of job-related classroom instruction in registered apprenticeship training programs. The LEA and the apprenticeship committee serve as the funding link between the registered apprenticeship training program and TWC. To qualify for funding, apprenticeship training programs and apprentices must be registered with the DOL's Office of Apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship training programs have demonstrated that employers that invest in training have lower employee turnover, increased employee productivity, better employee problem-solving skills, and improved employee relations. As a result, both the employer and employee are equally committed to the program's success.

For the biennium beginning September 1, 2021, TWC was appropriated a 100 percent increase over current biennium funding to support the Apprenticeship training program. Combined with WIOA statewide-discretionary funding TWC is projecting a 44 percent increase in participation during the FY'22–'23 biennium. With these additional funds, TWC can help address demand for apprenticeship jobs across Texas and can continue to prioritize the enrollment of women and other populations at risk of dropping out of the workforce into apprenticeship training.

Job Corps

Job Corps program is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the DOL. Authorized under Title I of WIOA as a required partner in the one-stop systems, Job Corps programs assist eligible youth, age 16 to 24 to connect to the labor force by providing them with intensive social, academic, career and technical education, and service-learning opportunities.

Located in primarily residential centers, Job Corps programs facilitate participants obtaining secondary school diplomas or recognized postsecondary credentials leading to successful careers, in in-demand industry sectors or occupations or the Armed Forces. Program goals include: economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement; or enrollment in postsecondary education, including an apprenticeship program; and support responsible citizenship. There are 131 Job Corps centers located throughout the United States, each offering educational training and a variety of vocational training programs. In Texas, Job Corps programs are coordinated out of Region 4, Dallas office with programs operating in El Paso, San Marcos, Laredo, and McKinney, Texas.

Other required partners administer the Indian and Native American Programs, which support employment and training activities for Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian individuals; Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker program, which provides funding to help migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families achieve economic self-sufficiency by offering supportive services to them while they work in agriculture or by helping them to acquire new skills for jobs offering better pay; and, the YouthBuild program, which provides low-income youth the opportunity to learn construction skills through building affordable housing for homeless and low-income individuals in their neighborhoods and other community assets such as schools, playgrounds, and community centers.

Child Care and Early Learning

High-quality child care promotes healthy child development and school readiness while enabling parents to work or attend training or education. The mission of the Child Care & Early Learning Division is to enhance the quality of and increase access to high-quality child care through program supports and provide financial aid for low-income families.

Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) administer child care financial assistance to support eligible low-income families and families that participate in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)/Choices employment program. TWC and the Boards provide education, guidance, and information to participating families about the characteristics and availability of high-quality child care and its importance to healthy child development.

In order to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the service industry and to support Texas' continued economic recovery, in June 2021 the Commission approved the use of $500 million to support the new COVID-19 Service Industry Recovery (SIR) Child Care Program, which helps low-wage workers who are in the 1) Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, 2) Accommodation and Food Services, and 3) Retail Trade industries obtain high-quality child care. Children of eligible SIR workers may receive child care services for 12 months.

In November 2021, the Commission approved $293.2 million in funding for low-income child care to allow for an increase in the number of children served by Boards. These funds will be made available to Boards in Board Contract Years 2022–2024.

The pandemic also highlighted an opportunity for the Commission to consider a policy change that allows unemployed parents to be determined eligible to receive child care financial assistance. Previously, only parents who were already working or in education and/or training programs met the child care initial eligibility criteria. In June 2021, the Commission approved a waiver of the existing child care rule, and now unemployed parents may receive up to three months of child care in order to search for work. The child care services continue if the parent finds a job that meets the hourly work requirement.

In June 2021, the Commission approved $2 million of statewide WIOA funds for short-term training for parents of children enrolled in the Child Care Services program, specifically parents in the initial job search period. Additionally, TWC continues to support initiatives that address the middle skills gap by offering child care services to parents enrolled in qualifying training and education programs.

The Texas Rising Star program is a quality rating and improvement system for early learning programs participating in the Child Care Services program. Texas Rising Star requires providers to exceed minimum licensing requirements and encourages them to attain progressively higher levels of quality. Texas Rising Star certification is available to all child care providers that participate in the Child Care Services program. Boards employ both Texas Rising Star assessors and mentors. In Board Contract Year 2023, a state-procured entity will assume responsibility for Texas Rising Star assessments and will employ all Texas Rising Star assessors. All assessors must complete and be certified through the Texas Rising Star Assessment Training and Certification Program (ATCP). All mentors must participate in the new Texas Rising Star Mentor Micro-Credentials program. Both the ATCP and the Mentor Micro-Credentials program are administered by the Children's Learning Institute at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston.

Boards also receive funding to improve the quality of child care services. Boards must determine their community's needs and annually develop Child Care Quality Expenditure Plans that outline their strategic investment of these quality improvement funds. Many Boards use these funds to support ongoing education and training for child care professionals. Additionally, TWC recently approved the use of $3 million in CCDF quality improvement funds to support the development of newly registered child care apprenticeship programs. A request for applications was issued in November 2021.

Foster Youth

TWC recognizes that helping foster youth and those aging out of foster care transition to independent living requires more than addressing the need for shelter, food, and safety. Intensive and coordinated efforts are required from public agencies and community organizations, professionals, community leaders, and concerned volunteers to support youth in becoming engaged, responsible, and economically self-sufficient adults.

TWC along with Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) regional offices and local Boards have jointly developed and entered into agreements addressing the unique challenges facing current and former foster youth transitioning to a successful adulthood, including improving employment outcomes for these youths. Through an MOU, DFPS and the Boards collaborate to: further the objectives of the DFPS Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program; ensure services are prioritized and targeted to meet the needs of current and former foster youth; and refer, as appropriate, foster youth who need housing to short-term housing.

DFPS staff, caregivers, and PAL contractors refer youth age 16 and older to local Texas Workforce Solutions Offices for job search and readiness assistance, career exploration, and employment and training services. Each Board has a designated point of contact for staff and youth to access assistance and services. Youth are encouraged to use the TWC online job matching system, WorkInTexas.com, to search for jobs, create a resume, and submit applications for employment.

The Labor Market Information (LMI) Division of TWC supports a website, "Texas Career Check," to facilitate career and education exploration available to youth in and formerly in Foster Care. The website provides information on occupation trends, occupational information, military occupations, school information, programs of study and a high school graduation plan, as well as an online interest profiler to help youth determine what they like and do not like. (https://texascareercheck.com/)

Texas Family Code §264.121 directs that workforce services be prioritized and targeted to meet the unique needs of foster youth and former foster youth.

Boards must ensure that:

- eligible foster youth receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals, except veterans and eligible spouses, in the receipt of federal and state-funded services; and
- workforce services are prioritized and targeted for youth transitioning out of the foster care system and for former foster youth.

Priority of Service for Support Services

To ensure that eligible foster youth receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals, except veterans and eligible spouses, in the receipt of workforce services, they also must have access to needed support services (for example, child care and transportation).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Both state and federal welfare reform legislation emphasize personal responsibility, time-limited cash assistance benefits, and the goal of work instead of public assistance. To support these mandates, TWC and the Boards developed a service delivery model with the goal of employment at the earliest opportunity for applicants and recipients of cash assistance. TWC, through a collaborative partnership with HHSC has implemented interagency initiatives to address welfare reform.

The Choices program is Texas' Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) employment and training program, which assists applicants, recipients, nonrecipient parents, and former recipients of TANF cash assistance to transition from welfare to work through participation in work-related activities, including job search and job readiness classes, basic skills training, education, vocational training, and support services. Workforce Solutions Offices provide these services that are designed to lead to employment. Choices services are an important part of this process because they serve both employers and job seekers and provide job-matching tools that all Workforce Solutions Office staff can use.

Choices staff meets with TANF recipients to introduce them to Choices services, conduct an in-depth assessment, and develop a Family Employment Plan. Participation for most recipients includes job readiness activities and job search activities as a means of testing the labor market and locating employment at the earliest opportunity. Job readiness activities include the following:

- Self-esteem building
- Job search skills
- Labor Market Information
- Employment goal setting
- Resume writing
- Interviewing techniques
- General Workplace expectations
- Job retention skills

Noncustodial Parent Choices

The Non-Custodial Parent Choices (NCP Choices) program is a collaborative effort of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) of Texas, Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), Workforce Solutions Office staff, and family court judges. The program targets low income unemployed, or underemployed Non-Custodial Parents (NCPs) who are behind on their child support payments, or who have had a child support obligation established.

Mirrored after TWC's Choices employment and training program for TANF recipients, the goal of the NCP Choices program is to help NCPs overcome substantial barriers to employment and career advancement while becoming economically self-sufficient and making consistent child support payments.

The success of the NCP Choices program is largely attributable to four core elements:

1. Court-ordered program participation. Failure to participate leads to "swift and certain consequences," up to, and including, jail time;
2. Presence of Workforce Solutions Office staff at the court to meet with NCPs immediately after being ordered into the program;
3. Intensive case management by Workforce Solutions Office staff, including weekly in-person contact until NCPs enter employment, and monthly verification of continued employment; and
4. Close communication with program partners regarding NCPs' participation and progress in the program.

Even though this is one of the hardest-to-serve populations, the NCP Choices program has seen positive employment, job retention, and child support results. The following program information was collected between September 2020 and August 2021:

- 1,787 non-custodial parents were ordered into the program.
- $1,192,991 was collected in child support payments.

TWC also encourages collaboration and coenrollment with other programs when appropriate to ensure the NCP receives a range of services.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Education and Training (E&T) program helps SNAP recipients who have been referred to the SNAP E&T program to gain skills, training, or work experience in order to increase their ability to obtain regular employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency. Administrative authority of the SNAP E&T program in Texas transferred from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) effective April 1, 2018. HHSC and TWC have partnered through an Interagency Cooperation Agreement to provide SNAP E&T services.

TWC coordinates and collaborates with 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and their contracted workforce service providers and community partners to provide SNAP E&T services. Collectively known as Texas Workforce Solutions, this network offers local access to integrated and statewide services to all employers, workers, job seekers, and youth, including individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

TWC rules (40 TAC §813.2(1)(D), §813.12, and §813.32(b)) and federal regulations (7 CFR §273.7(a) and 7 CFR §273.24(a)(1)) require SNAP recipients to meet work requirements unless they are exempt. Federal regulations at 7 CFR §273.7(c)(5) require each component of the state's SNAP E&T program to be delivered through its statewide Workforce Solutions Offices. The SNAP E&T program components offered in Texas include supervised job search, job search

training, workfare, work experience, basic education, vocational training, occupational training, and job retention.

On December 20, 2018, Congress reauthorized SNAP as part of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115–334). The law contains various provisions that affect SNAP eligibility, benefits, and program administration, including changes mandated by the law and those that provide additional flexibility for state agencies. All provisions of the Act related to SNAP were effective as of the date of enactment, unless otherwise stated.

On January 4, 2021, FNS issued a final rule, Employment and Training Opportunities in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, most provisions of which were effective March 8, 2021, to implement changes made by §4005 of the Agriculture Improvement Act to the SNAP E&T program.

Individuals with Limited English Proficiency

Individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English, are a large and growing population of job seekers in Texas. TWC continues to develop policy guidance, technical assistance, and language assistance to ensure meaningful access to workforce services for all customers. TWC integrates English literacy with civics education, workforce preparation activities, secondary education, and occupational skills training. This approach stresses contextualized learning to transition participants to postsecondary education, further skills training, or lead to employment.

Texas employers must continue to compete in the global marketplace and maintaining a skilled workforce is one of their prime concerns. Supporting the employment and training goals of the LEP workforce is clearly a core mission for Boards, training providers, and adult education programs. TWC working with multiple partners developed the LEP Guide for Workforce Professionals. Boards, Workforce Solutions Office staff, and education and training professionals can use this tool to enhance service delivery to LEP customers. The guide is available online at https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/lep-guide-workforce-professionals-twc.pdf.

Homeless Individuals

TWC strives to make services available to individuals with barriers to employment, including homeless populations, as identified by WIOA §171(b)(4). As part of this effort, TWC serves on the Interagency Council for the Homeless, a group charged with collaborating and planning the provision of services to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. TWC also partners with grantees of DOLVET's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) to offer job search and placement services, occupational training and counseling, and other vital assistance.

Additionally, Boards are charged with establishing collaborative partnerships with housing authorities and sponsors of local housing programs to address unmet housing needs of Choices recipients. Workforce Solutions Office staff performs initial and ongoing assessments to determine the employability needs of individuals; assessments must report unmet housing needs and whether those needs are a barrier to full participation in the workforce and progression to self-sufficiency.

Ex-Offenders

TWC is a member of the State Reentry Task Force, led by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). The task force consists of 29 individuals representing a cross-section of Texas agencies, organizations, and communities. The Reentry Task Force maintains working groups to address specific barriers to successful reentry. The Employment Working Group identifies

strategies to eliminate barriers to employment in a post release environment as well as coordination of resources, job training, and assistance.

TDCJ has implemented a new program called Website for Work that helps connect individuals on parole supervision with employers looking for skilled applicants. Website for Work is a web-based application managed by a dedicated employment specialist to connect unemployed or underemployed ex-offenders who have specific skills and certifications that meet the employer's needs. The Website for Work program serves the entire state of Texas and employers that hire an ex-offender within a year of his or her release from prison qualify for the federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). Additionally, TWC offers fidelity bonding through the local Workforce Solutions Offices. Fidelity bonding for employment is offered and marketed for certain at-risk job seekers, including individuals in the ex-offender population.

In July 2019, TWC received a $1.225 million discretionary grant from DOL to conduct a demonstration project using evidence-based and evidence-informed interventions, new interventions that theory or research suggests are promising, or a combination of both to improve employment outcomes of adults. The grant targets adults ages 25 or older who were formerly incarcerated in the adult criminal justice system and released within two years of the date of enrollment or are currently under supervision. Known as Texas Pathways to Reentry, the project must provide services in high-crime, high-poverty communities. The primary goal of the Texas Pathways to Reentry program is helping the target population to secure and retain suitable self-supporting employment. Participants will be assessed to determine criminogenic risks, needs, and barriers to employment. Workforce Solutions case managers will use the assessment information to develop an overall career path and service delivery strategy. Services will be structured to address the specific barriers identified during the assessment process.

Reemployment Service and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)

The Reemployment Service and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program is a federal grant program designed to allow states to provide personalized reemployment assistance to individuals who are receiving unemployment benefits and are determined likely to exhaust their benefits before becoming reemployed. The program uses statistical modeling to rank unemployment benefit claimants based on their likelihood to exhaust all unemployment benefits. This process includes a statistical evaluation of several work-related and economic factors, including length of workforce attachment, occupational field, wage, and location.

The RESEA program focuses on the following strategies:

- Conducting one-on-one reemployment and eligibility assessments to determine continued eligibility for UI benefits.
- Providing customized reemployment services that are tailored to each claimant's needs.

The goals of RESEA include providing claimants with a wide array of resources that support reemployment as quickly as possible and connecting claimants to reemployment services, including coenrollment in the WIOA dislocated worker program or other program services, as appropriate. By focusing on UI claimants who are likely to exhaust benefits, TWC's RESEA program also satisfies the federal Worker Profiling Reemployment Services statutory requirements.

Required RESEA activities include:

- registering in Wagner-Peyser employment services;
- developing an individual reemployment plan;
- providing labor market information customized to individual claimants needs;

- providing information and access to services available through Workforce Solutions Offices; and
- assessing continued unemployment benefit eligibility.

Texas' RESEA program further promotes the integration of workforce services as envisioned by WIOA.

C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

The Texas workforce system is a complex structure comprised of numerous programs, services, and initiatives administered by state agencies and Boards, TWIC, independent school districts, community and technical colleges, and local adult education providers. System partners are responsible for the delivery of a wide range of workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement.

The workforce system is interconnected by the programs and agencies that either serve common customers or are charged with achieving similar employment and educational outcomes for their targeted customer groups. Crucial to the system planning process and alignment with federal and state statutes, the Texas workforce system builds upon the system's core elements, goals, and objectives to meet the vision and mission of the system, including the core programs under WIOA:

- The Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth formula grant programs administered by the DOL under Title I of WIOA;
- The Adult Education and Family Literacy (AEFLA) program administered by the ED under Title II of WIOA;
- The Wagner Peyser Act ES program administered by DOL under Title III WIOA; and
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program administered by ED under Title IV of WIOA

Improved access and efficiency, along with value-added support services, are a few of the many benefits customers receive from the state workforce system. System partners are responsible for the delivery of various workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement, including:

- Providing services that facilitate the match between employers and employees
- Providing employment, training, and retention services for eligible WIOA participants and prioritizing services to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are disabled and/or basic skills deficient to spur financial self-sufficiency
- Developing adult education and family literacy programs that ensure all adults have the basic education skills they need to contribute to their families and communities
- Providing employment, training, and retention services to individuals with barriers to employment, including veterans, individuals with disabilities, trade-affected individuals, older individuals, ex-offenders, homeless individuals, long-term unemployed individuals, and youth
- Encouraging the use of training services that provide portable, transferable credit and credentials
- Providing support services, such as child care, UI benefits, and transportation to enable eligible individuals to work or participate in education and training activities;

- Monitoring and evaluating compliance of local area service delivery for fiscal accountability and program protection
- Providing technical assistance to local Boards and training providers to ensure the most effective delivery of workforce services

TWC, the 28 Boards, their contracted service providers, and community partners continue to work toward full integration of core programs. The strategy of alignment, coordination, and integration of education, employment, and training programs is close to being fully realized.

D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

Texas businesses receive value-added assistance through an integrated workforce system. Businesses have access to pools of job seekers at all levels of education and experience, allowing potential employers to tailor new hires to the requirements of the job and build a better workforce. Close ties to the local labor market enable Boards to conduct outreach by working with businesses to provide opportunities for work experience and on-the-job training (OJT) and allow low-skilled workers to build skill sets relevant to the current market. Additionally, Boards are well positioned to work with other community partners, such as economic development organizations, to expand opportunities to all customers.

Dedicated Business Services Units (BSUs) along with Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) provide businesses access to customized service options that address their specific business needs. BSUs and VRS offer a range of services designed to help employers with hiring and training needs to maximize their competitiveness, including:

- applicant recruitment, screening and referral;
- listing and maintaining job orders through WorkinTexas.com
- assistance with and participating in job fairs;
- information resources (e.g., labor market and business statistics, employment and labor law, UI benefits);
- testing and prescreening job candidates;
- basic employment skills training and referral to education and training providers;
- customized training -- including training through the state-funded Skills Development Fund -- and OJT skills training;
- assist with and information on the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC); and
- rapid response and downsizing assistance in the event of closings or mass layoffs.

Continued efforts to effect system-wide improvement includes the expansion of employers' access to grants through the Skills Development Fund. Participants receiving grants through this program build skill competencies to meet current and future demand in high-growth industry sectors. In crafting solutions for Texas employers, community-based organizations (CBOs) and technical colleges partner with TWC and local employers to provide job training when a specific need is identified. Training enables incumbent employees to advance their skills and/or creates new jobs with the partnering business. TWC works with the employer and

training provider to ensure that the program meets specific performance measures and benefits both the employer and the trainee.

During state fiscal year 2021, TWC:

- awarded 43 Skills Development Fund grants totaling $16,999,080;
- served 44 Texas businesses;
- supported the creation of 4,925 new jobs;
- upgraded the skills of 8,379 workers in existing jobs;
- awarded 22 Skills for Small Business grants totaling $824,250; and
- awarded six Dual Credit grants totaling $859,253.

TWC closely measures performance to evaluate the Boards' effectiveness in meeting the needs of employers. These measures include:

- assisting employers in filling vacancies; and
- expediting the return of UI claimants to work, thereby protecting the state's unemployment trust fund as well as containing the UI tax rates of employers.

TWC's Office of the Commissioner Representing Employers also reaches out to businesses by sponsoring Texas Business Conferences, an annual series of 12 to 15 employer seminars around the state. The seminars present practical, up-to-date information for operating a successful business and managing employees. Topics include: Texas employment law and the basics of hiring, employee policy handbooks, handling unemployment claims, independent contractors, and federal and Texas wage and hour laws.

TWC's Skills for Small Business initiative provides further training opportunities for both employers and employees. Other activities include TWC's partnership with the Office of the Governor's Economic and Tourism division to host the Governor's Small Business Forums, and with the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX) to provide geographic mapping technology, SitesOnTexas.com. This website assists employers in planning for business expansion, job retention, and workforce training.

Through the Texas Industry Partnership, TWC has dedicated WIOA funds to address skill gaps and ensure a talent pipeline to address regional industry needs, through collaborations between Boards and private employers or corporate foundations (partners). Collaborations must engage in allowable WIOA activities that support workforce development for six designated industry clusters: advanced technologies and manufacturing, aerospace and defense; biotechnology and life sciences; information technology; petroleum refining and chemical products; and energy.

The intent of the Texas Industry Partnership program (TIP) is to support Boards in strengthening partnerships with communities, leverage available state and local resources, and foster collaboration with partners to promote occupational job training in Texas.

TWC promotes partnerships with employers to overcome barriers in meeting workforce needs with the creative use of technology and innovation. TWC takes steps to ensure that the staff of public schools, vocational service programs, and CBOs are trained and supported to assist all individuals with disabilities in achieving integrated, competitive employment. TWC also promotes the availability and accessibility of individualized training designed to prepare an individual with a disability for the individual's preferred employment. To this end, individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to understand and explore options for education and training, including postsecondary, graduate and postgraduate education, vocational or technical training, or other training, as pathways to employment.

TWC's VR services collaborates with Boards to develop and implement a coordinated, team-based approach to serving employers. This strategy includes other state and federal partners, such as the DOL's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and the Veterans Administration, which conduct ongoing outreach with federal contractors to increase awareness, recruitment, hiring, and retention of qualified individuals with disabilities, including veterans.

E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In March 2016, Governor Abbott established the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative and tasked the commissioners of TEA, THECB, and TWC to work together on charges centered on developing strong links between education and industry, with the goal of helping Texans grow in economic prosperity. The commissioners built a proactive, ongoing partnership along with other stakeholders to align the educational goals of Texas with the state's higher education plan of 60x30TX, which aims for 60 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds to hold either a certificate or degree by 2030, with the goal of growing the state's workforce, industry, and the economy.

TWC will incorporate the State's 60x30TX strategy as one of the building blocks for engaging the state's community colleges and area career and technical education schools as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system. The goal of this system is to have at least 60 percent of Texans ages 25-34 possess a certificate or degree by 2030 through initiatives that include increasing postsecondary educational success over the next five years.

House Bill (HB) 1247 and HB 3767, passed during the 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021), codified the Tri-Agency Initiative and require TEA, THECB, and TWC to develop unified workforce education goals and strategies and align work-based learning programs across the state.

TWC promotes and recognizes community college engagement through our annual Partnership Awards. Each year, the Community College Engagement Award is issued to two community college partners (one large, one small) for their level of engagement in TWC programs that include Skills Development Fund and Self Sufficiency Fund grants, apprenticeship, WIOA grants, Summer Merit (STEM) projects, Skills for Small Business contract, Wagner-Peyser 7(b) grants, dual credit projects, AEL projects, veteran-focused Skills for Transition, employment services, Jobs and Education for Texas (JET) grants, and curriculum development or sharing (Fast Start). This nonmonetary award is presented annually at the Texas Workforce Conference. It highlights the important work of community colleges and other entities integral to preparing a skilled workforce. The colleges and organizations selected for recognition will have demonstrated innovation in meeting the needs of local employers.

Since the acquisition of the state's AEL program, TWC has encouraged the examination of new approaches to engage the state's education and training providers, thereby encouraging adults in areas of literacy and numeracy while also preparing them for sustainable employment and financial self-sufficiency.

As part of its partner engagement with educational institutions, TWC is involved in a unique collaboration with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) that assesses the curriculum requirements for public schools as well as legislation promoting early college high schools. TWC shares relevant labor market and career information to assist with decisions on directing resources toward a curriculum that will meet the occupational needs of the state. Support of early childhood education and professional development, along with English as a Second Language (ESL) and other AEL programs, are critical collaborations. The partnership between THECB, TWC, and participating public universities through the College Credit for Heroes (CCH) program has enabled veterans to receive college credit for the experience and training received while serving in the armed forces.

Additionally, THECB and TWC are working together to implement the Texas Fast Start program to promote rapid delivery of workforce education and development. This program focuses resources on meeting the needs identified by employers and other interested parties for additional fast-track, affordable certification programs in high-growth target industries.

Other significant engagements with educational institutions include Texas State Technical College (TSTC), the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX), and community colleges. TWC administers the state's Skills Development Fund (SDF), Texas' premier job-training program providing local customized training opportunities for Texas businesses and workers to increase skill levels and wages of the Texas workforce. Collaborations with Texas community and technical colleges and TEEX support job training programs among training and education providers. Through this collaboration, employers that need to find skilled workers or upgrade the skills of their current workforce are provided customized training solutions.

In FY'19, TWC awarded SDF grants to community colleges in partnership with more than 72 businesses that supported the creation of some 3,568 new jobs and the elevation of skills of more than 9,115 incumbent workers through skills training. The SDF has continued to expand and now supports certain dual-credit programs offered by school districts in partnership with public junior colleges, public state colleges, and/or public technical institutions, which accelerates a student's ability to obtain a degree. Grants awarded support the purchase of training equipment used in dual-credit programs.

Boards annually publish invitations to community colleges, area career and technical education schools, and other training providers, encouraging submission of applications for consideration as an eligible training provider.

Business partners contribute to the success of the SDF grant program through in-kind support which includes, providing trainees' wages during training, the use of training space and equipment, funding a portion of course costs as necessary, the provision of complementary courses that are not part of the SDF grant, and salaries for staff who are assisting with the grant. These in-kind contributions totaled over $19.2 million in FY'18.

TWC strongly supports partnerships that increase opportunities for adult learners to transition to postsecondary credentials, including registered apprenticeship certification and industry-recognized certificates and licenses and certifications that are portable and stackable. Current initiatives strategically position the statewide system for innovation in new directions related to full system integration and postsecondary education outcomes, as measured by high school equivalency, college and career readiness, enrollment in nonremedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions, and occupational and industry skill standards and certification widely used and recognized by business and industry. These initiatives include:

- Integration of services to support alignment of AEL activities with other core programs in the workforce system and linkages to employers and CBOs through workforce events, ongoing technical assistance efforts, and sharing of best practices developed across the state
- Continued development of content and models for integrated education and training career pathways, and other postsecondary transition models and workplace projects, including Registered Apprenticeships with employers; and TWC Accelerate Texas' is designed to build capacity and expand deployment of career pathway programs, which support robust employment, higher education transition, skills gains, and secondary completion through demonstrated approaches that integrate system services and leverage community partnerships

F. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Eligible Training Providers (ETP) and Career Schools and Colleges (CSC) are part of the TWC education and training system. Because of this, TWC works closely with these programs to create a job-driven education and training system that is performance and results driven.

ETPs are job training programs certified by TWC to provide WIOA-funded training services through vouchers known as Individual Training Accounts. WIOA requires Boards to target high-growth, high-demand, and emerging occupations within their workforce areas. To be approved for the statewide ETP List, a training program must align with an occupation included on the state's target occupations list. ETPs are also required to submit initial and ongoing annual student performance data.

CSC's are privately owned institutions that offer classroom or online training in which students are taught the skills needed to perform a particular job. TWC regulates career schools in Texas and provide information and technical assistance to schools, students, and the public.

Regulatory functions include licensing schools, approval of programs of instruction, approval of key school staff, site inspections, investigation of student complaints and unlicensed schools, administration of the Tuition Trust Account to assist students of closed schools and coordinating with other approval and regulatory agencies.

G. LEVERAGING RESOURCES TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

Federal Perkins funding, administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA), offers opportunities for AEL programs to leverage these federal resources for programs providing workforce training. AEL grant recipients can use Perkins-funded career and technical training program resources, such as technical instructors, equipment, and classrooms, to help support elements of workforce training programs for adult learners in the AEL program. The technical trainers teaching high school students skills in HVAC, computer repair, and more, also served as the workforce instructors for the AEL's integrated education and training program. TWC has promoted this model at various statewide meetings, most recently at the first statewide Ability to Benefit/Perkins Funding meeting for adult education programs held early summer of 2019.

Additionally, many community colleges in Texas are working to provide, or have provided, Ability to Benefit (ATB) alternatives under federal law and ED guidance. Establishing clear, and often enhanced coalitions within college departments (registration, financial aid, assessment, advising, academic disciplines, and continuing education), workforce training and integration with AEL, Boards and other partner providers, are necessary to implement the model. TWC has funded ATB expansion initiatives to help community colleges build capacity to implement this model.

H. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

TWC continues to encourage the state's education and training providers to identify and leverage deliverable services beyond those provided solely through the workforce system's funding. Among these practices, local adult education programs form partnerships joining educational, workforce development, and other human services agencies to collaboratively develop AEL services.

TWC strongly supports partnerships that increase opportunities for adult learners to transition to postsecondary credentials, including Registered Apprenticeship certification and industry-recognized certificates and licenses that are portable and stackable. Current initiatives strategically position the statewide system for innovation in new directions related to full system integration and postsecondary education outcomes. These outcomes can be measured by high school equivalency, college and career readiness, enrollment in nonremedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions, and occupational and industry skill standards and certifications widely used and recognized by business and industry. These initiatives include:

- Integration of services to support alignment of AEL activities with other core programs in the workforce system, bringing employers and CBOs together through workforce events, ongoing technical assistance efforts, and sharing of best practices developed across the state
- Continued development of content and models for integrated education and training career pathways, and other postsecondary transition models and workplace projects, including apprenticeships with employers
- Continued capacity-building for the Accelerate Texas Model. Accelerate Texas is designed to expand deployment of successful career pathway programs that lead to increased employment, higher education transition, skill gains, and secondary education completion through demonstrated approaches that integrate system services and leverage community partnerships

Continued support for college integration models that decrease the burden of student debt, such as with Ability to Benefit models that enable adult students who lack a high school diploma to enroll in a career pathways program and become eligible for a Pell grant. In 2019, TWC's initiative, the Texas Peer Network, hosted the first Ability to Benefit program in Texas, inviting AEL providers to share best practice and learn more about this model which has been partially restored by the ED

TWC recently received a DOL grant award of $10 million to support statewide apprenticeship expansion efforts from July 2021 to June 2025. Funds will increase, expand, and integrate registered apprenticeship programs (RAPs) with new industries and diversify apprentices.

This new opportunity will continue Texas' efforts to expand the number of apprentices in registered programs, support and encourage RAP diversification, and integrate RAPs into state workforce development strategies. Part of TWC's plan is to encourage community and technical colleges, as eligible grantees, to use allotment funding to address workforce development needs in the communities they serve. This approach will support RAPs by building staff knowledge and increasing capacity to imbed RAPs in more areas of the state.

Since 2016, DOL has awarded Apprenticeship Expansion grants to TWC to develop new RAPs and conduct outreach campaigns to expand Registered Apprenticeships in traditional and nontraditional industries and occupations. The expansion grants' goals align with the Tri-Agency (TWC, TEA, and THECB) recommendations to expand apprenticeship opportunities for all Texans. New RAPs have been developed in Texas, increasing the number of career pathways for Texas citizens and transitioning many into high-paying, high-skilled jobs resulting in nationally recognized certifications.

All Integrated Education and Training (IET) efforts require students to attain a recognized postsecondary credential, and the workforce training must be aligned with in-demand occupations.

I. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

TWC's market-driven approach engages all potential customers, including economic development entities. TWC's Office of Employer Initiatives (OEI) and its network of regional Texas Workforce Solutions partners hold listening events throughout Texas to hear about the achievements and challenges each region had identified. Through these meetings, new initiatives are launched, and new industry-aligned strategies are formed. OEI also partners with the TEA and THECB in regional meetings with employers, higher education and public education leaders, economic development and local workforce professionals, and other key community leaders to discuss regional economic priorities, employer workforce needs, and the career planning and preparation needed for Texas students to be ready for success in college or a career.

OEI manages several services that support business-focused workforce needs, including: Skills Development Fund – a grant program that partners Texas public community and technical colleges, or the TEEX with businesses, business consortiums and trade unions to provide customized industry focused training.

Recruit Texas – provides intensive, rapid response and support services to employers expanding in or relocating operations in Texas. The program focuses on:

- Developing customized workforce training programs
- Fast-track curriculum development
- Workforce training related support services for employers
- Instructor certification necessary to provide workforce training
- Acquiring training equipment necessary for instructor certification and employment

Skills for Small Business – provides grants for small businesses (fewer than 100 employees) for tuition and fees associated with training for new employees and incumbent employees.

Self-Sufficiency Fund – provides grants for non-profit COBs, public community colleges, technical colleges, or state extension services to train adult TANF and/or SNAP recipients in industry-recognized certification programs that lead to permanent full-time employment opportunities.

High-Demand Job Training (HDJT) Program – TWC supports collaborations between Boards and economic development corporations (EDCs) to provide high-demand occupational job training in local workforce areas. This program encourages Boards to partner with local EDCs that use their local economic development sales taxes for high-demand job training. Boards collaborate with local EDCs and match their local economic development sales tax funds to jointly support the provision of such training. In FY'19 and FY'20, TWC awarded $2,773,125 in HDJT program grants, with an average award of $94,246, to assist 14 communities that support colleges, ISDs, and private training companies with their training needs and support the training needs of 1,692 trainees.

Texas Industry Partnership (TIP) Program – TWC supports collaborations between Boards and private employers, corporations, or foundations (also known as Industry Partners) to address skills gaps and ensure a talent pipeline to address industry needs. Collaborations must engage in allowable WIOA activities, focusing on six designated industry clusters, and leverage funds. The projects for each Board may vary from equipment only purchases, tuition reimbursement, and workforce studies of the local board regions. In FY'19 and FY'20, TWC awarded $1,511,074 in TIP grants with an average award of $62,961. These grants assisted 10 communities that support colleges, ISDs, and private training companies with their training needs and support the training needs of 325 trainees.

In FY'21 the Commission provided $908,099 to support HDJT grants and $740,806 to support TIP grants to train a projected 1,944 individuals.

Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) Grant Program – allocates $10 million each biennium to defray start-up costs associated with the development of career and technical education programs to public community, state and technical colleges, and ISDs. Applicants can apply for JET grants to purchase and install equipment necessary for the development of career and technical education courses or programs that lead to a license, certificate or postsecondary degree in a high-demand occupation.

In FY'19, TWC awarded 27 JET grants (12 to colleges and 15 to ISDs) with an average award of $211,708. The equipment provided through these funds will be used to train students for jobs in high-demand occupations.

Additionally, TWC helps coordinate presentations and resources that support the Texas Economic Development Corporation (TxEDC) and the Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism (EDT). These two highly focused organizations serve as the gateway for bringing jobs to Texas. TxEDC and EDT offer many services to facilitate corporate relocation and expansion, including valuable incentives, financing options, and resources to streamline business site search.

B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

Refer to element III. b. 1. A. State operating systems that support coordinated implementation of State strategies (e.g., labor market information systems, data systems, communication systems, case-management systems, job banks, etc.)

1. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF–

WIOA emphasizes the importance of labor market and system performance information in driving strategic and operational decision-making in the workforce system. TWC has long recognized the importance of using data to drive decision-making and has made availability and evaluation of data a key part of its strategic development and oversight processes and consumer education efforts.

State Operating Systems

State operating systems are primarily divided into three categories:

- LMCI Exploration
- Participant Eligibility, Service Tracking, and Case Management
- System Oversight

Labor Market Information and Career Exploration Systems

TWC's LMCI Department provides information about general and specific trends within the labor market in Texas regarding different industries, occupations, employment levels, and wages. This information is critical to the strategic planning processes of TWC and the local Boards to improving the way Texans make career and educational decisions by providing useful and reliable information about careers, educational training options, and jobs. The department's products range from online career information to a variety of specialized economic development and regional planning tools.

Texas LMI (TexasLMI.com) is an interactive website hosted by TWC that disseminates Texas labor-market statistics. On TexasLMI.com, users will find a suite of easy-to-use labor-market research tools that provide time-series labor-market data, inquiry capabilities for labor force, employment/unemployment estimates, industry and occupational projections, and occupational wage data.

TexasWages.com is an online application that lets users explore occupational wages by workforce area and by metropolitan statistical area. Long-term employment projections data was also added to the tool to provide an enhanced user experience. By using TexasWages.com, a customer can find hourly or annual wages for the mean, median, entry and experience levels for

over 800 detailed occupations. Users can view and compare the different wages across all the sub-state areas in Texas to make informed decisions or carry out research.

To gain insight into a region's labor supply and demand, the LMCI Department designed the Texas Labor Analysis (TLA) tool. This application is an online suite of labor analysis tools that lets users create in-depth statewide or regional reports for aggregated or single regions. Users can choose any of five separate applications in Labor Analysis including Gap Analysis, Demand, Supply, Regional Occupational Profile, or Top Statistics.

Gap Analysis enables users to compare the various sources of potential labor market supply (such as graduates from educational programs and registered job seekers) and labor market demand (such as job openings and projected employment). Users can customize the report by region or by occupations and can view the statistics on a map that indicates the spread of the supply-demand relationship by workforce regions in Texas.

The Demand module in TLA allows users to discover real-time demand for occupations based on current Help Wanted Online postings. With it, customers can perform a regional demand analysis using projected and latest employment numbers, and salaries. Reports can be generated on Industry, Occupation, and the relationship between the two.

On the supply side, users can estimate the formal supply of skilled workforce by viewing an area's education and workforce training programs. The Supply application can display the number of enrollments and graduates for different programs of study offered by various schools across Texas.

Regional Occupational Profiles compares different workforce regions of Texas on some key employment indicators like wages, employment projections, and trend of online job postings. This tool gives users more insight into occupational wage and employment numbers by offering metrics such as wage differentials and location quotient data.

Top Statistics is a quick way to find the top 25 occupations by region. The data can be viewed by highest employment, job openings, highest wage, or highest projected employment.

Changes in the education system brought about by legislation provide TWC the opportunity to help students transition from the classroom to career readiness. TWC supports school counselors, school districts, students, and parents by providing LMCI to assist them with student career-planning and preparation. Additionally, the agency provides information and supports efforts to prepare students for occupational training at the presecondary, secondary, postsecondary, and college and university levels.

A few of the nationally recognized consumer education and career pathway exploration tools offered by TWC include the following:

- Reality Check (http://www.texasrealitycheck.com) TexasRealityCheck.com is one of the more frequently used resources in the LMCI tool box and features a widely used iPhone application. The website allows students to make lifestyle choices, create a budget, and then view the occupations and preferred education levels that support those choices.
- Texas Career Check (https://texascareercheck.com) Texas Career Check offers information on hundreds of job tiles, pay information, and future projected jobs. Users can explore the career side or education side to assist with career planning.
- Texas Consumer Resource on Education and Workforce Statistics (Texas CREWS) - Texas CREWS (http://www.txcrews.org) Texas CREWS is a dashboard tool that provides information about Texas' public two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions; evaluates programs/institutions on the basis of resulting wages and student loan levels; and enables parents and students to make informed decisions about college and thereby obtain the best return on their educational investment.

The Texas CREWS platform is like what TWC uses to capture and provide access to eligible training provider data, which is needed to deepen consumer education, as required by WIOA.

Participant Eligibility, Service Tracking, and Case Management Systems

TWC provides the main automated systems used by the local Boards and other grantees for job matching, data collection, and case management, including adult education and vocational rehabilitation, as well as child care assistance. Additionally, the Boards and other grantees use a financial reporting system developed by TWC.

WorkInTexas.com Replacement - WorkInTexas.com is the free job-matching website TWC administers for Texas' workforce system. It provides:

- extensive job matching options based on skills and experience;
- links to labor market and career development information; and
- free, 24-hour-a-day access.

WorkInTexas.com went into production in May 2004. At that time, it was cutting-edge and one of only a handful of online job connection systems. To determine the effectiveness of the current system, TWC formed a task force comprised of Local Workforce Development Board (Board) Private Sector Members, Board Executive Directors and a representative from the State Agency Coordinating Council for Human Resources (HR) Directors. After extensive evaluation, the task force determined the system was now outdated and needed to be replaced.

In the summer of 2019, TWC launched the new WorkInTexas.com. The new system improved job matching to better meet the hiring and job searching needs of employers and job seekers. Job-seeker functions include resume upload, resume versioning, resume builder, and Career Pathways. All customers of the system have access to labor analytics and supply and demand tools to enhance job searches. Other improvements include a user-friendly mobile design, modern communications capabilities and increased access to jobs and workforce talent. The improved site also enables Texas Workforce Solutions to significantly enhance service delivery, offering employers and job seekers another reason to connect with their local workforce development boards.

The two-year long project included the opportunity for job-seekers and employers to provide valuable input to help craft requirements for the new website. This helped to create a system that will increase employer access to talent, improve candidate matches to job descriptions, and incorporate local and regional labor market information to support informed business decisions.

Employers can post jobs, search résumés, recruit candidates, get labor market information, and receive a variety of other services available through a network of statewide Workforce Solutions Offices. Individuals seeking a new job, different job, or an additional job can post their résumé, search job listings (including Texas state agency jobs), obtain employer contact information to apply for jobs, get information about the job market, and receive a variety of other services also available through Workforce Solutions Offices.

The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) - TWIST is the integrated intake, eligibility, case management, and reporting system for employment and training services. It was designed as a central repository for customer information. TWIST ultimately decreases duplication within and across the Texas workforce system while streamlining the provision of services to customers. It enables Workforce Solutions Office staff to enter intake information for customers only once for multiple employment and training programs and to retrieve it statewide. TWIST also includes interfaces with other automated systems—WorkInTexas.com, the UI benefits system, and HHSC's system.

Child Care Attendance Automation - Child Care Attendance Automation (CCAA) allows parents to record attendance using a swipe card at a point-of-service device located at the authorized child care facility. Parents also can use an interactive voice response system using the authorized child care provider's phone. Attendance recorded through CCAA is transferred to TWIST on a weekly basis, and TWIST is used to process payments to providers based on the CCAA attendance records.

Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) - TEAMS is Texas' state-of-the-art, web-enabled system that maintains student-level data, including demographic, assessment, and outcome data, as well as class, site, program, and provider information. TEAMS users can analyze class, site, or program information using standard reports generated at the user level. TEAMS provides a wide range of information about adult education, including snapshots of student and program performance, personnel qualifications, and staff development activities.

ReHabWorks - ReHabWorks is a web-based case management system. It is the portal through which field staff enters information from and about the consumer to manage the VR process. Functionalities include collecting required information for preparing state/federal reports, guiding processes and forms, and reporting requirements.

Cash Draw and Expenditure Reporting - TWC's online Cash Draw and Expenditure Reporting (CDER) system is a web application used by Boards to draw funds from their program allocations. All financial transactions are handled through this online system, and Boards are no longer required to submit paper documents or Excel spreadsheets. CDER has significantly decreased manual processing and greatly improved the reporting of data to all parties.

Quarterly Wage Records - TWC makes extensive use of quarterly wage records, both for required and ad hoc reporting. TWC uses Texas wage records and those obtained from other states through the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) for required WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) reporting. A fuller discussion of the use of quarterly wage records is contained in the Program Data section of this plan.

System Oversight Systems

TWC provides access to performance and management information reports to Boards and grantees. Currently, TWC does not have a single consolidated data warehouse and reporting system. Instead, TWC has a variety of systems that provide summary and customer-specific data to support management and oversight functions. Some of these systems are part of the underlying case management systems (TEAMS and WorkInTexas.com, for example, each have a set of reports that can be run). TWC also has several systems created exclusively for reporting purposes that allow standard reports and ad hoc queries to be run. Because Boards and other grantees are generally able to access these systems, TWC can ensure a high degree of transparency in the Texas workforce system.

The systems can produce data on hundreds of subpopulations for most performance measures, which allows for a deeply granular evaluation of performance and management information. This level of detail also allows TWC to perform highly complex evaluations of performance data for forecasting, target setting, and general determinations of effectiveness.

TWC provides Boards, other grantees, and state staff with guidance regarding data collection and reporting. This includes both common and program-specific guides that outline data entry deadlines and requirements for recording data on Eligibility Determination, Service Dates and Details, Outcome Tracking (for those elements not tied to wage records), and Case Management. TWC's Workforce Development Division provides technical assistance to Boards and grantees to help ensure they timely and accurately enter data as required into the appropriate systems.

TWC's Subrecipient Monitoring Department conducts data validation and other Board and grantee reviews to support system and data integrity.

TWC's Division of Information Innovation & Insight (I|3) is responsible for producing, analyzing, and reporting performance data. I|3 provides timely, accurate, and understandable information and analyses relevant to the performance, accountability, and integrity of the Texas workforce system. I|3's reporting ensures that TWC, Board and grantee management have the information necessary to make policy decisions that will help the system meet or exceed performance expectations, thus offering the opportunity for Texas businesses, residents, and communities to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

Most WIOA performance measures are based on quarterly Exiter cohorts and quarterly wage record filing. Despite this, TWC's quarterly performance data may change on a monthly basis. To compensate for this, I|3 produces performance data on a monthly basis for the governor's office, Texas Legislature, agency management, Boards, and other grantees. Texas employers report quarterly wage data electronically. Therefore, performance for a given quarter of Exiters can be meaningfully run much earlier than the federal deadlines provide for, and TWC does so in order to improve TWC's ability to identify and respond to potential performance issues more quickly.

In addition to producing performance data each month, I|3 coordinates with TWC's operational divisions to develop "Explanations of Variance" when performance is not between 95 percent and 105 percent of target (whether high or low). TWC also holds open, posted meetings each quarter with the Commission to discuss system performance. These meetings are broadcast on the Internet to allow Boards, grantees, other stakeholders, and the public to listen to the discussions and understand the system's current areas of strength and weakness, as well as proposals to support continuous improvement.

2. THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (E.G., CO-ENROLLMENT POLICIES AND UNIVERSAL INTAKE PROCESSES WHERE APPROPRIATE). IN ADDITION, PROVIDE THE STATE'S GUIDELINES FOR STATE-ADMINISTERED ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO A ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

State Policies

TWC is governed by a three-member Commission appointed by the governor. The three full-time Commissioners represent employers, labor, and the public. Together they serve as the rule making authority for TWC, oversee agency functions, and develop agency policy.

Twenty days after adoption by the Commissioners, TWC rules, which guide agency operations and its programs, are codified in the Texas Administrative Code, Title 40, Part 20. Policies that support the implementation of TWC strategies and programs related to WIOA are available on the agency's website, including:

- Texas Workforce Commission Rules, available at https://twc.texas.gov/agency/texas-workforce-commission-rules
- The *WIOA Guidelines for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth*, available at https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/wioa-guidelines-twc.pdf, provides Boards with the criteria and documentation sources for establishing WIOA Title I program eligibility for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. This policy guide is based on WIOA final rules for Titles I–IV, publicly available in late June 2016. The WIOA final rules pertaining to Titles I and III, published in the *Federal Register* on August 19, 2016, went into effect October 18, 2016. As future updates become available, the policy guide will be updated.
- The *WIOA Guide to Texas Workforce System Operations*, available at https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/wioa-operations-guide-twc.pdf,provides

information on the methods by which WIOA reinforces the partnerships and strategies necessary for Workforce Solutions Offices to provide job seekers and workers with the high-quality career, training, and support services they need to find and keep good jobs. These strategies also help businesses find skilled workers and access other human resources assistance, including education and training, to meet their workforce needs. This guide describes the roles of TWC, Boards, chief elected officials, and local workforce partner programs. Boards are required to ensure that all state policies provided in this document are adhered to and followed according to established timelines.

- Operational guidance and active workforce policy provided to local Boards in the form of Workforce Development (WD) Letters, Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Letters, Technical Assistance (TA) Bulletins, and comprehensive guides are based on Commission-approved policies and are available at https://twc.texas.gov/agency/workforce-policy-guidance.

- TWC maintains a repository of major publications including the agency's strategic plans and annual reports, publications for employers and job seekers, and program information, available at https://twc.texas.gov/agency/reports-plans-publications.

- Various reports, policy guides, and customer information related to VR services are maintained by TWC and available at https://twc.texas.gov/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-program-overview and https://twc.texas.gov/partners/vocational-rehabilitation-division-publications.

Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy

Partnership with Texas Workforce Solutions and Designated Providers

The following activities support WIOA core programs and align with the state's strategies, as previously described.

TWC administers the development and integration of workforce services in coordination with the Board's oversight and planning efforts. Service delivery is executed through Texas Workforce Solutions, which may contract with Workforce Solutions Offices (our one-stop providers) to operate a variety of program components. This network gives customers local access to workforce solutions and statewide services at approximately 180 Workforce Solutions Offices, four UI tele-centers, and numerous partner locations.

WIOA has strengthened Texas' progress toward integrating services for customers. WIOA §193(a)(3) provides that Boards' contracted workforce service providers and community partners are defined under prior consistent state law.

Section 302.021 of the Texas Labor Code set forth the job training, employment, and employment-related educational programs and functions consolidated under the authority of TWC. In Texas, prior consistent state law defines the Boards' responsibility to develop, implement, and modify a plan for convening all relevant programs, identified as one-stop required-partner programs, including:

- WIOA, formerly WIA
- ES
- UI benefits information
- Choices, the TANF employment and training program
- SNAP E&T

- Child Care Services
- TAA
- AEL programs
- VR programs
- Business Enterprises of Texas
- Grant for Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind
- The Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center

Prior consistent state law further defines the following as required one-stop partner programs. Other than UI compensation, which is administered by TWC, the programs are not under the direct oversight of the Boards; therefore, Boards are required to establish memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with:

- AEL (WIOA, Title II);
- Apprenticeship programs;
- National and Community Services Act Program;
- Non-Certificate Postsecondary Career and Technology Training programs; and
- SCSEP

TWC also recommends that Boards enter into MOUs with the following optional partner activities:

- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 USC 2301 et seq.)
- Job counseling, training, and placement services for veterans, 38 USC 41
- Education and vocational training programs through Job Corps, administered by DOL
- Native American programs authorized under Title I of WIOA
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development-administered employment and training programs
- Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act
- Reintegration of Offenders programs authorized under the Second Chance Act, 2007
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs authorized under WIOA §167

Additionally, Boards may partner with other entities that are not considered required workforce partners or optional workforce partners. These entities are state or local organizations that do not carry out a workforce development program and may include local social service agencies, housing authorities, and others.

TWC also requires Boards to jointly develop and adopt an MOU with HHS. Although HHS is a federal optional one-stop partner, the MOU fulfills state law regarding the coordinated interagency case management of recipients of financial assistance in employment and training activities and support services, Texas Human Resources, Code §31.0128.

Pay-for-Performance Contracts

TWC and Boards will maintain, where applicable, performance-based contracts. However, TWC and Boards will consider developing, with stakeholder input, a WIOA pay-for-performance contracting strategy applicable to Title I programs, as defined in WIOA §3(47).

The development of a performance-based contract is contingent on the pay-for-performance contract strategy, which establishes specific benchmarks that must be achieved for the contractor to receive payment. WIOA calls for the benchmarks to be tied to the prime indicators of performance and adjustments thereof related to economic conditions and the population demographics.

TWC will maintain the latitude provided for in WIOA to consider the development of a pay-for-performance contract strategy as guidance is issued.

Determination of Funds Provided for Infrastructure Costs

TWC provides policy and procedural guidance to boards regarding the requirements for funding infrastructure costs in the Guide to Texas Workforce System Operations, Section D Infrastructure Funding. This Guide, updated in February 2020, states that Boards, with the agreement of CEOs, develop and enter into MOUs with statutorily required one-stop partners for operation and funding of a one-stop delivery system in the local area. Boards may also enter MOUs with other optional partners, as described by WIOA. Among several required provisions, the MOU must include a final plan, or an interim plan if needed, on how the infrastructure costs of the one-stop centers will be funded.

Within each MOU, each Board and its workforce partners must establish an IFA that describes how the Board and partner programs will fund the infrastructure costs of the Workforce Solutions Offices that are part of the local workforce development area (workforce area) (WIOA

§121(c)(1) and 20 CFR §678.500(b)(2)(i)). If a Board and its required workforce partners are unable to reach consensus on the terms of the IFAs for the program year, then the Board must notify the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) of an impasse no later than March 15 (20 CFR

§678.510(c)) of the program year immediately preceding the program year for which the IFA must be negotiated. TWC will, in turn, notify the state agency responsible for administering the partner's program. If TWC cannot help the Board resolve the issue, TWC will notify the governor, the Texas Workforce Investment Council, the Secretary of Labor, and the head of any other federal agency with responsibility for overseeing a workforce partner's program.

Boards and workforce partners must fund infrastructure costs through either the Local Funding Mechanism (LFM) or the State Funding Mechanism (SFM). The LFM provides Boards, CEOs, and workforce partners with the flexibility to design and agree locally on the methods to fund infrastructure costs. However, if a Board fails to reach consensus with all of the required workforce partners operating in its workforce area with regard to the amount each partner will contribute to the local workforce system's infrastructure costs, the statute replaces local flexibility for determining how to fund infrastructure costs with the SFM. Under the SFM, TWC (on behalf of the governor) is charged with allocating infrastructure costs and determining each partner's proportionate share of costs for Boards that did not reach consensus on the LFM. The LFM and SFM apply only to the funding of infrastructure costs.

3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

A. STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

TWC is governed by a three-member Commission appointed by the Governor. The agency executive director is accountable to the Commission and is responsible for the daily operations of the agency. The executive director is assisted by a deputy executive director who has

oversight responsibility for agency's administrative support divisions. The agency is organized into 15 distinct program and administrative support divisions. The program areas facilitate workforce services delivery through twenty-eight local Boards. A description of the agency divisions is provided below.

Customer Care Division

TWC's Customer Care Division includes Governmental Relations and Customer Relations. Customer Care serves as the primary point of contact with legislative offices as well as handling the Customer Relations hotline and helping external customers at the TWC main building.

Division of Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring

The Division of Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring (FDCM) supports TWC operations in its administration and enforcement of all regulatory statutes within its jurisdiction, including helping other divisions resolve regulatory issues; recommending legal actions, as necessary; enforcing provisions of the Texas Labor Code, Texas Education Code, and other applicable statutes through the appropriate statutory remedies; preventing, detecting, and eliminating program fraud, waste, and abuse; and assisting all TWC employees with ethics questions. A division priority is the prevention, detection, and elimination of fraud and abuse in the UI program.

Information Technology Division

The Information Technology (IT) Division is responsible for applications and information systems that support TWC's critical business operations. Staff works closely with TWC business areas and other stakeholders to create and maintain automated applications that best serve evolving business needs. The division also supports, either directly or through contract, the infrastructure required for TWC systems, including data center operations, networks, personal computers, email, desktop software tools, database administration, scanner operation, telephony, help desk services, system access/provisioning, and print/mail services. IT is also responsible for IT project management, information security, IT accessibility compliance, and the planning, maintenance, and testing of an ongoing disaster recovery program.

Unemployment Insurance Division

The Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division includes UI support services, call center operations, and appellate services. The TWC Tax department and Unemployment Benefits Services are managed by this division. The division assists employers and claimants with eligibility requirements, benefit extensions and deadlines, and appeal procedures.

Unemployment Benefits Services, funded through employer taxes, provides temporary income to workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. TWC collects unemployment taxes from liable employers and pays unemployment benefits to qualified claimants. TWC has a formal appeal procedure to address claim issues and employers' tax liability, contribution, or reimbursement disputes.

Workforce Development Division

The Workforce Development Division provides oversight, coordination, guidance, planning, technical assistance, and implementation of employment and training activities, with a focus on meeting the needs of employers throughout Texas. The division currently administers programs such as WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; Adult Education and Literacy; Wagner-Peyser Employment Service; Choices (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Employment and Training); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T); Apprenticeship; Skills Development Fund; Texas Veterans Leadership Program; and Career Schools and Colleges.

Civil Rights Division

The Civil Rights Division (CRD) enforces the state's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Fair Housing laws through education, conciliation, mediation, and investigation. The division investigates complaints of employment and housing discrimination; conducts personnel policy reviews and EEO compliance monitoring for state agencies and institutions of higher education; and provides training and technical assistance to public and private entities to reduce employment and housing discrimination throughout the state. The CRD enters into annual work-sharing agreements with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), its federal partners, that review CRD's cases to ensure compliance with applicable federal EEO and Fair Housing statutes.

CRD was formerly the Texas Commission on Human Rights (TCHR) and was governed by its own set of commissioners, who established policies for the division and supervised the director in administering the division's activities. TCHR served as the state's established authority on EEO and Fair Housing, also known as a fair employment practice agency and the Fair Housing initiative program. The 2015 Texas Legislature streamlined oversight of the division by eliminating its separate seven-member board and placing it under TWC. Currently, the division answers to TWC's Executive Director and its three Commissioners.

Business Operations Division

The Business Operations Division comprises Procurement and Contract Services, Infrastructure Services, Human Resources, Training and Development, Risk and Security Management, Document Services, and Conference Planning and Media Services. Business Operations provides day-to-day leadership, management, and vision by planning, directing, and coordinating administrative functions and operations to support the business needs of TWC.

Vocational Rehabilitation Division

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Division of TWC provides services to individuals with disabilities to assist them with obtaining, maintaining, or advancing in employment. The VR program serves adults, youth, and students with disabilities. Services may include evaluations, counseling and guidance, training and education assistance, assistive technology, and employment services, as well as referrals to the Business Enterprises of Texas Program and Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center. Students with disabilities may receive pre-employment transition services that will assist them with the transition to postsecondary education or employment.

In addition, the VR program assists businesses seeking to recruit, hire, and accommodate employees with disabilities. Services include assistance accommodating employees with disabilities, disability awareness training, recruitment and job-matching assistance, and coordination of employer job fairs.

Finance Division

The Finance Division provides financial services that promote highly effective financial management controls, helps agency management achieve the efficient use of financial resources, and ensures accurate financial information is available in a timely manner. Functions include:

- Budget management
- Revenue and trust management
- Encumbrances
- Financial reporting
- Financial systems support

- Financial technical assistance
- General ledger accounting
- Payables
- Payroll
- Reconciliation
- Travel

Office of Internal Audit

The Office of Internal Audit (OIA) aims to enhance and protect organizational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice, and insight to the Commission and agency management. The office assists TWC in accomplishing its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control, and governance processes. TWC's Internal Audit function is mandated by the Internal Auditing Act, Texas Government Code, Chapter 2102.

Office of General Counsel

The Office of General Counsel (OGC) provides the Commission and agency staff with the highest quality of customer service and sound legal counsel to minimize legal risk and costs, reduce litigation exposure, and ensure legal compliance, and to do so efficiently, expeditiously, reliably, and professionally.

The office supports the Commission and agency staff by providing legal services to foster sound decision-making in all areas of operation. These services include advice and client support for legal issues relating to litigation, contracts, policymaking, governance, programs, performance, administrative functions, and services provided by or through the Commission, the Boards, and contractors, as well as agency operations. The Open Records Section coordinates compliance with the Public Information Act and requests for access to TWC information under subpoenas and governmental requests for information.

Office of Outreach & Employer Initiatives

The Office of Outreach & Employer Initiatives is responsible for providing leadership and direction within the Texas workforce system to engage employers, business organizations, educational institutions, and economic developers in the ongoing development of a customer-focused, market-driven workforce system. The office develops cluster-based strategies and industry partnerships and implements innovative industry-led programs for business recruitment, retention, and growth. This office receives no funding under WIOA.

Division of Information Innovation & Insight

The Division of Information Innovation & Insight (I|3), formerly known as the Division of Operational Insight, works with its partners to produce and analyze data and business processes to better serve the employers, individuals, families, and communities of Texas. I|3 consists of two groups responsible for different aspects of its mission. The first, Operational Insight, evaluates operational, programmatic, and outcome data to generate actionable operational insights that TWC and its partners can use to improve the impact that the Texas workforce system has on employers, individuals, families, and communities and ultimately to help transform TWC into an evidenced-based learning organization. I|3's other department, Labor Market Information (LMI), improves the way Texans make career and educational decisions by providing useful and reliable information about careers, educational training options, and jobs. LMI's products range from TexasRealityCheck.com, a website that allows students to make lifestyle choices, create a budget, and view the occupations and preferred

education levels that support those choices, to a variety of specialized economic development and regional planning tools.

The Child Care & Early Learning Division oversees the child care services program for eligible, low-income families, which promotes long-term self-sufficiency by enabling parents to work or attend workforce training or education activities. It also educates parents about the availability of quality child care, which enhances children's early learning. In addition to assisting families, it also helps child care providers improve the quality of services for all children in Texas by providing resources and assistance.

https://twc.texas.gov/files/agency/twc-org-chart-wioa-twc.jpg

TWC Organizational Chart November 2021

B. STATE BOARD

Membership

TWIC is composed of 19 members. The governor appoints 14 members representing business, organized labor, education, and CBOs. The remaining members are ex officio representatives from TWIC's five-member state agencies. Appointed members serve six-year staggered terms, of which one-third of the members' terms expire each odd-numbered year. Ex officio members serve as long as they are the presiding officer of the member agency they represent. Texas Government Code, §2308.052 specifies that TWIC's membership composition must have:

- five governor-appointed members who represent business and industry, including business members serving on Boards;
- five governor-appointed members who represent organized labor, with input from recognized labor organizations;
- three governor-appointed members who represent education, including local public education, public postsecondary education, and vocational education;
- one governor-appointed member who represents CBOs, and who is not a provider of services; and
- five ex officio members who represent statutory agency members, as follows:
    - Director of the Economic Development and Tourism Division in the Office of the Governor
    - Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency
    - Executive Commissioner of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission
    - Commissioner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
    - Executive Director of the Texas Workforce Commission

I. MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Current TWIC members, by member category, include:

Business and Industry

- Mark Dunn, Chair (Lufkin) – President, Dunn's Construction LLC

- Thomas Halbouty (Southlake) – Industry Advisor, Formation 8; Vice President, Chief Information Officer and Chief Technology Officer, Pioneer Natural Resources (retired)
- Paloma Ahmadi (Shavano Park) – Associate General Counsel for Employment, Brex Inc.
- Wayne Oswald (Houston) – Executive Director, Houston Business Roundtable (retired)
- Lauren Gore (Houston) – Partner, LDR Investment Group LLC

Organized Labor

- Jesse Gatewood (Corpus Christi) – Business Manager, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local Union 278
- Lindsey Geeslin (Lorena) – Manager, Lhoist North America
- John Martin (San Antonio) – Training Director, South Texas Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee
- Paul Puente (Houston) – Executive Secretary, Houston Gulf Coast Building and Construction Trades Council
- Brandon Willis (Beaumont) – Public Affairs Agent, International Union of Operation Engineers Local 450

Education

- Joe Arnold (Muldoon) – Deputy Vice Chancellor and Executive External Relations Officer, Texas State Technical College
- Michael Hinojosa (Dallas) – Superintendent, Dallas Independent School District
- Richard Rhodes (Austin) – Chancellor, Austin Community College District

Community-Based Organization

- Richard Rhodes, Vice Chair (Austin) – Member, Texas Economic Development Council (retired)

State Agency Ex-Officio

- Adriana Cruz (Economic Development and Tourism, Office of the Governor)
- Harrison Keller (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)
- Ed Serna (Texas Workforce Commission)
- Cecile Young (Texas Health and Human Services Commission)
- Mike Morath (Texas Education Agency)

A current membership roster is available on TWIC's website at:
https://gov.texas.gov/organization/twic/members

II. BOARD ACTIVITIES

Strategic Planning

Section 2308.104 of the Texas Government Code mandates TWIC to develop a "single strategic plan that establishes the framework for budgeting and operation of the workforce development system." The plan must include goals, objectives, and performance measures for the workforce

system that involve programs of all state agencies that administer workforce programs. As such, the plan acts out the mission and vision for the Texas workforce system.

State statute also directs TWIC to "develop and implement immediate and long-range strategies to address problems identified within the workforce system."

The system strategic plan is intended to guide system partners in implementing workforce programs, services, and initiatives while avoiding the duplication of partner agencies' strategic plans. The system plan is strategic in that it is designed to focus on the outcomes that will make the most significant progress in achieving the mission and vision of the system. The strategic plan is supported by research conducted by TWIC and an annual evaluation of how well the plan and programs are working. These activities—strategic planning and implementation, system and performance evaluation, and research to support system and program improvement—constitute most of the work that TWIC does.

During the planning and development process, three strategic imperatives emerged as the key foundational elements that represent a best-in-class workforce system. These three imperatives serve as cornerstones upon which the capacity of the Texas workforce system is built on to identify and respond to changing market conditions and needs of workforce system customers. These imperatives are core competencies that must be embedded in all system elements to achieve the plan's mission and vision. Therefore, a key tenet of this plan is that all workforce system partners have core competencies in and a commitment to customer service and satisfaction, data-driven program improvement, and continuous improvement and innovation, as discussed below.

Customer Service and Satisfaction

Accurately assessing customer satisfaction with the workforce system and transforming customer feedback into productive policies are essential to best meet the needs of workforce system customers. While the system strategic plan focuses on a demand-driven system and emphasizes the needs of employers, customer service and satisfaction must be factored into system-level planning. Employers, current and future workers, and system program and service providers are key customers of the Texas workforce system.

To be truly effective, the Texas workforce system must identify and anticipate employers' needs to require employee skills that will fit the dynamic, global economic framework in which Texas employers operate. Ensuring a work-ready and competent workforce that meets the needs of Texas' employers is a core competency of the Texas workforce system.

The Texas workforce system must be able to meet the needs of both current and future Texas workers—wherever they are in their careers. Customers must be assured that wherever they enter the workforce system, there will be a pathway *through* the system by instituting a "no closed door" culture that ensures success for customers of the Texas workforce system programs and services. All points of entry provide access to all the programs and services.

The Texas workforce system must promote and enable successful collaboration across system partners for the overarching mission of improving outcomes for Texas employers and the current and future workforce. It is the responsibility of all system partners to serve Texans collaboratively, and facilitating this collaboration is an integral part of this plan.

Data-Driven Program Improvement

Data from programs and other areas of the workforce system are critical in evaluating the extent to which workforce system programs, services, and products are meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders. The collection of key data, as well as the reporting and analysis of that data—in a consistent and useful manner—are essential in demonstrating outcomes, determining whether changes are required or desired, and establishing benchmarks for future

performance. To achieve these data-related organizational competencies relative to the performance measures in this plan, partner agencies may need to build or modify their existing data systems. By receiving information from updated data systems, the Texas workforce system will be able to measure what matters most and build the collection and analysis capabilities that are missing.

Information and statistical data serve a vital communication purpose, not only within the Texas workforce system but also for key stakeholders and others that participate in this process. Systems that improve the flow of data, information, and analysis that support effective decision-making are essential to achieve effective and efficient programs, services, and outcomes. Although this is a challenging task, it is essential to the performance of the Texas workforce system.

Continuous Improvement and Innovation

The Texas workforce system engages with a dynamic, competitive, and global marketplace. To achieve the mission and vision for the workforce system that is articulated in this plan, a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation is essential to ensure an adaptive and best practice–oriented workforce system. Actions that are essential to continuous improvement and innovation include the following:

- Research and assess best-in-class practices throughout industry and workforce systems nationally and internationally
- Incorporate promising practices from outside the Texas workforce system
- Analyze program and system performance and move quickly to correct the course, when appropriate, as indicated by empirical data and information
- Streamline data, information, communications, and decision-making capabilities to ensure that improvement and innovation become embedded into all system elements by ensuring that core competencies are developed and nurtured throughout the system

Crucial to the strategic planning process and to align with federal and state statute, the Texas workforce system strategic plan builds upon the system's core elements and contains system goals that TWIC and its planning partners use to create actionable objectives to meet the mission and vision of the system. Four goals and their system objectives and partner strategies have been identified through the processes discussed above.

Table 1 Texas Workforce System Goals and System Objectives

Goal	System Objective
Focus on Employers	Increase business and industry involvement and expand licensure and industry certification.
Engage in partnerships to promote collaboration and outcomes.	Expand partnerships with system partners and stakeholders enhanced participant
Align system elements facilitate effective and efficient and implement policies and processes to ensure portable and transferrable credit and credentials.	Improve and enhance services, programs, and policies to transitions. Develop
Improve and integrate methods.	Use enhanced or alternative program and service delivery programs

The Texas workforce system strategic plan calls attention to issues and opportunities that have cross-partner implications and holds significant strategic value to the overall success of the system's ability to meet its mission and vision. During the plan's development, planners included ways for system partners, stakeholders, and TWIC to identify and assess high-priority, high-impact issues to improve outcomes for the workforce system and its customers.

TWIC and other stakeholders identified the following issues that cross the programs or services administered by multiple agencies (cross-partner issues) to be considered as part of the strategic planning process. The 12 cross-partner issues and opportunities were derived from the 39 planning issues and opportunities previously identified by TWIC and its system partners during preplanning listening sessions and consultations:

- Facilitate effective and efficient transitions and enhance transition services
- Increase employment outcomes
- Expand partnerships with system stakeholders and promote collaboration
- Incorporate and/or expand options for dual credit and/or licensure and certification
- Increase business and industry involvement
- Align programs and services
- Share the most recent data and information
- Implement beneficial practices and reduce duplication
- Recruit and/or provide professional development
- Ensure portable and transferrable options
- Address skills shortages
- Institutionalize alternative service delivery methods

Evaluation

Each year TWIC reports on the progress in achieving the objectives of the strategic plan and on the performance of workforce programs related to key metrics. The Texas Government Code specifies that TWIC will prepare an annual report for submission to the governor and the legislature on the extent to which the system is achieving workforce goals and objectives. The report also evaluates partner-agency alignment under the strategic plan for the Texas workforce system. Approved by the governor in 2015, the Texas workforce system strategic plan focuses on high-level system objectives that require multi-partner collaboration for programs, initiatives, and outcomes. Reporting elements are designed to provide a system-wide view of achievements for partner agencies and other system stakeholders, and to meet statutory requirements for reporting to the governor and legislature.

As part of the evaluation framework for the FY'16-'23 strategic plan, five balanced scorecards were developed to complement the strategic plan's structure. The scorecards incorporate narrative and graphics to illustrate the achievements of the Texas workforce system. The components of the balanced scorecards display the actions of partner agencies and their delivery agents, including Boards, independent school districts, community and technical colleges, and local adult education providers. These system partners are responsible for programs and services focused on education, workforce education, and workforce training services. Four of the five scorecards focus on the four goals laid out in the strategic plan and partner agencies' implementation of strategies to achieve the following related metrics: focus on employers; engage in partnerships; align system elements; and improve and integrate

programs. The fifth scorecard focuses on the following system performance metrics (formal measures): educational achievement, entered employment, retained employment, and customers served. Data from the eight partner agencies are collected and aggregated to determine system performance for a short period as well as for longer periods. Aggregating data from an extended period is possible because TWIC has worked with its system partners since 2004 to standardize definitions and methods across all workforce programs.

To achieve a high degree of consistency when aggregating data across programs, TWIC requested that federal definitions be adopted for the formal measures where relevant and that program periods similar to federal periods be used. After renegotiation in 2009, definitions and program periods continued to differ slightly from those used during the previous strategic plan period.

TWIC worked with partner agencies to review and update the formal measure definitions and methods and to further align them with WIOA requirements. Both entered employment and employment retention are essentially consistent across partner agencies and, where required, the program periods for reporting were adjusted based on federal guidance.

Research

TWIC supports system planning, implementation of the system strategic plan, and evaluation through research products and news updates that are distributed to members, system partners, and workforce stakeholders. Available on TWIC's website, research products include the strategic plan for the workforce system, evaluation reports, resource publications, reports on critical and emerging issues, and recommendations to the governor.

Examples of recent research include the publications listed below.

Industry-Based Certifications for Middle-Skill STEM Occupations in Texas

This report presents the results of TWIC's system initiative to identify third-party, industry-based certifications that are of value to Texas employers and that can positively affect employment outcomes in middle-skill STEM occupations. The list of certifications contained in this report can be used as a resource to help workforce system partners achieve objectives related to increasing certification outcomes for education and training participants.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services: A Texas Primer

This report provides information about the VR program in Texas, focusing on VR services authorized under WIOA. The report presents information about the VR program structure in Texas, funding, program delivery, relevant legislation, and program participants.

Work-Based Learning in Career and Technical Education Programs in Texas

This report provides a foundation for understanding work-based learning in secondary and postsecondary education in Texas. Programs from the secondary and postsecondary sectors are profiled and presented as best practices to illustrate potential options for and benefits of work-based learning. Lessons learned from these practices may provide valuable information, not only for educational institutions, but also for other workforce system programs.

Understanding the Need for Adult Education in Texas

This report is an update to *Identifying the Current and Future Population in Need of Adult Education* published in March 2010. Between April 2018 and September 2018, TWIC worked with the Office of the State Demographer to conduct analyses of the current population in need of adult education services, a detailed estimate of the future need for services based on growth projections for the Texas population, and the geographic dispersion of need in Texas by workforce areas.

People with Disabilities: A Texas Profile

This report details the demographic characteristics of the population of individuals with disabilities in Texas. Detailed demographic analyses may be used in program planning and improvement efforts by Boards, state agencies, community and technical colleges, policy analysts, and other workforce system stakeholders.

4. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS

A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE PROGRAMS

TWC has a strong commitment to the use of performance data to evaluate programs and partners. TWC was an early implementer of the Common Measures and in 2005 extended them beyond Wagner-Peyser and WIA to cover other federal and even state-funded workforce system programs. TWC realized that using the same measures and definitions across programs helped improve program evaluations and removed potential barriers to integration of services by creating common definitions of success.

TWC actively monitors the system through monthly, and in some cases, weekly performance reports. Program staff reviews these reports and communicates with system partners as appropriate to provide technical assistance and obtain information on best practices to share with other partners.

One of the key ways that TWC evaluates programs and partners is by comparing performance to targets. TWC has adopted a system by which performance is compared against performance targets to establish a "Percent of Target" for each measure, and depending on where the Percent of Target falls within a given range, performance is rated as "Meeting" the target (MP) or as being either "Positive Performance" (+P) or "Negative Performance" (-P), as follows:

	Where "High is Good" (e.g., Number Served, % Reemployed within 10 Weeks etc.)	Where "Low is Good" (e.g., Avg Cost, Weeks to Reemploy, etc.)
Positive Performance (+P)	more than 105% of Target	less than 95% of Target
Meeting Performance (MP)	95-105% of Target	95-105% of Target
Negative Performance (-P)	less than 95% of Target	more than 105% of Target

For WIOA measures, however, we have modified this system to align more closely with federal standards:

	WIOA Statutory Measures
Positive Performance (+P)	more than 110% of Target
Meeting Performance (MP)	90-110% of Target
Negative Performance (-P)	less than 90% of Target

This makes target-setting a key part of the evaluation and accountability system. TWC's I|3 uses a variety of different models to help set performance targets based upon assumed case mixes and economic conditions. These methods continuously evolve based on input from partners through the negotiation process and additional research. This dialog between TWC and its partners represents an important component of continuous improvement.

WIOA, like WIA before it, requires working toward continuous improvement. However, continuous improvement does not simply mean that the system needs to do better on all things every year. Continuous improvement is not as simple as always setting targets a little bit higher than the prior year's results. The system is better served by setting targets in the areas of great strength at a "maintenance" level to concentrate on improving in areas of lesser strength. In an environment of fewer resources or greater demand for similar resources, simply maintaining performance can represent improvement—improvement in efficiency.

The fact that we operate in a dynamic system makes the development of effective statistical models to guide target setting so important. WIOA provides that the Secretaries of Labor and Education will develop a set of statistical models to help set performance targets for the WIOA measures. As presented at DOL's Spring 2019 WIOA Performance Meetings in Chicago and Dallas, TWC has embraced use of the federal Statistical Models and modified them to help ensure accountability among local workforce Boards and are pleased that DOL and USED have provided statistical adjustment modeling for all five of the common WIOA participant/exiter-based measures.

The statute provides a set of performance measures to evaluate the six core programs and system partners. The workforce system in 2021 is very different than it was when the WIOA measures were initially developed. WIOA places great emphasis on the importance of the career pathways that a person might follow over a period of many years, while the performance measures and the joint performance reporting constructs are based on the notion of a person losing employment and coming to the one-stop system for a relatively short, finite period, after which they find a job and leave so that his or her outcomes can be measured. The statutory measures do not recognize that post-exit enrollment in education is sometimes an appropriate outcome for non-Youth such as those who are transitioning out of the military and using their GI Bill benefits to attend school. Additionally, the statutory measures do not address the question of whether exiters are able to retain employment even though that is a key concern for TWC customers.

Therefore, while TWC applies the statutorily prescribed performance measures to assess performance across the six core programs, TWC also applies state-prescribed performance measures and—with input from local Boards, grantees, and other partners—will continually develop and test other measures that may provide a more meaningful way of communicating strengths and identifying areas of improvement. For example, TWC developed a set of WIOA-based measures that that focus on either employment or enrollment in education post-exit, regardless of the program, and a retention-like measure that focuses on those employed or enrolled in quarter 2 post-exit, and to see whether they remain employed or enrolled in quarters 3 and 4, post-exit. TWC also plans to return to working on a set of performance measures that focus more on the employment connection made between a worker and employer.

While TWC's current reports provide some historic trend data to identify improvements over time, they are limited. As part of the Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW) system, TWC is developing new ways to view, interact with, and evaluate data to identify the quality, effectiveness, and improvement in programs operated by the state, our Boards, and other grantees. The EDW has been instrumental in supporting fraud detection and prevention as well as helping Boards serve those impacted by the pandemic. An early example of this was the development of a Tableau-based claimant supply dashboard, which allowed local Boards to

further examine their customer populations and better understand their needs and current status.

B. ASSESSMENT OF ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS

TWC's experience with integrated Common Measures has demonstrated its value in promoting one-stop partner responsibility for the success of its services while boosting participant accessibility and transparency within the Texas Workforce System. Therefore, TWC applies the same measures and methodologies to other one-stop partner-programs that it does the core programs, in addition to any program-specific measures that are required by either federal or state regulations or identified by TWC as appropriate for a given program. For example, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' regulations (45 C.F.R §264.30, *et seq.*) allow recipients of assistance to engage in a variety of activities that count toward the TANF Work Participation measure. TWC, as permitted, established an alternate measure that focused on recipients meeting work participation requirements exclusively through paid employment (other than for in-school teens working toward a diploma). The state has since worked to modify the measure to better align with and promote career pathways.

Regardless of whether a program is a core program or a partner program, or whether a measure is required by WIOA or state law or was created in partnership with Boards or other grantees, TWC applies performance measures and performs evaluations at the customer-level first and then aggregate results by program or population or partner. As discussed further in the Program Data section of this plan, TWC needs to be able to freely apply data from all sources to customer records to ensure that program results are not artificially boosted or limited because one program has access to critical data that others do not. This is particularly important in those instances where a customer is enrolled in both a core and non-core (perhaps state-funded) program; that customer's results should be reflected the same way at both the system-level and in the results for each program that helped the customer achieve those results.

We have previously described how we develop and apply performance measures as well as set targets and evaluate performance levels achieved to ensure the Texas Workforce System is meeting the needs of employers, job seekers, and communities in Texas. Those efforts are informed by continuous evaluation of system data and engagement with our Boards, grantees, and stakeholders to account for their goals.

C. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The US Departments of Labor and Education have issued guidance that explicitly notes that WIOA's performance accountability provisions will be applied to Titles I and III at the individual measure level for PY'20. This means that any state achieving at least 50 percent of their adjusted target will be considered to have met performance expectations. While the Departments, as of the time of this writing, have not yet released their end-of-year final targets for WIOA, as required in WIOA §116, TWC has compared negotiated levels of performance against the performance achieved. In doing so, TWC finds that the state met all initial Title I and Title III expectations.

While the Department of Education recently waived PY'20 and PY'21 performance accountability provisions for Titles II and IV, TWC participated in the initial target-setting negotiation for these programs. TWC achieved 96 to 105 percent of the initially negotiated Title II targets and more than doubled the expected level of achievement in the negotiated measure in Title IV. Our assessment is that the programs met PY20 performance expectations, which means that programmatic changes and improvement efforts were driven by agency priorities and not by a need to correct performance deficiencies.

D. EVALUATION

TWC has historically used a blend of Six Sigma, Lean, and Theory of Constraints methodologies for a continuous improvement model called Rapid Process Improvement (RPI). RPI has been used to evaluate dozens of system processes, identify opportunities for improvement, and test the results of implemented changes. Over the last two years, TWC has further expanded its continuous improvement model to move beyond RPI by designing a new methodology called Business Transformation (BT). The primary distinction between RPI and BT is the nature of the problem that is being targeted for improvement. RPI seeks to improve quality and efficiency in business processes, while BT is designed to uncover and address root causes of system-level issues and limitations. BT tends to be used on broader problems that have multiple processes associated with them. BT's goal is not just efficiency and quality improvements but a strategic rethinking of entire business approaches, priorities, and value systems associated with core business functions.

One recent and ongoing BT effort came out of TWC's triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) for Title IV vocational rehabilitation (VR). The CSNA is a critical resource to understanding how the Texas VR program is viewed by individuals who participate in Title IV programs and their VR service providers, employers, families, and disability support communities. CSNA findings are only valuable insofar as they are analyzed and used to guide action. Analysis of economic and related VR data substantially corroborated CSNA findings.

VR service providers voiced their concerns about low reimbursement rates, the inconsistency and declining number of referrals from TWC, and the burdensome paperwork and requirements to do business with the Texas VR program. I|3 examined the data and was able to validate and see the cumulative impact of these provider concerns. For example, over the past five years TWC saw a 51.5 percent reduction in the number of service provider locations (from 11,723 to 5,688) doing business with the Texas VR program. As of FFY'20, only 24 percent of available provider locations were doing business with the VR program, which coincided with a significant reduction in referrals to many of those providers.

The issue of declining availability and use of VR service providers resulted in secondary impacts, such as further reducing options for VR participants and making it more difficult for staff to find providers to refer them to. There was not a single process that needed to be improved to reverse the declining provider and referral trends. The existing RPI methodology was not going to solve the issue, which became TWC's initial BT project. TWC took the following actions:

- After examining reimbursement rates and history, TWC concluded that rates were too low and recommended rate adjustments, which TWC's Commissioners approved.
- As a result of several conversations with VR counselors, TWC found that the reduction in referrals to service providers was driven in part by staff turnover. Newer staff members did not have relationships with local providers and were not able to easily search for available providers in their area. In response, I|3 built a new Tableau-based provider locator that staff may use to quickly find providers by location and types of services offered.
- In an attempt to reduce provider burdens, TWC began reassessing established service provider requirements by comparing them to less burdensome policies in other states. This ongoing work is being performed in a targeted way to maximize the program's early impact.
- TWC began building solutions to quickly answer providers' questions and offer them the guidance necessary to assure the provision of quality services to our customers.

- TWC began building a data-driven approach to provider recruitment that targets the providers that are most in need based on customer and provider density in geographical areas.

TWC works with local Boards, other partners, and academic researchers on system evaluations and looks for opportunities to cooperate and partner with the Secretaries of Labor and Education on studies that complement and enhance the research priorities of TWC and its Boards and partners. In addition, TWC believes that the webinars and regional calls that DOL and ED hold provide an excellent avenue for coordinating such work and sharing results between the states and the departments.

Recently, TWC participated in a new adult education evaluation learning community project. This 15-month project brought together research and evaluation experts from many states to develop and conduct high-value evaluations for Adult Education and Literacy (AEL). TWC evaluated the impact that different forms of intake and onboarding mechanisms used by AEL grantees had on certain measures, such as length of participation. The final report was issued during PY'20 and used to develop the curriculum for a session at TWC's AEL summer institute in August 2021.

TWC has also been performing evaluation work related to the VR program. One project involves a quasi-experimental evaluation of the impact of TWC's Project SEARCH for individuals with developmental disabilities. Project SEARCH allows participants to compare three 10- to 12-week paid internships in competitive integrated employment settings, thus giving them the opportunity to focus on gaining proficiency in their preferred occupation with the goal of obtaining and retaining permanent employment. Common local employers involved in Project SEARCH include hospitals, law firms, and supply chain industries, which offer diverse internships in areas such as office administration, data entry, assembly/packaging, housekeeping, and food preparation.

Another project in the early stages of development involves a machine-learning model developed to identify VR participants who are six months into their cases and appear to be headed for an unsuccessful closure. The key to this project is not to identify the cases but to develop an intervention that may transform an unsuccessful trajectory into a successful one. The VR division is developing the intervention, which will be tested through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to identify cases on the path to failure and randomly assign them to receive the new intervention. This RCT will enable staff to determine whether the intervention has a causal impact on program outcomes. Although this work is being conducted within the VR program, it should be applicable to many other programs, including WIOA core partner programs.

I|3 is working with TWC's Workforce Development Division on several evaluations for DOL-funded programs. The first is an RCT for a new service that would be funded by WIOA dislocated worker (DW) statewide funding and involves special job-coaching and related resources. The evaluation will involve the random selection of Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) claimants for access to such services and will serve as both a WIOA DW and RESEA evaluation, as it is expected to meet CLEAR's "high causality" standard. Another study encompasses a broader quasi-experimental design that addresses the impact of the RESEA program on benefits usage and employees returning to work. It is anticipated that this second study will meet CLEAR's "moderate causality" standard.

Finally, I|3 is using its analytical resources to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse within the UI system by developing predictive analytics models used by UI's benefit payment control and investigative staff. TWC supports other states' efforts to promote integrity in their systems by sharing best practices and contributing to the UI Integrity Center's Suspicious Actor Repository.

Foundational to TWC's ambitions to fully leverage its data is TWC's EDW system, which supports advanced reporting, analytics, and high-quality evaluations that will meet moderate and high causal evidence as described on the CLEAR website. The system will streamline standard reporting to improve efficiency and will provide more resources for analysis and evaluation work. The system also will allow TWC to better connect data relating to participants, services, and outcomes across programs, which will facilitate monitoring at the highest level (systemwide) as well as the program level (WIOA Titles I–IV and beyond), the characteristic level (that is, subpopulations across all programs), or a combination thereof (individuals in a program who meet specific conditions).

A key portion of this work is the development of a common data model for customers in all programs. This system, which will be called Rosetta, will allow customer data to be transformed, standardized, and more easily combined. This will allow us to build Tableau dashboards that can work for any program.

The EDW buildout is being supported by a Workforce Data Quality Initiative grant application that will accelerate system development and bring additional capabilities online much sooner than would have been possible without the funding.

Over the next two to five years, TWC plans to replace or significantly modify nearly all enterprise-level information technology (IT) systems supporting our core programs and services. These systems must provide high-quality data that can support the levels of evaluation that WIOA requires. TWC will expend significant effort on ensuring that its IT modernization pays off both in the short run by serving customers and in the long run by yielding information about which efforts work under which conditions.

Once the Rosetta data system is fully implemented, TWC will apply market basket analysis to identify common customer groups much the way business marketing does when analyzing consumer purchasing patterns. However, our approach will reach farther than the identification of common customer groups—we intend to evaluate each group to determine whether service-based differences exist between high- and low-achieving customers in each group and then evaluate those services for effectiveness. Our assumption is that although most services have value, the value varies by individual and the degree to which services are provided in conjunction with other services or through other means.

Through this approach, TWC hopes to implement a system that better uses data to determine appropriate service delivery strategies unique to each individual customer. This approach is not intended to remove local flexibility or to disregard staff experience, but rather to support staff by providing better evidence-based options, based on the more precise data obtained through market basket analysis, to help plan an approach likely to lead to customer success. This approach will also help bring new staff up to speed more quickly.

TWC's evidence-based data analysis and evaluation provide a more efficient way to serve employers. We are working to identify employers that might benefit from outreach and education regarding short-term unemployment insurance (UI) compensation as a way to help the employer retain its skilled labor force during a period of temporary financial difficulty.

With the help of our Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative partners, TEA and THECB, TWC invested heavily in providing professional development for I|3 staff through the Coleridge Initiative's data science class. The class was conducted with real workforce and education data that were deidentified in Coleridge's data environment. Preparation for the training allowed for greater coordination and partnership between the Tri-Agencies, which resulted in the development of a modern data-sharing agreement and the design of the research questions and agenda for the class.

TWC recognizes the value of collaborating with evaluators outside the agency and even outside the state's workforce system. The agency works with academic researchers, such as the Ray

Marshall Center at the University of Texas and the Texas Policy Lab at Rice University, to evaluate the intersection between workforce preparation through education and labor market outcomes through Texas' Education Research Centers (ERCs), which combine and make available K-12, postsecondary education (at public colleges and the university), and workforce wage and employment data. The Texas Legislature established the ERCs through legislation, which required development of the ERC system, and the system to focus its research to assist Texas' elected officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders improve education in Texas. Additionally, recent legislation called for the creation of a more open and current workforce and education data repository in order to support identification of effective programs, measure the impact of changes on outcomes, and provide more robust data to stakeholders and partners.

5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

I. YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 128(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

TWC's three-member Commission adopted Fiscal Year 2020 WIOA Block Grant Allocations on April 30, 2019, pursuant to Texas Labor Code §§301.001, 302.002, and 302.065. These sections establish TWC to operate an integrated workforce development system in the state, in particular through the consolidation of job training, employment, and employment-support services (including subsidized child care), to achieve an efficient and effective delivery of services and to allocate funds to workforce areas for the purpose of meeting or exceeding statewide performance targets, as set forth in the General Appropriations Act and as consistent with federal and state program requirements.

Specifically, Texas Labor Code §302.062(a) prescribes that TWC shall provide funding to the workforce areas, in which Boards have been certified and local plans approved by the governor, through a block grant process.

The funds appropriated to TWC under House Bill (HB) 1, the General Appropriations Act, 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2019), for the FY'20–'21 biennium, are included in the block grant allocations to all workforce areas throughout the state (including those allocations adopted for WIOA Title I and Title II programs). These block grant allocations, which consist of state and federal program funds for workforce training and employment and support services, are awarded in concert with the requirements of associated state and federal statutes, program regulations and rules, and TWC contract provisions and requirements.

Pertinent informational references to TWC rules provisions are made throughout the block grant allocations package, clarifying:

- how allocations were computed;
- what allocation factors were used;
- the sources of the allocation factor data;
- why these allocations are largely based on estimated federal amounts, and may need to be subsequently amended (because federal FY '20 appropriations have not yet been enacted); and
- various other details regarding relevant assumptions, explanations, and associated information.

The TWC executive director is ordered to administer these block grant allocations in the most efficient and economical manner and within all guidelines prescribed by HB 1, General Appropriations Act, 86th Legislature, Regular Session (2019), the Texas Labor Code, and TWC rules.

For Title I Programs

Within-State allocations of formula-funded WIOA Title I will be made pursuant to statutory provisions for Youth Activities under §128(b), and Adult Employment and Training Activities and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities under §133(b) and pursuant to conforming to TWC General Administration rule §800.63. Youth Activities funds not reserved for statewide workforce investment activities (as authorized under WIOA §128(a)(1)) will be made available as Within-State Allocations for Youth Activities to workforce areas based on:

- one-third of the funds allocated on the basis of the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment (as defined in WIOA §127(b)(2)(B) and §132(b)(1)(B)(v)(III)) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total number of unemployed individuals within all areas of substantial unemployment in the state[1];
- one-third of the funds allocated on the basis of the relative excess number of unemployed individuals (as defined in WIOA §127(b)(2)(D) and §132(b)(1)(B)(v)(VI)) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total excess number of unemployed individuals within the state[2]; and
- one-third of the funds allocated based on the relative number of disadvantaged youth (as defined in WIOA §127(b)(2)(C)) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total number of disadvantaged youth within the state.[3]

Within-State Allocations to workforce areas (as provided in WIOA §128(b)(2)(A)(ii), §133(b)(2)(A)(ii), and §133(b)(B)(iii)) shall meet minimum percentages for Youth Activities, Adult Employment and Training Activities, and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities (for FY'06 or a subsequent year) that are no less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage among the workforce areas in the state for the two preceding fiscal years.

In accordance with the requirements of Texas Labor Code §302.062(d), block grant–allocated funds for workforce training and employment services and associated support services shall be allocated by the Commission among the workforce areas in the state that are no less than 90 percent or more than 125 percent of the proportion during the two preceding fiscal years.

Of the amount allocated from the Within-State Allocation for a fiscal year, not more than 10 percent of the amount may be used by the Board involved for the administrative costs of carrying out local workforce investment activities (as provided in WIOA §128(b)(4) and §133(b)).

1. Period and Source of the Data: the higher of the 12-month period ending June of the prior year or the prior calendar year, TWC LMI Department
2. Period and Source of the Data: 12-month period ending June of the prior year, TWC LMI Department
3. Period and Source of the Data: US DOLETA, Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 14–17, April 4, 2018, Table 6

II. ADULT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

Adult Employment and Training Activities funds not reserved for statewide activities (as provided in WIOA §128(a)(1) and §133(a)(1)) will be made available as Within-State Allocations for Adult Employment and Training Activities to workforce areas based on:

- one-third of the funds allocated on the basis of the relative number of unemployed individuals in areas of substantial unemployment (as defined in WIOA §127(b)(2)(B) and §132(b)(1)(B)(v)(III)) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total number of unemployed individuals within all such areas of substantial unemployment in the state;[1]
- one-third of the funds allocated on the basis of the relative excess number of unemployed individuals (as defined in WIOA §127(b)(2)(D) and §132(b)(1)(B)(v)(VI)) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total excess number of unemployed individuals within the state[2]; and (Period and Source of the Data: the higher of 12-month period ending June of the prior fiscal year or the prior calendar year, TWC LMI department); and
- one-third of the funds allocated on the basis of the relative number of disadvantaged adults (as defined in WIOA §132(b)(1)(B)(v)(IV)) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total number of disadvantaged adults within the state.[3]

Within-State Allocations to workforce areas (as provided in WIOA §128(b)(2)(A)(ii),

§133(b)(2)(A)(ii), and §133(b)(B)(iii)) shall meet minimum percentages for Youth Activities, Adult Employment and Training Activities, and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities (for FY'06 or a subsequent year) that are no less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage among the workforce areas in the state for the two preceding fiscal years.

In accordance with the requirements of Texas Labor Code §302.062(d), block grant–allocated funds for workforce training and employment services and associated support services shall be allocated by the Commission among the workforce areas in the state that are no less than 90 percent or more than 125 percent of the proportion during the two preceding fiscal years.

Of the amount allocated from the Within-State Allocation for a fiscal year, not more than 10 percent of the amount may be used by the Board involved for the administrative costs of carrying out local workforce investment activities (as provided in WIOA §128(b)(4) and §133(b)).

1. Period and Source of the Data: 12-month period ending June of the prior year, TWC LMI department
2. Period and Source of the Data: the higher of 12-month period ending June of the prior fiscal year or the prior calendar year, TWC LMI department
3. Period and Source of the Data: DOLETA, TEGL No. 14-17, April 4, 2018, Table 6

III. DISLOCATED WORKER EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) AND BASED ON DATA AND WEIGHTS ASSIGNED

Dislocated Worker Employment and Training funds not reserved for statewide activities (as provided in WIOA §128(a)(1) and §133(a)(1)) or statewide rapid response activities (as described in WIOA §132 (b)(2)(B)) will be made available as Within-State Allocations for Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities to workforce areas on the basis of:

- 20.00 percent (Program Year 2015 (PY'15) factor weight) of the funds on the basis of the relative number of insured unemployed individuals (that is, average monthly total number of unemployed individuals who are covered by state and federal unemployment insurance program) residing within each workforce area, compared to the total number

of insured unemployed individuals within the state (Period and Source of the Data: prior calendar year, TWC's Claimant Characteristics Report);

- 19.67 percent (PY'15 factor weight) of the funds based on the relative average number of unemployed individuals residing within each workforce area, compared to the average number of unemployed individuals within the state (Period and Source of the Data: prior calendar year, Monthly Local Area Unemployment Statistics, LAUS Estimates Report, TWC LMI department);
- 10.33 percent (PY'15 factor weight) of the funds on the basis of the relative number of workers residing within each workforce area who are included on Texas plant closure and layoff notices issued under authority of the Worker Adjustment Retraining Notification Act (WARN), compared to the number of such workers within the state (Period and Source of the Data: prior calendar year, TWC Workforce Development Division);
- 20.00 percent (PY'15 factor weight) of the funds on the basis of the relative proportion of the state's declining industries (for the four calendar quarters ending the prior September, compared to the four quarters ending September of two years earlier), for any industry group reflecting statewide decline, for any workforce area, and also showing a decline in those respective industry groups (six-digit NAICS industry classification), aggregated by workforce area (Period and Source of the Data: period of data as described, TWC LMI department);
- 19.67 percent (PY'15 factor weight) of the funds on the basis of the relative proportion of individuals in Farmer-Rancher Economic Hardship (that is, total population of farm and ranch employees who are not covered by UI) residing within the workforce area, compared to the total number of individuals within the state in Farmer-Rancher Economic Hardship (Period and Source of the Data: prior calendar year, Texas State Data Center); and
- 10.33 percent (PY'15 factor weight) of the funds on the basis of the relative proportion of individuals in Long-Term Unemployment (that is, the average monthly number of individuals, residing within each workforce area who have been unemployed for 14 weeks or longer) residing within the workforce area, compared to the total number of individuals within the state in Long-Term Unemployment (Period and Source of the Data: prior calendar year, TWC's Claimant Characteristics Report).

Within-State Allocations to workforce areas (as provided in WIOA §128(b)(2)(A)(ii), §133(b)(2)(A)(ii), and §133(b)(B)(iii)) shall meet minimum percentages for Youth Activities, Adult Employment and Training Activities, and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training Activities (for FY'16 or a subsequent year) that are no less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage among the workforce areas in the state for the two preceding fiscal years.

In accordance with the requirements of Texas Labor Code §302.062(d), block grant-allocated funds for workforce training and employment services and associated support services shall be allocated by the Commission among the workforce areas in the state that are no less than 90 percent or more than 125 percent of the proportion during the two preceding fiscal years.

Of the amount allocated from the Within-State Allocation for a fiscal year, not more than 10 percent of the amount may be used by the Board involved for the administrative costs of carrying out local workforce investment activities (as provided in WIOA §128(b)(4) and §133(b)).

B. FOR TITLE II

I. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL AWARD MULTI-YEAR GRANTS OR CONTRACTS ON A COMPETITIVE BASIS TO ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE, INCLUDING HOW ELIGIBLE AGENCIES WILL ESTABLISH THAT ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS ARE ORGANIZATIONS OF DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS

AEL under WIOA Title II §211 provides the basis and methodology for the awarding of state grants for AEL activities, in §243 the basis and methodology for the allotment of funds for integrated English literacy and civics education (IEL/CE), and in §225 for the use of funds for correction education programs for individuals who are institutionalized, including those who are post-release. In accordance with this basis and methodology, and pursuant to TWC General Administration rule §800.68 as outlined below, AEL allocations are made available to each workforce area. TWC is currently reviewing AEL allocation methodology to workforce areas and may amend rule language related to deobligation and reallocation of funds.

- ED allocates AEL State Grant funds based on their relative proportion of the nation's total number of individuals at least 18 years of age without a secondary school diploma and who are not enrolled in school. TWC allocates these funds (together with associated state general revenue matching funds) on the same basis to workforce areas across the state. TWC obtains from the Texas State Data Center the most recent data available for this allocation factor each year, as directed by the Texas Labor Code and TWC rules. Allocation factors for TWC block grants must be aggregated to the 28 workforce areas throughout the state, the most effective approach is to obtain allocation factor data values/estimates by county and then to aggregate to workforce areas.

- Pursuant to TWC rule §800.68(b) and (c), federal funds constituting the state award of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) grants (excluding amounts received for IEL/CE §243 program funds) and associated state general revenue matching funds shall be allocated to workforce areas based on the relative proportion of individuals residing within each workforce area who are at least 18 years of age, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and are not enrolled in secondary school, during the most recent period for which statistics are available.

- Federal funds encompassing the state award of AEFLA State Grants (excluding amounts received for IEL/CE §243 program funds) and associated state General Revenue matching funds for the pertinent program year/fiscal year are allocated using statistics provided by the Texas State Data Center. The allocation factor data consists of the most recent estimates available by the US Bureau of the Census' American Community Survey (ACS) three-year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), applied to Texas State Data Center county population estimates (aggregated to workforce area populations). This data set is consistent with that used by ED in determining AEFLA state grants.

- At least 82.5 percent of the federal funds encompassing the state award of AEFLA state grants (excluding amounts received for IEL/CE §243 program funds) and associated state General Revenue matching funds for the pertinent program year/fiscal year are allocated based on the relative proportion of individuals residing within each workforce area who are at least 18 years of age, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and are not enrolled in secondary school, during the most recent period for which statistics are available; an equal base amount; and the application of a hold-harmless procedure.

- Pursuant to TWC rule §800.68(d), AEFLA federal funds received for IEL/CE §243 programs are allocated to workforce areas based on the same methodology and data factors provided in WIOA§243(b). The federal funds constituting the state allotment of amounts for EL/CE §243 programs for the pertinent program year/fiscal year are allocated based on:(A) the relative proportion of:(1) 65 percent of the average number of legal permanent residents during the most recent 10-year period, available from US

Citizenship and Immigration Services data, and(2) 35 percent of the average number of legal permanent residents during the most recent three-year period, available from US Citizenship and Immigration Services data.(B) an equal base amount; and(C) application of a hold-harmless procedure.

- The state of Texas appropriates $5.8 million per year of the state's TANF block grant to TWC to serve eligible individuals in its Adult Education and Literacy program. Pursuant to TWC rule §800.68(e), TANF federal funds associated with the AEL program will be allocated by the Commission to workforce areas according to a need-based formula. 100 percent of the TANF funds will be based on: (A) the relative proportion of the unduplicated number of TANF adult recipients residing within the workforce area with educational attainment of less than a secondary diploma during the most recently completed calendar year; (B) an equal base amount; and (C) the application of a hold-harmless procedure.

Title II Adult Education and Literacy Statewide Competition and Awards

In fall 2017, Texas conducted a statewide competition of services, under RFP 320-18-01, to fund contracts through June 30, 2020, with options for up to three one-year renewals. Thirty-six AEL grant recipients were awarded grants. The grant period is for two years (that is, 24 months) with an option for TWC to renew the grant for an additional one-year period, as many as three times. The start date for the original two-year period (24-month period) was July 1, 2018. If TWC determines at the end of the initial two-year term that the grantee is not performing or that the outcomes are not being achieved, TWC can allow the grant to expire. If the grantee is struggling, and TWC has an enhanced technical assistance plan in place to support the grantee, TWC can authorize the grant for another year to reassess at the end of that year whether to continue to fund the grant.

In its Request for Proposals (RFP), Texas incorporated and specifically indicated the considerations specified in WIOA §231(e) as grant award requirements required of eligible providers. These considerations were scored as narrative questions in the RFP, and offerors were required to provide narrative detail to demonstrate how they will meet each consideration.

In October 2019, Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) conducted a review of this statewide competition to ensure that processes for the award of Title II funds to eligible providers adhered to WIOA requirements. In its final report, OCTAE noted that the next statewide competition shall be held no later than Program Year 2023. State staff are working to ensure applications for AEFLA funds meet the 13 considerations outlined in AEFLA §231.

For the next statewide RFA, state staff will revise application items that were addressed during OCTAE's 2019 virtual monitoring review of Texas' grant application process, including separating the past effectiveness criteria (one of the 13 considerations) from demonstrated effectiveness.

A competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process will be used by TWC. All eligible providers follow the same competitive procedures. The RFP will provide instructions for preparation of proposals, a deadline for submitting a notice of intent to apply and a deadline for receipt of the proposals, review criteria, assurances, and other legal, fiscal, and program requirements; and plans for cooperative arrangements the eligible provider will develop with other agencies, institutions, or organizations for the delivery of AEL services.

Grantees will respond to questions in the proposal that include requirements as outlined in WIOA §232(1)-(7). The review of proposals will include rating responses to questions aligned to the 13 considerations in WIOA §231(e)(1)-(13).

Title II Adult Education and Literacy Determining Demonstrated Effectiveness

Through the AEL competition, eligible providers will be required to demonstrate past effectiveness by providing performance data on documented factors of improving the skills of eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy, in the content domains of reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to the application for funds. Prior TWC AEL grant recipients will be required to provide performance data required under section 116 of WIOA to demonstrate past effectiveness as evidenced by data from the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) student data management system to demonstrate the extent to which they met state-negotiated performance measures for all state and federal performance measures.

Eligible providers that have not been previously funded under Title II of WIOA must provide performance data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving basic skills deficient-eligible individuals including those with low levels of literacy in the content domains of reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to the application for funds and demonstrate the extent to which they objectively evaluate performance criteria in achieving outcomes listed under section 116 of WIOA.

Eligible providers must also provide information regarding outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training.

TWC shall determine each applicant's eligibility to apply for AEFLA funds, based on whether it has demonstrated effectiveness in providing AEL services, as required under 34 CFR §463.24 and in guidance outlined in OCTAE's Technical Assistance Guide, "Determining Applicant Eligibility When Conducting a State Competition for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Fund."

In the next statewide competition for AEFLA funds, TWC will ensure any applications reviewed are first screened for eligibility, including eligibility based on the provider's demonstrated effectiveness in serving eligible individuals and the outcomes of participants.

II. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE DIRECT AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS TO APPLY AND COMPETE FOR FUNDS AND HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE THAT IT IS USING THE SAME GRANT OR CONTRACT ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS

Texas aligned AEL and workforce development systems in 2013. The alignment required statewide deployment of models to develop the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education programs and obtain and advance in employment. Successful models have included IET, career pathways, distance learning, and college and workforce preparation activities. Texas also aligned service-delivery options for individuals with disabilities and other special needs. AEL statewide service-delivery contracts are compliant with WIOA requirements under performance, workforce system, and rehabilitative services alignment and programmatic integration.

In fall 2017, Texas conducted the second statewide competition of services to fund contracts from July 1, 2018, through June 30, 2020, with options for up to three one-year renewals.

Thirty-six AEL grant recipients were awarded grants.

In its Request for Proposals (RFP), Texas incorporated and specifically indicated the considerations specified in WIOA §231(e) as grant award requirements of eligible providers. These considerations were scored as narrative questions in the RFP, and offerors were required to provide narrative detail to demonstrate how they will meet each consideration.

AEFLA §232 requires that eligible providers desiring a grant or contract submit an application containing required information and assurances, including a description of:

- how funds awarded will be spent; and
- any cooperative arrangements the eligible provider has with other agencies, institutions, or organizations for the delivery of AEL services.

Contracts awarded to AEL grant recipients were limited to two years, with the option of three one-year renewals at the discretion of TWC's Commission, taking into account performance and other factors. Renewals for years three, four, and five are not automatic, and are based on meeting or exceeding performance and expenditure benchmarks, or other factors as determined by the Commission. At the completion of the five-year maximum contract term, TWC will conduct a new competitive statewide procurement. All contracts, including those that have been in effect for less than the maximum five-year contract term, must be competitively procured during subsequent statewide procurements.

Of the funding Texas receives to administer AEL services, 82.5 percent must be used to provide AEL services as stipulated in AEFLA §231. Of the 82.5 percent, up to 10 percent is allowed for corrections education and education for other institutionalized adults.

Federal AEL funds may be used for programs for out-of-school individuals who are at least 16 years of age and:

- function at less than a secondary school completion level;
- lack a secondary school credential; or
- are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

State AEL funds are for programs for out-of-school individuals who are beyond compulsory school-attendance age and:

- function at less than a secondary school completion level;
- lack a secondary school credential; or
- are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

Eligible providers for a grant or contract under TWC include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Local education agency;
- Community-based organization or faith-based organization;
- Volunteer literacy organization;
- Institution of higher education;
- Public or private nonprofit agency;
- Library;
- Public housing authority;
- Nonprofit institution that can provide literacy services to eligible individuals;
- Consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above; and

- A partnership between an employer and any of the entities described above.

TWC uses an RFP competitive process under which all proposals for funding are treated in the same manner in terms of review and evaluation during the RFP process including the same announcements, proposal materials, and review and award process for each RFP the state issues. TWC ensures all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to AEL funding opportunities. All offerors eligible under Section 231 of WIOA submit proposals directly to TWC. They are not required to apply through another agency or agencies in a multi-tiered process.

Notice of availability of awards are distributed via email distribution lists of current providers, Literacy Texas, the state's nonprofit literacy council network, Texas community and technical college systems, Boards, as well as public posting on the AEL website, the Texas Electronic State Business Daily, and the Texas Comptroller's website, which houses announcements and details of all open procurement in Texas. The RFP processes are designed so that direct application to TWC is clear, customary, and nonnegotiable.

C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

TWC's VR Division serves as the Designated State Unit (DSU) for the VR program as required under § 721(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. (Title IV). As such, the VR Division is responsible for the distribution and expenditure of VR funds for the delivery of services to eligible students and adults with disabilities, and to potentially eligible students with disabilities.

Funds are distributed to local VR offices in each of the six TWC VR regions based on projected expenditures to serve customers in the region for the fiscal year. Projections are based on several factors, including expenditures and customers served in the prior year and anticipated for the subsequent year, as well as the implementation of statewide initiatives and new or revised service delivery strategies.

Services to VR customers may be provided, arranged or purchased by VR staff. Services must be necessary to assist the customer with achieving his or her employment goal and based upon the Individualized Plan for Employment developed jointly by the VR counselor and the customer.

Pursuant to 34 CFR §76.50(b), VR funds may not be sub-granted because neither the Rehabilitation Act nor its implementing program regulations specifically permit sub-granting under the VR program. As a result, community rehabilitation programs and other providers with whom TWC VR contracts for the provision of VR services are considered vendors or contractors not subgrantees.

6. PROGRAM DATA

A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

TWC operates a collection of different IT systems to capture participant information, services, and outcomes. Many of these systems were legacy systems that were transferred to TWC as programs were moved to the agency. However, these systems were all built on now outdated technology and were designed to support the predecessors to the WIOA core programs.

Modifying those systems to meet WIOA's requirements has proven excessively challenging; therefore, TWC has begun a system modernization project that includes the following four main components:

1. Implementation of a recently procured unemployment insurance system replacement
2. Rebuilding TWC's VR case management system
3. Procurement of a new case management system to support TWC's subsidized child care and early learning programs

4. Configuration of a recently procured case management system that will support all DOL programs operated by TWC, aspects of the TANF and SNAP E&T program, and other miscellaneous programs. This system will be highly adaptable to new programs and initiatives as they are developed by TWC.

The Texas workforce system has been on the leading edge of performance measurement, evaluation, and accountability within the national workforce structure for nearly two decades. TWC implemented a set of system-wide performance measures that successfully improved employer engagement and effectiveness serving employers. TWC embraced the Common Measures and applied them to all state and federally funded employment and training programs using common Periods of Participation and integrated reporting. TWC also obtained a performance measure waiver that gave TWC flexibility in selecting performance measures to contract with Boards so that the system could break down program siloes and focus on integrated services. TWC participated in the redeveloped the Workforce Investment Streamlined Performance Reporting System (WISPR) for DOL to simplify the system and add additional functionality. Texas became the first state to file a WISPR. TWC mentored other states interested in integrated reporting with or without the WISPR.

As noted, TWC has undertaken a new enterprise data warehousing project to support data integration, reporting, consumer education, evaluation work, and decision-making at all levels of the workforce system. As the source systems listed above are replaced, parallel projects will integrate data from the new systems into the warehouse in such a way as to allow the combining of data from different TWC eras spanning as much as two decades. These parallel projects will be critical to ensuring a smooth analytics transition from one set of systems to their replacements without disrupting the flow of data needed to effectively manage and innovate these programs.

In addition to reporting requirements under WIOA §116(d), TWC will be actively monitoring and evaluating the Texas workforce system under WIOA §116(e). Evaluation efforts will include applying both federal- and state-prescribed performance measures, in addition to continually developing and testing other measures. Consistent with WIOA §116(i), TWC will be using data obtained from other states to implement this part of TWC's Combined State Plan.

TWC was appropriated over $64 million during the FY '20-'21 biennium to replace legacy workforce systems.

UI Systems Replacement Project

TWC, through a competitive procurement process, is seeking to acquire a turnkey modifiable off-the-shelf (MOTS) technology solution to replace its existing UI legacy systems including benefits, tax, and appeals applications. The procurement will include services to implement the MOTS, make essential modifications required for Texas, migrate relevant data, and provide a shared maintain and operations solution after the MOTS is put into production. TWC has engaged a third-party vendor to perform independent verification and validation (IV&V) activities for the duration of the project.

The new system will support the entire UI program and its customers by:

- Focusing on re-employment first with the objective of getting Texans back to work quickly and efficiently;
- Enhancing self-service options;
- Automating manual, paper-based processes to increase workflow efficiencies & reduce operational costs;
- Providing integrated workflow for resource assignments and managing/monitoring of assigned work;

- Providing automated data population, cascading of data between input screens, and drop-down menus to improve productivity and reduce data entry errors;
- Facilitate electronic communication within TWC as well as among TWC, its customers and employers;
- Providing TWC staff with timely access to information necessary for performance measurement and quality management;
- Providing immediate access to data and customizable dashboards to support decision-making;
- Implementing a unified case management system with workflow that interfaces with UI data to store claims, determinations, claimant and employer data, and appeals information; and
- Providing a scalable platform with a flexible architecture to support process improvements and system integration requirements.

Workforce Case Management Replacement

TWC needs an integrated system, based on a common platform, to streamline case management activities for staff and Workforce Boards to provide case management processes. This project will replace The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) excluding child care, Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS), Texas Review, Oversight, and Coaching System (TxROCS), and ReHabWorks. It will provide TWC and partners with innovative technology and tools. TWC engaged a third-party vendor to perform IV&V activities for the duration of this project.

The new Workforce Case Management system will advance Commission goals by:

- Increasing staff access to systems services;
- Integrating and aligning TWC systems and services, and;
- Equipping TWC staff, Boards and their partners, and AEL providers with innovative technology and tools.

This adds value to our customers by:

- Delivering excellent customer service and customer experiences with TWC;
- Delivering excellent customer outcomes.

TWC anticipates this project will:

- Reduce TWC staff turnover;
- Reduce improper payments;
- Assure that TWC meets or exceeds the agency's EIR Accessibility requirements; and
- Streamline mission critical case management services and activities for staff and Workforce Boards, that will address complicated integration and/or lack of integration between TWC's multiple stand-along systems and platforms of varying ages.

In 2019, TWC implemented a new labor exchange system, is preparing to procure a next generation case management system to support WIOA core and partner programs and continues to work to refine the enterprise data warehouse. The project is being developed and managed as a Workforce Solutions project. TWC is actively working to upgrade legacy solution

systems to provide state leadership with accurate data and a proven method for analyzing business needs to support and improve data driven decision-making.

The project requirements will include interfaces between systems to ensure data integration and to facilitate the coordination of services as well as communications across the programs.

As noted, TWC's EDW is being developed to produce reports required under WIOA section 116(d)(2).

The EDW advances Commission goals by:

- allowing TWC to provide statistical information regarding outcomes and effectiveness of workforce services provided to job seekers and employers; and
- meeting the data utility mandates listed in the State Strategic Plan for Information Resources Management including data management and governance, open data, and data analytics.

This yields value for our customers and partners by doing the following

- Improving reporting accuracy and speed of report generation
- Enabling more sophisticated and comprehensive data analysis
- Increasing the scope and availability of relationally connected data that will enable reporting capabilities and outcome inferences that are not currently possible
- Enabling cross-functional dashboards that identify program relationships and impacts that cannot easily be identified or monitored with today's system
- Creating a single historical reporting system of record
- Reducing the risk of statutory noncompliance regarding required data reporting
- Eliminating manual processes to run and/or store reports
- Reducing data preparation time, allowing staff to focus on better coding and analysis

B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

TWC continues to work with local partners in developing performance reporting measures that provide information about how services impact customer outcomes. As TWC improves its suite of automated systems, partners gain the ability to capture a more complete set of customer data that supports categorical workforce programs and stores the associated data in a central repository.

TWC's vision for its next generation integrated performance reporting system involves incorporating customer data from all federal and state-funded employment and training programs coupled with a customer-focused data model that will support aggregating data into any combination of programs and characteristics. This will allow the system to meet program reporting requirements as well as permit other views of the data. Key to its effectiveness and ability to support transparency and accountability, the system will need to be able to report a customer's outcomes the same way for every program or aggregation of data, while ensuring the security and confidentiality of customer data. For example, if a customer who received services from WIOA Adult and SNAP E&T and was identified as employed in the second quarter after Exit through data obtained from another state, TWC will report that success in both WIOA Adult and SNAP E&T performance measures to ensure that stakeholders and elected officials have a complete and accurate view of each program's contribution to successful employment outcomes.

Evaluating participants' outcomes is important in helping to ensure accountability. Additionally, TWC evaluates current and historic data to understand what factors influence performance in order to be able to determine whether results achieved were reasonable, to predict what levels of performance is likely to be achieved in the future, and to identify what actions the system should take when serving specific customers to achieve effective outcomes. These efforts will support continuous improvement and set the foundation for developing means to measure the return on investment.

Lastly, during the course of this plan, TWC will be redeveloping its existing longitudinal outcome system with a broader system incorporating more programs and providing a more complete picture of what happens to those we serve over the medium and longer terms.

C. USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) WAGE RECORD DATA

Wage records remain the best, most objective source of information for determining employment-related outcomes. Measures that use wage records are also far more efficient and less costly than those that depend on administrative data. For example, TWC can match to UI wage records to verify program-specific, customer-level data furnished by providers of training services. Additionally, TWC encourages the Secretary of Labor to consider—in consultation with the Workforce Information Advisory Council, federal agencies, and states—developing standardized definitions for the data elements composing wage records as well as improved processes and systems for the collection and reporting of such records. TWC currently makes extensive use of quarterly UI wage records as part of its common data systems both for required and ad hoc reporting and makes the data available to the Boards, other state agencies, and various researchers either directly or by performing matches to seed records provided by external entities.

The 87th Texas Legislature passed legislation that directs TWC to work with employers to explore enhancing wage records with occupational information and other data that would increase the value of the labor market information that TWC is able to provide. As part of this exploration, TWC is meeting with a group of other states and national employers brought together by the US Chamber of Commerce to pursue its Jobs and Employment Data Exchange (JEDx) initiative, which calls for many of the same actions that the new Texas legislation requires. While TWC may not ultimately implement JEDx as proposed, participation in the work group will bring TWC into contact with others attempting to accomplish the same goals and is expected to yield important perspectives to supplement those we will obtain through our own coordination and consensus-building with Texas employers.

While TWC and the local Boards generally operate Texas Workforce Solutions as an integrated system that focuses on customer outcomes rather than program outcomes, there is often interest in program-specific outcomes. TWC is committed to providing consistent, reliable, and comparable performance data to partners, stakeholders, and the public. Therefore, TWC calculates performance at the customer-level across programs and then aggregates the results by sublevel, such as by program or for customers with given characteristics.

However, WIOA §116(i)(2) provides that the Secretary of Labor shall provide access to wage data from other states to the extent that this data is necessary to carry out the state plan or the annual report prescribed by WIOA §116(d), and WIOA §116(e) requires the state in coordination with the Boards to conduct ongoing evaluations of activities carried out by the state. Therefore, as noted, TWC intends to use data obtained through the new State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) to evaluate system and program performance through a variety of federal and state-developed performance measures, as well as to evaluate system and program impact and return on investment.

D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

TWC administers and enforces many state and federal laws covering various workforce-related privacy issues. These laws are intended to set high standards for performance and customer satisfaction. TWC's compliance includes legislation that addresses §444 of the General Education Provisions Act and other applicable federal laws. TWC is a state educational agency under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) because it administers two US Department of Education programs: WIOA Titles II and IV.

TWC maintains an internal control structure and written policies that provide safeguards to protect personally identifiable information (PII) from an education record, and other information that is readily or easily exchanged in the open market or considered to be sensitive. Confidentiality is specifically maintained for student-identifying information received by TWC from career schools or colleges, or any other school, business entity, or educational institution that TWC reviews. Violating the confidentiality of this information is a Class-A misdemeanor offense.

TWC's compliance is facilitated by such resources as the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS), the data management system for federally funded AEL programs in Texas. TEAMS access is limited to people who work for an AEL grant recipient or subrecipient and have satisfactorily completed FERPA training provided by TWC. Similarly, TWC's ReHabWorks system, supporting the Title IV VR program, has strict access controls to safeguard privacy. TWC has also recently completed cybersecurity maturity assessments for each of the 28 Boards and updated security language in the agency board agreements.

In addition, TWC electronically publishes its guidelines to protect the security and confidentiality of customers' PII to which Boards and other TWC grantees must adhere. These guidelines and other guidance include the following:

- TWC Information Security Standards and Guidelines
- TWC Privacy Manual for Safeguarding Sensitive Personally Identifiable Information
- Employment Service Guide
- WD Letter 02-18, issued March 23, 2018, and entitled "Handling and Protection of Personally Identifiable Information and Other Sensitive Information," and subsequent updates
- WD Letter 11-16, issued June 15, 2016, and entitled "Access and Data Security for Workplace Applications," and subsequent updates
- WD Letter 14-08, issued March 19, 2008, and entitled "Modifications to Unemployment Insurance Benefits System Access," and subsequent updates

7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS

Texas is home to 1.5 million veterans, the second largest veteran population in the nation. TWC is using the newest workforce development strategies and initiatives to expand services for veterans and spouses of veterans.

Priority of Service for Veterans

Texas Workforce Solutions has always provided priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses in all DOL-funded programs. Additionally, the Texas legislature mandated priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses in all state-funded workforce services.

TWC's Subrecipient Monitoring department maintains a risk assessment methodology for monitoring local Board activities, and priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is included in the items that are applied to this methodology. Monitoring activities generally

include on-site visits, interviews with staff, and regular reviews of local Board policies related specifically to priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses.

The Jobs for Veterans Act ensures the priority of service of covered veterans and eligible spouses for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under WIOA. A veteran must still meet each program's eligibility criteria to receive services under the respective employment and training program.

Texas Workforce Solutions staff ensures the requirements for priority of service apply to all workforce service programs funded in whole or in part by the DOLETA or state funds.

Specifically, Texas Workforce Solutions staff apply priority of service to the following two categories of qualified job training programs: Universal access programs (e.g., Wagner-Peyser–funded services) that deliver services as a whole and that do not target specific groups, and programs with eligibility criteria (e.g., Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act–funded services).

Veterans and eligible spouses are:

- identified at the point of entry;
- informed of their entitlement to priority of service;
- informed of the full array of employment, training, and placement services available; and
- informed of any applicable eligibility requirements for those programs and services.

Priority of service for WIOA and other programs with statutory priorities is then applied in the following order:

- Veterans and eligible spouses who meet the mandatory priorities or spending requirement or limitation must receive the highest priority for the program or service;
- Non-veterans within the program's mandatory priority or spending requirement or limitation must receive priority for the program or service over veterans and eligible spouses outside the program-specific mandatory priority or spending requirement or limitation; and
- Veterans and eligible spouses outside the program-specific mandatory priority or spending requirement or limitation must receive priority for the program or service over non-veterans outside the program-specific mandatory priority or spending requirement or limitation.

In Texas, the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program is administered by the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists, Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs), and Consolidated Positions (CPs) are integrated with each Board's service provider staff and Wagner-Peyser Employment Service staff in each of the Board's Workforce Solutions Offices. TWC, TVC, and the 28 Boards work collaboratively to coordinate and deliver employment and other support services to all veteran job seekers and their families.

Texas' automated labor exchange, WorkInTexas.com, has several features specifically tailored to serve veterans and eligible spouses, including the following:

- A two-day hold on all newly created job orders—these jobs are available only to veterans and eligible spouses for the first two days they are open to ensure veterans get the first opportunity to review and apply.

- Employers may designate job orders for Veteran Applicants Only.
- WorkInTexas.com provides information to the veteran and eligible spouses when he or she registers online that explains every veteran's entitlement to priority of service and also provides additional information related to available workforce services and programs.
- WorkInTexas.com sends email or mail notifications to veterans and eligible spouses who have completed online registration that reiterates their entitlement to priority of service for all workforce programs and services.
- WorkInTexas.com provides certain features that are tailored to veterans and eligible spouses, such as:
    - icons that identify veteran job seekers to employers;
    - job search options for veterans and eligible spouses, including search options that provide listings for Veteran Only job orders and federal contractor job orders;
    - a veteran icon with the following Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) indicators:
        - Homeless
        - Disability
        - Veteran Disability
        - Recently Separated Veteran
        - Transitioning Service Member
        - Veteran Age Priority
        - Low Income
        - Career Readiness Standards
        - Reduction in Force
        - Spouse or Family Care Giver
        - Wounded or Ill or Injured Service Member
        - Released from Incarceration
        - Drawn Unemployment for 27 or more Weeks
        - Meet Vietnam-Era Veteran Designation
        - Veteran Between age 18 and 24
    - We Hire Vets icon;
    - We Hire Ability icon; and
    - working with the WorkInTexas.com team to include the Hire Vets Medallion Program icon.

WorkInTexas.com uses a hands-off software-based process to gather job orders from the National Labor Exchange (USNLX.com) and other large job boards, such as Monster and Career Builder, and adds them to Texas' automated labor exchange. This imported job data provides

veterans and eligible spouses with as many quality job opportunities as possible through the state labor exchange.

In addition, Senate Bill 389, 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2015), requires state agencies to include relevant Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) codes on all job orders added to WorkInTexas.com. The State Auditor's Office (SAO), in conjunction with TVC, developed a State Classification-to-MOS crosswalk that is maintained and accessed by state agencies from the SAO website. The Military Crosswalk, is attached to each occupational category on the SAO's website so that state agencies can easily look up state classification titles, identify related MOS codes, and include those MOS codes on job orders.

Significant Barriers to Employment

A veteran or eligible spouse is determined to have a significant barrier to employment if he or she meets at least one of the following:

1. Special disabled or disabled veteran, as defined in 38 USC §4211(1) and (3); are individuals who:
    a. are entitled to compensation (or who, but for the receipt of military retired pay, would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs;
    b. have a disability claim pending with the US Department of Veterans Affairs; or
    c. were discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability;
2. Homeless, as defined in 42 USC §11302(a) and (b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended
3. Recently separated service member, as defined in 38 USC §4211(6), who in the previous 12 months has been unemployed for 27 weeks or more
4. Offender, as defined by WIOA §3(38), who is currently incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration
5. Veteran lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate
6. Low income, as defined in WIOA §3(36)

A veteran or eligible spouse identified as having significant barriers to employment is immediately referred to DVOP or CP staff. When DVOP or CP staff are not available, Workforce Solutions Office staff provide or arrange for services to be provided.

Wagner Peyser Employment Services staff, WIOA staff, or other Workforce Solutions Office staff provide services to veterans and eligible spouses who have been determined:

- to have significant barriers to employment, but for whom no DVOP or CP staff are available to provide services; or
- to not have significant barriers to employment.

Boards screen individuals seeking services with the Significant Barriers to Employment Triage Tool, whether in person, via telephone, or by any other electronic means (such as email and/or text) to determine whether they are veterans or eligible spouses and whether they are eligible for services from DVOP or CP staff.

The following active duty service members or Transitioning Service Personnel are eligible for DVOP or CP services:

- Transitioning members of the US Armed Forces who have been identified as being in need of individualized career services
- Members of the US Armed Forces who are wounded, ill, or injured and receiving treatment in military treatment facilities or warrior transition units
- Service members who have not met Career Readiness Standards and who can provide a Form DD-2958 signed by their commander
- Transitioning service members ages 18-24
- Active duty service members being involuntarily separated through a service reduction-in-force

When screening individuals to determine their veteran status, Workforce Solutions Office staff:

- determines the purpose of the visit, telephone call, or electronic correspondence;
- explains that the purpose of the triage tool is to determine which staff are best suited to assist them;
- ensures that the individual identifies whether he or she is a veteran, eligible spouse transitioning service member, or spouse or other family caregiver; and
- ensures that veterans and eligible spouses confirm whether any of the significant barriers to employment criteria apply

8. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Achieving excellence in accessibility is based on three core principles:

- ensuring that all customers can effectively use workforce products and services;
- creating a workspace accessible for individuals with disabilities; and
- complying with all federal and state legal requirements.

Electronic and Information and Resources

TWC puts these core principles into practice by making its websites and other electronic and information resources (EIR) accessible and its content user friendly for individuals with disabilities, including members of the public and TWC employees, pursuant to Title 1, Texas Administrative Code, Chapters 206 and 213. WorkInTexas.com, TWC's public online job matching system, is tested for compliance upon all updates to the system using the most updated Job Access With Speech (JAWS) software.

Additionally, TWC employs an EIR accessibility coordinator to serve as a contact for EIR accessibility concerns. The coordinator both monitors agency-wide compliance with accessibility policy and facilitates correction of noncompliant EIR. To these ends, the coordinator partners with accessibility-designated liaisons in each business area. An accessibility liaison functions as the primary contact for the business area's compliance with EIR accessibility requirements. The liaison also assists in staff development, addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities, as well as in sharing TWC's accessibility goals and requirements.

Other agency efforts to achieve excellence in accessibility include:

- providing staff regular classroom training sessions on a range of accessibility topics;

- developing and maintaining an inventory of all agency EIR;
- consulting on accessibility purchases and facilitating the exception request process;
- working with business areas to develop and implement remediation plans for noncompliant websites, applications, and products, and consulting as needed during remediation;
- developing intranet pages with accessibility resources for employees; and
- meeting regularly with accessibility liaisons.

Accessibility at Workforce Solutions Offices and TWC-Owned Buildings

The TWC Equal Opportunity (EO) Compliance Department functions within the Division of Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring (FDCM). The EO Compliance Department monitors recipients of WIOA Title I financial assistance to determine compliance with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions of WIOA §188. Both programmatic and physical accessibility are addressed during an EO compliance review.

As recipients of WIOA funding, Boards are required to conduct local EO monitoring of all programs and facilities within their Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA). Boards are then monitored for compliance annually by TWC through either a desk or on-site review, as referenced in the Nondiscrimination Plan (NDP) maintained on file with DOL's Civil Rights Center (DOL-CRC). All 28 Boards are scheduled for an EO review annually. Dates for EO monitoring reviews generally align with those of TWC's annual Board monitoring review.

In determining which sites are selected for on-site physical accessibility reviews, the EO Coordinator will conduct a risk assessment based on the following criteria:

- the location was not previously reviewed by TWC staff based on historical review data;
- the location was not reviewed by TWC staff during the tenure of the current Board EO Officer; and/or
- the location reflected numerous deficiencies in the previous EO review, thus warranting a follow-up review by TWC.

An EO accessibility checklist that aligns with the Texas Accessibility Standards is used by both the local EO Officer staff and TWC staff when conducting physical accessibility reviews. The checklist outlines all compliance requirements within the following four priorities:

- Accessible approach and entrance
- Access to goods and services
- Access to public toilet rooms
- Access to other items such as water fountains and public telephones

TWC's Equal Opportunity Coordinator provides training during the Quality Assurance Network's quarterly meetings and through other Equal Opportunity training as requested by the local EO Officers that addresses all facets of WIOA Section 188 compliance, including physical accessibility compliance and accessibility best practices.

9. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

TWC puts principles into practice by making its websites and other electronic and information resources (EIR) accessible and its content user-friendly for individuals with Limited-English Proficiency (LEP). WorkInTexas.com, TWC's public online job matching system, is available in English and Spanish. TWC's website also has information in Spanish regarding unemployment benefits, labor law, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, and TWC press releases.

TWC requires that Boards ensure that all individuals with LEP have equal opportunity and access to all federally funded workforce services, including those funded under WIOA, TANF, Choices, and SNAP E&T, as well as the three One Stop partner programs (Vocational Rehabilitation, Unemployment Insurance, and Child Care).

Boards must review WIOA's nondiscrimination and equal opportunity regulations that prohibit discrimination, and specifically the requirements to:

- provide information in languages other than English, and ensure access to persons with LEP to WIOA services on an equal basis with those proficient in English; and
- ensure that communications with individuals with disabilities are as effective as communications with individuals without disabilities.

Boards must comply with the following four requirements to ensure meaningful language access:

- A thorough assessment of language needs, including:
    - an analysis of the language needs of each Board's local workforce development area;
    - the identification of the language needs of each LEP individual;
    - the identification of situations in which the individual will need language services;
    - a statement of resource needs; and
    - recommendations for how to make these resources available
- A comprehensive written policy to ensure meaningful communication with LEP individuals. This includes notices to LEP individuals of their rights to free language assistance; staff training; monitoring; and translation of written materials. The guidance warns that the use of family, friends, and/or minor children as interpreters can raise Title VI liability issues.
- Training staff to implement the language access policy. Boards must ensure that service providers and those entities to which a referral is made have the requisite training and knowledge.
- Vigilant monitoring to ensure that LEP individuals can access services.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Planning and Coordination

WIOA places a strong emphasis on planning across multiple workforce partner programs to ensure alignment in service delivery. One important goal is to develop effective partnerships across programs and community-based providers to provide individuals with the employment, education, and training services they need. Effective partnering is pivotal to maximize resources

and to align services with career pathways and sector strategies. It is vital that WIOA required and optional workforce partners and programs work together to ensure a customer-centered approach to service delivery.

The Texas workforce system brings together workforce development, employment and training, and educational services in a seamless customer-focused service-delivery network that enhances access to all program services and improved long-term employment outcomes for individuals receiving assistance. Workforce partners administer separately funded programs as a set of integrated streamlined services to customers.

The vision for the Texas workforce system is to align a wide range of publicly and privately funded education, employment, and training programs, while also providing high-quality customer service to all job seekers, workers and businesses.

Texas workforce system's six core programs include:

- Title I Adult program;
- Title I Dislocated Worker program;
- Title I Youth program;
- Title II AEFLA program;
- Employment Services program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III of WIOA; and
- The VR program, authorized under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of WIOA.

The Texas workforce system includes other required partners and optional workforce partners identified in prior consistent state law. Through Workforce Solutions Offices, these workforce partner programs and their direct service providers ensure that businesses and job seekers – a shared client base across multiple programs – have access to information and services that lead to positive educational and employment outcomes.

As required in WIOA §121(e)(1), each local workforce delivery system must provide the following:

- Career services, as defined in WIOA §134(c)(2) and in Appendix A of the TWC Guide to Texas Workforce System Operations
- Access to training services, as described in WIOA §134(c)(3)
- Access to local employment and training activities, as described in WIOA §134(d)
- Access to all programs and activities provided by required workforce partners and any optional workforce partners
- Access to the data, information, and analysis described in the Wagner-Peyser Act §15(a), to include all job search, job placement, recruitment, and other labor-exchange services authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act

WIOA §193(a)(3) allows states to define their required partners under prior consistent state law. Texas Labor Code §302.021 and §302.062 establish the job training, employment and employment-related educational programs and functions consolidated under the authority of the TWC. In Texas, prior consistent state law under Texas Government Code §2308.304 and §2308.312 defines the responsibility of each Board to develop, implement and modify a plan for convening all relevant programs, identified as Workforce Solutions Office-required partner programs.

The required workforce partners in Texas include:

- WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs
- Wagner-Peyser ES program
- AEL program
- VR program
- UI program
- TAA program
- Choices, the TANF employment and training program
- SNAP E&T program
- Child care services
- Apprenticeship programs (Texas Education Code Chapter 133), if they have been certified by DOL's Office of Apprenticeship Training and meet the state criteria established in Chapter 133 to receive state funding for the support of the apprenticeship training programs
- Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) Program
- SCSEP Program

Other entities that carry out a workforce development program may serve as optional workforce partners. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Career and Technical Education programs authorized under the Carl D Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 USC 2301 et seq.)
- Job Counseling, Training and Placement Service for Veterans, as authorized under Title 38 USC Chapter 41
- Education and Vocational Training program through Job Corps and administered by the DOL
- Native American programs authorized under WIOA Title I
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development-administered employment and training programs
- Employment and Training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act
- Reintegration of Offenders program authorized under the Second Chance Act of 2007
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs under the National Farmworkers Jobs Program authorized under WIOA §167

Additionally, Boards may partner with other entities that are not considered required workforce partners or optional workforce partners. These entities are state or local organizations that do not carry out a workforce development program and may include local social service agencies, housing authorities, and others.

V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;	Yes
2. The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;	Yes
3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;	Yes
4. (a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administrating the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public; (b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;	Yes
5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	Yes
7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	Yes
9. The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes
10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and	Yes
12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor.	Yes

VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

A map identifying each Board area is available at https://www.twc.texas.gov/partners/workforce-development-boards-websites#texasWorkforceDevelopmentBoardWebsites. The 28 Boards are the following:

1. Panhandle
2. South Plains

3. North Texas
4. North Central Texas
5. Tarrant County
6. Greater Dallas
7. Northeast Texas
8. East Texas
9. West Central Texas
10. Borderplex
11. Permian Basin
12. Concho Valley
13. Heart of Texas
14. Capital Area
15. Rural Capital Area
16. Brazos Valley
17. Deep East Texas
18. Southeast Texas
19. Golden Crescent
20. Alamo
21. South Texas
22. Coastal Bend
23. Lower Rio Grande Valley
24. Cameron
25. Texoma
26. Central Texas
27. Middle Rio Grande
28. Gulf Coast

The Commission recognizes Texas' current workforce areas as their own independent regions.

Background

In 1993, the Texas legislature passed Senate Bill 642, the Workforce and Economic Competitiveness Act (Act), transforming the state's fragmented workforce development system into an integrated service delivery network and improving the quality and effectiveness of services. At the time of the Act, Texas had 35 Service Delivery Areas set forth under the federal Job Training Partnership Act of 1982.

The 1993 Act required TWIC to recommend designation of workforce areas in the state, the first step in establishing a system for delivering a slate of integrated services, from workforce training to the TANF and SNAP E&T programs, community services, and the basic labor exchange system.

In 1998, Congress passed WIA. Recognizing that Texas previously established the framework of an integrated workforce system, WIA provided for several grandfather provisions, which allowed Texas to continue certain provisions under prior consistent state law. One of these provisions was specific to the designation of workforce areas. This provision allowed Texas' Boards to continue if they performed successfully and maintained sustained fiscal integrity.

The Act also required that the local elected officials reach agreement on the designation for a workforce area. After much analysis and deliberation, including significant public input, and the recognition that even contiguous areas often have very diverse needs, 28 workforce areas—governed by Boards—were identified and designated by the governor. The realignment from 35 to 28 workforce areas supported Texas' vision of an integrated and streamlined workforce system, a precursor to the purposes of WIOA.

Local Area Designation

WIOA §189(i)(1) allows states that have enacted, not later than December 31, 1997, a state law providing for the designation of service delivery areas for the delivery of workforce investment activities, to use such areas as local areas under Title I of WIOA. Prior consistent state law at Texas Government Code §2308.252 provides for the designation of local workforce areas in Texas. Therefore, the provisions of WIOA §106 related to local area designation do not apply in Texas.

Compliant with WIOA §108, each Board develops and submits to the governor a comprehensive four-year local plan in partnership with the chief elected official (CEO). Texas Government Code §2308.304(b) also requires each Board to develop a local plan with goals and objectives that are consistent with statewide goals, objectives, and performance standards. State and federal law require TWIC to review local plans and modifications and make recommendations to the governor for approval.

Regions

WIOA requires states to identify regions in the state. WIOA's intent regarding regional identification is for locals to engage in regional efforts that result in the analysis of the regional labor market, establishment of regional service strategies, development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region, and the coordination of services with regional economic development needs. TWC continues to comply with these WIOA requirements.

Long before a federal requirement existed, Boards across Texas had a demonstrated history of collaboration beyond the designated workforce areas. These regional collaborative efforts have resulted in workforce system leaders partnering to align workforce policies and services with regional economies and supporting service delivery strategies tailored to these needs. A few examples of regional collaboration include:

- The Cameron County, Coastal Bend, and South Texas Boards collaborate regionally on the Future of the Region South Texas group, the efforts of which extend beyond the workforce and include the region's local governments, infrastructure, health care system, education, and economic development.
- Five Boards—Alamo, Coastal Bend, Golden Crescent, Middle Rio Grande, and South Texas—work collaboratively to support the needs of the oil and gas industry in the Eagle Ford Shale area.

- The Capital Area Board has participated in the Accelerating Connections to Employment (ACE) National Evaluation study, funded by DOL's Workforce Innovation Fund. ACE is driven by a consortium of nine workforce investment boards, ten community colleges, and employer partners across four states, tasked with reducing poverty by linking education, training, and workforce services to create skill-building opportunities and career pathways for low-skilled, low-income individuals.

- The Capital Area, Alamo, Central Texas, Greater Dallas, Heart of Texas, North Central Texas, Rural Capital Area, and Tarrant County Boards are members of the I 35 Initiatives Consortium. The consortium was founded in 2010 to establish a multiregional coordinated strategy for meeting the recruitment and skill training needs of businesses in the life sciences cluster, with an emphasis on health care and bioscience. The consortium represents 46 percent of the Texas' residents located in the 51 counties that span from San Antonio to Dallas-Fort Worth.

- Additionally, the Greater Dallas, North Central Texas, and Tarrant County Boards have created the Dallas/Fort Worth Regional Workforce Leadership Council (RWLC), the driving force for a cooperative approach to promoting the region's strongest industries and supporting the region's key clusters. RWLC works to meet industries' needs through the collaboration of the Boards with chambers of commerce and business leaders.

- The Rural Workforce Network (RWN) Consortium Biotechnology/Life Sciences-Medical Targeted Industries Project was designed to further build capacity to meet the skills readiness and skills training needs of employers and job seekers in the RWN region, through an understanding of employers' needs, assessments of job seekers' skills, and the creation and credentialing of a work-ready workforce. Five Boards—Concho Valley, West Central Texas, Permian Basin, North Texas, and South Plains—four employers, and nine public colleges participated in this project.

- As many Texas Boards share labor sheds with adjacent states, these Boards find it beneficial to establish partnerships with out-of-state partners to create a regional response to workforce and economic challenges. The Texoma Board partners with the Southern Oklahoma Workforce Board, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, and several other key organizations in Oklahoma to form the Texoma Regional Consortium, which covers a 13-county region along the Texas and Oklahoma borders. The Texoma Regional Consortium addresses needs of local business and industry in both Texas and Oklahoma through participating in strategic planning to identify key regional strategic themes, develop regional labor market analysis, sponsor regional job fairs, and participate in other joint ventures to address workforce and economic challenges.

- Multiple Boards across the state have partnered with each other to respond to disasters, such as Hurricane Harvey, leveraging resources to help support those most in need.

Development and implementation of the above regional collaborations were based on analysis of labor markets, industry needs, and the needs of economic development entities. These efforts have enhanced and continue to enhance both the capacity and performance of the Texas workforce system. The Boards continue to meet WIOA expectations.

In Texas, local leadership—CEOs, Boards, and Board staff—have long championed regional planning, particularly in developing opportunities in in-demand industry sectors and occupations. The benefits from regionalism include collaborative planning, pooling and leveraging of resources, capacity building, and ensuring that services can be delivered in the best possible way—regionalism is essential to the Boards' mission.

To ensure Boards are meeting the WIOA criteria for "performed successfully" and "sustained fiscal integrity" TWC requires Boards to submit data on designated performance measures.

Performance measure data is reported monthly and maintained on TWC's website maintained by Information Innovation & Insight (I|3), formerly known as the Division of Operational Insight (available at https://intra.twc.texas.gov/intranet/plan/html/index.html). Additionally, to ensure sound fiscal management, TWC conducts routine monitoring visits that verify fiscal integrity and assist Boards in addressing any identified issues. Board grant and financial monitoring information is available at https://twc.texas.gov/agency/texas-workforce-commission-financial-grant- information.

Units of local government or grant recipients that request but are not granted designation or re-designation (in accordance with TWIC rules §901.1) as a local workforce development area, may appeal in accordance with the state's written policy and procedure described in TWIC rule §901.2 (40 TAC Part 22).

Appeals must be delivered to the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) no later than 30 days after the date the designation or redesignation was made. The appeal must include the specific reasons for the appeal. The appeal must also include any new information the requestor/Board would like to have considered as part of the appeal process. When the appeal is received, the notice of the appeal will be published in the Texas Register, including a statement inviting input and the deadline to submit input. At TWIC's discretion, they may also schedule a public meeting to allow for oral comments to be heard. TWIC may consider the appeal or may designate a committee to do so and make a report to TWIC. All relevant information may be reviewed in addition to the information submitted with the appeal and the information obtained during the public comment period. Finally, TWIC will make a recommendation to the Governor within 120 days of the date of receipt of the appeal request.

TWC is required to establish a process for a required workforce partner to appeal a determination:

- regarding the portion of funds to be provided under the state funding mechanism or SFM, and
- on the basis that the determination is inconsistent with the requirements of the SFM.

The appeal process established by TWC must provide prompt resolution of the appeal in order to ensure the funds are distributed in a timely manner, consistent with WIOA §182(e) – Prompt allocation of funds.

The appeals process established by the Texas governor specifies that a one-stop partner may appeal a governor's determination regarding the one-stop partner's portion of funds for one-stop infrastructure costs.

The appeal may only be made on the grounds that TWC's determination is inconsistent with the proportionate share requirements in WIOA regulations, as described in 20 CFR §678.735(a), the cost contribution limitations in §678.735(b), or the cost contribution caps in §678.738.

The workforce partner must submit the appeal, signed by the chief elected official, to the Texas Workforce Investment Council. The governor will consider and rule on the appeal in writing.

https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/wioa-operations-guide-twc.pdf [see Appendix F, Steps in Implementing the SFM.

2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

State Policies

The state makes information on state-imposed requirements—such as guidance for the statewide workforce development system, including policy for the use of state funds for workforce investment activities—available to the public.

The following materials are readily accessible through the TWC website:

- WIOA Guidelines - overview, implementation, guidance, service, and stakeholder input https://twc.texas.gov/files/jobseekers/wioa-guidelines-twc.pdf
- Current TWC rules, as codified in 40 TAC, Part 20, as well as information on past rule amendments https://twc.texas.gov/agency/texas-workforce-commission-rules
- All active workforce policy issued through guides,
- Workforce Development (WD) Letters, Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Letters, and Technical Assistance (TA) Bulletins https://twc.texas.gov/agency/laws-rules-policy/workforce-policy-and-guidance
- Reports, plans, and publications: Agency strategic plans and annual reports, publications for employers and job seekers, and program plans and reports http://www.twc.state.tx.us/partners/reports-plans-publications

The following VR materials are readily accessible through the Texas Workforce Commission website:

- New or modified manuals, guides, and publications https://twc.texas.gov/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-program-overview
- Current TWC rules, as codified in 40 TAC, Part 20 https://twc.texas.gov/agency/texas-workforce-commission-rules

In August 2019, the Commission approved a portion of the governor's reserve and state leadership funds for several statewide initiatives to address WIOA's focus on workforce integration, quality improvement, capacity building, professional development, internships, externships, and more. The initiatives apply across the following programs and services.

<u>Veterans Initiatives</u>

Hiring Red, White & You! (HRWY)—TWC hosts an annual statewide job fair in November to connect Texas veterans and their spouses with Texas employers that value the experience, discipline, and other exceptional qualities inherent in a military background. The 2020 HRWY event drew more than 9,688 job seekers and more than 1,618 employers. Since its 2012 inception, HRWY has connected more than 108,288 job seekers, including 42,275 active-duty military and transitioning service members, veterans, and spouses, to 18,268 employers, with more than 2,800 same-day hires.

College Credit for Heroes—The program maximizes college credits awarded to veterans and service members for their military experience by developing streamlined degree paths and workforce certifications to expedite transition into the Texas workforce. The College Credit for Heroes (CCH) online portal allows veterans and active-duty service members to request evaluations of credit to be used at colleges and universities throughout Texas. From its launch in 2012 through PY'18, the portal received approximately 43,000 requests for evaluation. (On August 31, 2019, the portal was closed in recognition that a majority of colleges and universities have developed local evaluation and credit-award programs. TWC now maintains a web-based list of participating CCH institutions and assists in connecting veterans and transitioning service members to the schools of their choice.)

<u>The Evaluation of Credit</u>

The 85th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2017) passed HB 493, which requires TWC, in consultation with THECB, to report the number of academic credit hours that were awarded under the program and were applied toward a degree or certification program at an IHE during the most recent academic year. The reporting elements listed in HB 493, which went into effect January 1, 2018, are included in this report.

As of 2020, CCH is a growing network of schools with a majority relying on localized evaluation and credit programs. All of the 14 institutions providing HB 493 survey data follow localized evaluation processes. These institutions recognize the value of military experience and remain committed to supporting veterans as they enter and complete postsecondary education. Some IHEs have partnered with the American Council on Education (ACE) and are using the ACE online guide to evaluate military courses for academic credit. The guide lists recommended credit units in academic disciplines as well as required learning outcomes, topics of instruction, and related competencies. Exhibits within the ACE guide support credit recommendations for different subject areas and give specific guidance to registrars, deans, and other school officials looking to apply military courses to their institutions' degree requirements.

In addition to the use of the ACE guide, CCH-participating institutions continue to rely on local policies and processes for the evaluation and awarding of credit. It is during these evaluations that IHEs use innovative methods to measure depth of knowledge and skills and award credit accordingly. IHEs report that they use methods such as prior learning assessments (PLAs), credit by exam, and interviews.

Average Credit Hours per Veteran: CCH Grantees and CCH Partner Schools

The data gathered from the 2020 House Bill (HB) 493 study showed an increase in the average credit hours per veteran awarded and transferred by both CCH grantees and CCH partner schools from the previous academic year. The average credit hours awarded per veteran doubled in 2020 to 10.4 credit hours. In comparison, an average of 5.2 credit hours was reported in 2019. While the 2020 increase indicates a greater uptake of the CCH program in general, it is also highly likely that IHEs have improved and solidified their reporting processes.

Average Credit Hours per Veteran: CCH Grantees vs. Non-CCH Grantees

The data is much more promising when looking only at IHEs that operated as CCH grantees throughout 2020 and that met the reporting requirements established in their CCH grants. When analyzing the credit hour data by tracking CCH grantees versus non-CCH grantees separately, the benefits to veterans at CCH grantee institutions becomes easier to discern.

For example, in 2020 a veteran who attended an IHE that participated in a CCH grant program was awarded an average of 10.4 credit hours. In comparison, to 2019 a veteran who attended an IHE that did not participate in a CCH grant program was awarded an average of four credit hours. There was also a significant difference between the number of credits transferred in by CCH grantee schools compared to non-CCH grantee schools.

CCH Phase 8 Capacity-Building Program

On February 20, 2020, TWC issued a Request for Applications (RFAs) from eligible applicants to participate in the CCH Phase 8 Capacity Building Program, which allows IHEs to develop or improve upon their military evaluation processes through the use of a fully integrated system to identify and track student veterans participating in the CCH program. TWC awarded $757,271 to four IHEs for the CCH Phase 8 Capacity Building Grant.

The CCH Phase 8 Capacity Building Program is a two-year grant. The first 12-month period is dedicated to planning, while the second 12-month period is dedicated to the implementation of a pilot period**.** The four primary goals for the program are the following:

1. to develop and document a pilot military transcript evaluation process that ensures that academic credit will be awarded consistently to all veterans and service members
2. to develop a sustainable tracking system for students participating in the program that accurately gauges the benefits that students receive and confirms that processes and policies are being implemented consistently across the institution
3. to recruit program champions from the current students, alumni, and faculty members who are or have participated in the CCH program to act as advocates and resources regarding the program
4. to integrate CCH program information into veteran or active-duty service member resources

Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative

TWC conducted a competitive procurement to solicit RFAs for the provision of services to hard-to-serve veterans who have one or more barriers to employment, such as homelessness; a history of substance abuse; physical, mental, or learning disabilities; post-traumatic stress disorder; ex-offender status; or recent discharge from military duty. American GI Forum was awarded, and the program was implemented in San Antonio, Houston, the Dallas/Fort Worth metro area, and El Paso.

The Veterans Workforce Outreach initiative is designed to outreach hard-to-serve veterans who are not currently being served through Workforce Solutions Offices, to address employment barriers faced by hard-to-serve veterans, and to reintegrate hard-to-serve veterans into meaningful employment.

Employment barriers are addressed and resources are accessed to overcome barriers under the guidance of a case manager. Veterans benefit from a range of services that may include assessments; job development and job placement; case management and support services, such as transportation; rent and utility assistance; mental health assistance, including clinical counseling; wheelchairs, crutches, and medical beds; food assistance; and financial assistance.

From March 2019 to February 2020, the project provided 371 assessments and enrolled 224 veterans and provided 338 veterans the Basic Skills Upgrade Training (BSUT). One hundred ninety five (195) veterans were placed into enrollment averaged $16.91 an hour. From March 2020 through November 2021, 359 veterans were assessed and have enrolled 328 and provided the veterans 329 BSUT with 189 entering employment.

The Texas Veterans Network

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) issued an RFA to community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop regional networks composed of organizations whose missions include providing services and support to veterans (for example, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), other CBOs, Local Workforce Development Boards, Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), and other entities) as well as to create opportunities to share referral and service information that will allow for coordination of services in 92 counties across the state.

The RFA requires the grantee or grantees to create an automated veteran service coordination referral system that captures services received, referrals made, and services available through an integrated network that can increase a veteran's opportunity to receive all services needed to transition successfully into civilian life. Additionally, a shared veteran service coordination referral system among veteran service providers reduces the impediments to comprehensive and coordinated service provision, thereby reducing barriers to employment.

The RFA required the grantee or grantees to provide a 25 percent match to the grant. The total grant amount is $4 million, with each grantee receiving $2 million. The grant is active from April 13, 2020, through March 31, 2023.

In April 2020, the following grantees were selected to establish the Texas Veterans Network:

- Alamo Area Development Corporation
- Combined Arms

Performance to date is shown in the following table.

Outcome Measures From April 2020 through March 31, 2021	Combined Arms Results	Combined Arms Yearly Target	AADC Results	AADC Yearly Target
Number of Organizations in Network	147	100	145	90
Number of Network Building Events	413	300	69	8
Number of Network Training/Workshops Held	73	20	43	4
Number of Network Organizations with Referral System Installed	147	100	145	90
Number of Referrals Made in the Veteran Referral System	19,446	35,000	4,281	1,500
Number of Unduplicated Veterans Served Using the Veterans Referral System	11,421	10,000	2,376	1,400

Military Family Support Program

The Military Family Support Program provides military spouses with enhanced job search assistance, assessment of skills, labor market information, résumé writing, and interview skills. If funding is available, military spouses may receive certification or licensure training in target occupations.

The Military Family Support Program has been funded for three years, with a $1 million allocation per fiscal year. Currently, there are several military installations throughout the state that have signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with their respective Board to participate in the program. The Military Family Support Program has connected more than 423 military spouses to local business leaders, peers, and career development support programs.

Military Family Support Program Highlights

Completed Program Year	2018	2019	2020	Total
Number of Military Spouses Outreached	394	350	397	1,141
Number of Military Spouses Assisted in the MFSP/Registered in WIT	186	230	337	753
Number of Military Spouses Receiving Credentials	34	38	9	81
Number of Employers Targeted to Hire Military Spouses	76	156	28	423
Number of Military Spouses Hired	72	74	17	163

COVID-19 had a large impact on the Military Family Support Program. In March 2020, the US Department of Defense issued a stop-movement order, effectively halting the moving of military families for months and restricting access to all military installations. The order was lifted in late June 2020; however, military installations around the world posted restrictions based on the local COVID-19 threat. As of January 2021, only 37 percent of US military installations were open for unrestricted travel or access. From April 2020 through March 2021, most family and Transition Assistance Programs were conducted virtually.

We Hire Vets Campaign

We Hire Vets is an employer recognition program that recognizes Texas employers for their commitment to hiring veterans. Employers whose workforces are composed of at least 10 percent military veterans are eligible to receive a We Hire Vets employer recognition decal to display on their storefronts and an electronic decal to display on their websites. Employers that qualify for the We Hire Vets program also receive a letter signed by the Chair of TWC's three-member Commission and the Chair of TVC.

We Hire Vets, sponsored by TWC and TVC, has issued 732 We Hire Vets decals and letters to Texas employers. At the statewide Texas Conference for Employers, TWC Commissioner Aaron Demerson recognizes employers that have submitted a nomination and qualify for the program. Several We Hire Vets ceremonies have been conducted in cities across the state, including El Paso, Killeen, and Houston.

The following is a list of employers that are participating in the We Hire Vets program:

- Airbus Helicopters, Inc.
- Azbell Electronics, Inc.
- City of Jarrell Police Department
- Fort Hood Area Habitat for Humanity
- DynCorp International
- United States Gypsum Sweetwater Plant
- Recruit Veterans

- SENTRYSIX Defense Group, Inc.
- Social Security Administration
- Tatitlek Training Services
- XETX Business Solutions
- Travis County Veterans Service Office
- Virtual Service Operations
- Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande
- Dynamic Workforce Solutions dba Workforce Solutions East Texas

Program Results

Completed Program Year	Number of We Hire Vets Decals Issued
2017	129
2018	235
2019	161
2020	163
2021	33
Total	721

House Bill 33: Measures to Facilitate Award of Course Credit for Military Service

The 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2021), passed HB 33, which relates to measures to facilitate the award of postsecondary course credit leading to workforce credentialing based on military experience, education, and training to prepare veterans for employment in certain industries. TWC is currently undergoing the rulemaking process to implement this legislation.

Jobs Y'all

In November 2018, TWC launched the "Jobs Y'all: Your Career. Your Story." campaign designed to inspire young Texans to discover and explore the state's in-demand industries and learn about skills needed to enter the workforce. This online program educates and inspires young

Texans to create self-directed career paths, features in-demand industries, and connects participants to career resources. The website introduces users to eight industries, a career explorer app, and other online resources, as follows:

- Featured industries:
    - Aerospace and Defense
    - Advanced Technology and Manufacturing
    - Biotechnology
    - Life Sciences and Healthcare
    - Construction
    - Energy

    - Information and Computer Technology
    - Petroleum Refining and Chemical Products
    - Transportation and Logistics
- Career Explorer, search by industry, occupation, and/or geography to learn about job projections and average wages
- Web-based resources include the following:
    - Texas Career Check
    - Texas Reality Check
    - Texas Internship Challenge

Youth Initiatives

Youth Career Fairs—Local Texas Workforce Solutions Offices host youth career exploration and job fairs to provide youth area specific opportunities and resources. Youth are encouraged to contact their local Workforce Solutions Office for youth specific events and opportunities.

Teacher Externships—TWC supports externships for middle school and high school teachers to allow them to learn firsthand about the skills required for in-demand occupations. These externships allow teachers to better understand in-demand careers in their local community and convey to students the array of opportunities available to them. More than 2,500 teachers have participated since 2015. Due to COVID-19, this program was canceled in FY'20 and FY'21. The program was reinstated for FY'22. New grants are scheduled to begin in March 2023.

Foster Youth—TWC provides grants to 18 Foster Youth Transition Centers that provide a comprehensive array of services and referrals to help transitioning foster youth overcome barriers. TWC hosted its first annual Foster Youth conference to support local delivery of integrated services for foster youth, to share perspectives and information from state and local partners on their critical work and resources for foster youth, and to provide opportunities to build the network of partnerships among state and local organizations that serve foster youth.

Governor's Challenge Camp—The Governor's Science and Technology Champions' Academy provides a STEM-related one-week residential summer camp for students in grades 9–12.

For summer 2021, TWC awarded 10 grants , which provided scholarships for over 1,200 students to attend 35 camps across the state.

Texas Science Careers Consortium (Texas Science and Engineering Fair)—This science and engineering fair is a competition for state middle school and high school science fair winners to showcase their research projects in STEM fields.

Other Selected Initiatives

Small Business Initiatives—TWC provides training and information to all Texans interested in entrepreneurship and starting or expanding a business or small business, including those run by veterans, minorities, and women.

High Demand Job Training Program—TWC supports collaborations between Boards and economic development corporations (EDCs) to provide high-demand occupational job training in local workforce areas. This program supports Boards partnering with local EDCs that use their local economic development sales taxes for high-demand job training. Boards collaborate with local EDCs and match their local economic development sales tax funds to jointly support the provision of such training.

Texas Industry Partnership (TIP) Program—TWC supports collaborations between Boards and private employers, corporations, or foundations (Industry Partner(s)) to address skills gaps and ensure a talent pipeline that meets industry needs. Collaborations must engage in allowable WIOA activities, focusing on six designated industry clusters, and leverage funds.

Building and Construction Trades—Texas companies are creating significant opportunities for workers in high-demand construction and building trade occupations, including carpenters, plumbers, pipefitters, welders, masons, and electricians. Grants support workforce development training for Texas adults by preparing them for employment in high-demand occupations in the building and construction trades.

Innovative Academies—Funds support innovative partnerships between schools, employers, and colleges that provide new opportunities for students to acquire skills, certifications, and credentials in high-demand occupations in key industry clusters while allowing the students to earn college credit that results in an associate degree or an articulated agreement toward a bachelor's degree.

Rapid Response Services

TWC and Workforce Solutions Office staff provide rapid response assistance to help workers who lose their jobs because of layoffs, plant closures, or natural disasters. These services include immediate on-site and/or virtual assistance with reemployment services and UI information as well as group stress and financial management seminars. In some cases, mobile units are dispatched to offer these services.

Texas' layoff aversion strategies focus on a proactive—rather than reactive—approach to assisting at-risk companies before they reach the actual layoff stage. Identifying at-risk companies and developing a customized plan to address each company's unique set of circumstances requires a coordinated effort among all community partners, including state agencies, Boards, economic development agencies, public and private entities, and so forth.

Effective layoff aversion strategies and activities help employers develop the skilled workforce necessary to adapt to the changing economy, stay in business, and retain employees.

Successful layoff aversion strategies and activities engage the full range of programs and resources of the Boards and Board partnerships. Rapid response partnerships can directly provide or facilitate the provision of an array of benefits to address the challenges presented by specific circumstances. An effective layoff aversion strategy:

- retains jobs;
- retains critical industries in the region;
- improves coordination among state agencies, Boards, and economic development and other public- and private-sector partnerships; and
- creates new labor-management partnerships.

Through their connections with local businesses and rapid response activities, Boards are in a unique position to assist companies in averting layoffs by implementing effective strategies.

Examples of layoff aversion strategies implemented to address at-risk companies and workers may include, but are not limited to:

- helping employers manage reductions in force, including identification of companies at risk of layoffs, assessments of needs and options for at-risk companies, and providing services to address and support their needs;

- developing, funding, and managing incumbent worker training programs or other worker upskilling approaches as part of a layoff aversion strategy or activity;
- connecting companies with state programs designed to prevent layoffs or to quickly re-employ dislocated workers; employer loan programs for employee skill upgrading; and other federal, state, and local resources necessary to address their business needs;
- connecting businesses and workers to short-term, on-the-job, or customized training programs and apprenticeships before or after layoff to help facilitate rapid reemployment;
- activating the rapid response team and services after receiving a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) or other notification; and
- responding to information received from other sources about possible closures.

While WIOA allows for broad flexibility for using rapid response funds for layoff aversion activities intended to minimize the negative impacts of dislocation on workers, employers, and communities, Boards are encouraged to conduct rapid response activities to support creative approaches and strategies.

The Shared Work Unemployment Benefit Program provides an alternative to layoffs by affording employers an opportunity to manage business cycles and seasonal adjustments without losing trained employees. The program allows for the payment of UI benefits to employees to supplement wages lost because of reduced hours. TWC is identifying early warning indicators within its EDW system that will identify employers that might benefit from rapid response activities and specific short-time compensation services.

Child Care

Early Childhood Education Partnerships—TWC's Child Care Services program provides child care subsidy assistance to eligible low-income families with children under age 13, allowing parents to work, attend school, or participate in training. Child Care Services is tightly integrated within the workforce. When a parent who is receiving child care subsidies loses his or her job, he or she has up to three months to find work and retain child care assistance. During their three-month job search period, the family continues to receive child care assistance at the same level. Additionally, Child Care Services staff refers parents who have lost employment to workforce services to assist them with becoming reemployed quickly. The integration of Child Care services and workforce services helps smooth employment transitions for low-income parents, supporting greater economic stability for families.

Employment Services

Small Business Initiative (Office of the Governor)—The purpose of the Interagency Cooperation Contract is to provide training, information conveyance, and recognition to small businesses, including, but not limited to, those run by veterans, minorities, and women. The intent is to provide businesses with information (based on local and state level input) regarding available workforce-related services, workforce training programs, contracting opportunities, best practices and methodologies, exporting products and services, available governmental services, and any other areas relevant to small business inception and growth.

Veterans Apprenticeship (Registered Apprenticeship Training Program for Veterans and/or Service members)

The Registered Apprenticeship Training Program for Veterans and/or Service members is a program that:

- accelerates participants into or through a DOL Registered Apprenticeship training program in Texas; or
- accelerates participants into or through a DOL Pre-Apprenticeship training program that leads to enrollment of participants into an Apprenticeship Training Program during the grant period.

Registered Apprenticeship Program

The purpose of the Apprenticeship Training Program funds is to supplement a portion of the costs of job-related classroom instruction for eligible apprenticeship training programs that are registered by DOL's Office of Apprenticeship. TWC currently provides funding for the Apprenticeship Training Program through an application process. Funding is generally state general revenue (GR) funds, however, other funding has been leveraged to supplement the program to include WIOA and TANF NCP funds.

TWC recently received a DOL grant award of $10 million to further support statewide apprenticeship expansion efforts from July 2021 through June 2025. Funds will increase and expand Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), integrate RAPs into new industries, and diversify apprenticeship opportunities. This additional funding opportunity will continue Texas' efforts to expand the number of apprentices in RAPs, support and encourage RAP diversification, and integrate RAPs into state workforce development strategies. Part of TWC's plan is to encourage community and technical colleges, as eligible grantees, to use allotment funding to address workforce development needs in the communities they serve. This will support RAPs and build staffing and knowledge capacity to imbed RAPs in more areas of the state.

When businesses close plants or lay off workers due to natural disasters, Workforce Solutions Offices can provide immediate on-site services to assist workers facing job loss, contingent on the gravity of the conditions. Activities are coordinated with various agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management System (FEMA), the Texas Division of Emergency Management, Office of the Governor, Disaster Preparedness, and others. Managed rapid response services provide early intervention assistance designed to transition workers to their next employment opportunity as appropriately and as soon as possible.

TWC seeks out opportunities to assist those who have been laid off due to closures or other large dislocation events. By leveraging available resources, such as Dislocated Worker Grants from the United States Department of Labor (DOL), TWC continues to provide assistance to both job seekers and employers.

Hurricane Harvey

In August 2017, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) received thirty-six million dollars ($36,000,000) in Disaster Dislocated Worker Grant (DDWG) funds from the United States Department of Labor (DOL) to assist with recovery efforts in forty-two (42) counties directly affected by Hurricane Harvey. DOL's unprecedent rapid response to this catastrophic event resulted in the immediate delivery of workforce services. A total of three thousand five hundred thirty-seven (3,537) Texans participated in the activities supported by these funds.

At the close of this grant, December 2020, eight hundred thirty-four (834) temporary jobs had been created to provide disaster clean up services and humanitarian aid. One thousand twenty-eight (1,028) individuals were enrolled in training services and three thousand eighty-one (3,081) individuals received intensive career services.

COVID-19 Pandemic

In May 2020, TWC received $39 million in DDWG funds from DOL to combat the public health emergency and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds provide

temporary disaster relief employment to assist local health departments, nutrition programs, and other humanitarian organizations in responding to the disaster. The funds also support the delivery of career services, training, and supportive services, which include transportation assistance and supplies. These services enable businesses to successfully reopen and allow individuals to return to work safely. As of October 2021, this grant has served 2,824 Texans, placing 883 participants in temporary disaster relief employment, enrolling 1,000 participants in training, and providing career services to 941 participants.

Hurricane Laura

In October 2020, TWC received $2.5 million in DDWG funds from DOL to assist with recovery efforts in 15 counties directly affected by Hurricane Laura. The funds provide temporary disaster relief employment for cleanup services and humanitarian aid. As of October 2021, 136 individuals have been enrolled to participate in these recovery efforts.

Texas Winter Storms

In May 2021, TWC received $3.12 million in DDWG funds from DOL to assist with recovery efforts in 52 counties directly affected by the Texas Winter Storms. The funds provide temporary disaster relief employment for cleanup services and humanitarian aid. The funds also support the delivery of career services, training, and supportive services, which include transportation assistance and supplies. As of October 2021, 105 individuals have been enrolled to participate in recovery efforts and receive career and training services.

Rapid Response

Rapid response services focus on assistance to area employers, workers, and the community in managing reductions in force. To ensure that Texas is poised to meet the needs of local employers, rapid response services are funded through the Boards' WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth formula programs. The funding stream allows for a prompt rebound from layoffs, as funds are readily and locally available. Texas has also reserved rapid response funds at the state level for Boards that demonstrate a need for additional assistance.

The rapid response system first pursues strategies to avert layoffs, while maintaining capacity to return workers to productive employment as quickly as possible—if the layoff is unavoidable. TWC and Boards use multiple employment and training resources to craft layoff aversion solutions. Past solutions have supported development of incumbent worker programs, which help address employer training needs and avert or mitigate a layoff. Training usually focuses on skills attainment activities.

The second objective of rapid response is reemployment on or before the affected worker's last day of work. Upon notification of layoff, transition efforts are implemented to help dislocated workers engage in employment or training services that facilitate a quick return to work. Layoff notices, including those submitted in compliance with the WARN Act and Trade Act petitions, are received at the state level and forwarded to Boards by the next business day.

Boards and providers are also responsible for outreach to employers. Board or Workforce Solutions Office staff members use current labor market information to assess the needs of and options for at-risk companies as well as offering employment and training activities to address risk factors. Following the initial contact with the employer and worker representatives, an employee information orientation may be conducted on-site and on company time. The orientation typically offers an overview of available services and additional activities that may be conducted on-site. Additional activities include workshops or seminars on the psychology of job loss/stress management, debt/financial management and negotiations for debt-payment arrangements, job search skills, and labor market information. The orientation also provides information on UI and, if appropriate, the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program.

Workforce areas are also encouraged to engage rapid response staff in the BSUs. Rapid response staff members attached to the BSU have access to team resources that are helpful in matching worker skill sets with company hiring requirements. TWC and the Boards set the stage to assist businesses with future staffing needs by maintaining a positive relationship throughout the layoff process. To this end, the outreach effort highlights both the services available to at-risk employers and those services available once business improves and staff needs rebound.

Trade Adjustment Assistance

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) assists individuals who have lost their employment to increased imports or shifts in production to a foreign country. Integrated services and benefits for dislocated workers, including those affected by trade changes, are available at local Workforce Solutions Offices.

As part of an integrated delivery system, TAA early intervention services (that is, rapid response) are carried out under WIOA. When the Workforce Solutions Office becomes aware of a layoff, staff will determine whether the dislocation may have trade implications; if it does, assistance is provided to the company, workers, or affected unions submitting a TAA petition. Furthermore, when a petition is submitted with prior staff notification by one of these groups, the TAA state coordinator notifies the responsible Board and ensures rapid response efforts are made to assist the company with transitional services.

To comply with 20 CFR Part 618, the State of Texas uses both state merit staff and partner staff to conduct TAA case management services. Merit staff are housed in areas with large TAA activity to ensure workers receive adequate service provisions. Where TAA merit staff is not present, WIOA or ES staff provides TAA case management to assist the workers. Additionally, the state must co-enroll all trade-affected workers in the WIOA dislocated worker program. Staffing flexibilities and co-enrollment between the programs allow Texas to help adversely impacted workers return to suitable employment as quickly as possible.

Texas Workforce Solutions provides employment and job search assistance services to help the TAA worker find long-term employment. All adversely affected workers are initially assessed to determine transferable skills, knowledge, and abilities and to assist in researching the labor market information for previous and future occupational goals.

Additional TAA benefits and services are available if the worker is unable to secure suitable employment. Using a multitude of national, state, and local labor market information, staff members assist the worker in considering available employment opportunities in the worker's area or the area of relocation. TAA workers are required to identify an occupational goal that is specific to the required training.

In addition to considering LMI and the occupational goal in developing a training plan, staff must provide in-depth objective and comprehensive assessments to determine the worker's abilities. These instruments include but are not limited to Accuplacer, Compass, Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and other tools specific to training providers. Local staff members develop a plan, with merit staff approval, to ensure the training meets the TAA approval criteria in 20 CFR §618.610.

During State Fiscal Year 2021 (SFY'21), the Texas workforce system provided the following TAA services and outcomes:

- 4,296 workers were determined potentially TAA eligible and outreached for service provision.
- 223 workers applied for TAA services or benefits.
- 545 workers participated in TAA-supported training services.

- 11 workers participated in vocational and remedial training programs, either integrated or conducted concurrently at the same school.

The following TAA performance results were attained in SFY'21:

- 417 workers (90 percent) entered employment.
- 89 percent of workers entering employment retained employment over the following three quarters.
- Workers securing employment regained 90 percent of pre-layoff wage levels, based on a six-month follow-up.
- 52 workers participated in basic skills enhancement during TAA-supported training.

B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

Allotments under WIOA enable the state to assist Boards in providing workforce investment activities for adults and dislocated workers.

Workforce development and adult education and training are key services available to prepare job seekers for success in jobs that employers need filled. By improving the skills, education, and literacy levels of individual adults and dislocated workers, these services improve their subsequent employment, job retention, and earnings.

Alternative Training Models

Texas uses several alternative training programs as part of its workforce development strategy. These programs involve TWC collaborating with Boards, companies, and education training providers to improve training, as well as awarding a competitive grant program for training programs. These are discussed in other sections of the plan; however, a few deserve highlighting because of their success in advancing high-quality on-the-job training and incumbent worker training for both the participant and the employer.

The Skills Development Fund is Texas' premier job-training program providing training opportunities for Texas businesses and workers. Funding for the program is administered by TWC. Success is achieved through collaboration among businesses, public community and technical colleges, Boards, and economic development partners.

The Skills Development Fund program assists businesses and trade unions by financing the design and implementation of customized job-training projects. This fund merges business needs and local customized training opportunities into a winning formula to increase the skills levels and wages of the Texas workforce.

The Skills for Small Business program receives financing out of the Skills Development Fund. The Skills for Small Business program is dedicated to supporting the backbone of Texas' economy—small employers. Businesses with fewer than 100 employees can apply to TWC for training offered by their local community or technical college, or the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX). The program trains newly hired employees, with the intent of helping to fill positions for work that employers currently cannot fill and that often pay better than most jobs. TWC works with the college to fund the specific courses selected by businesses for their employees.

The Skills for Veterans initiative also receives financing out of the Skills Development Fund, in order to specifically address the training needs of post-9/11 veterans returning home and

entering the Texas workforce. Skills for Veterans train veterans for jobs in high-demand by Texas employers. Employers that hire post-9/11 era veterans, including those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn or Operation Enduring Freedom, may be eligible to participate in this training opportunity, offered by their local community or technical college, or TEEX.

The Self-Sufficiency Fund program assists businesses and trade unions by financing the development and implementation of customized job-training projects for new and current workers. Self-Sufficiency Fund grants offer businesses customized training solutions that support workforce hiring efforts and skills upgrading for current workers. The purpose of the Self-Sufficiency Fund is to provide training for targeted employment opportunities, primarily for adult TANF recipients as well as those individuals at risk of becoming dependent on public assistance.

2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Apprenticeships are industry-driven, high-quality career pathways during which employers may develop and prepare their future workforce. Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) are automatically eligible for the statewide Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). RAP sponsors make a request through the state's ETP Unit or TWC's Office of Apprenticeship and provide minimal information to TWC for inclusion on the ETPL.

Once included on the statewide ETPL, RAPs are available for any WIOA participant in Texas. Boards may use their WIOA formula funds to issue Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for the instructional portion of these programs. Additionally, Boards are encouraged to consider funding the work component of RAPs through on-the-job training. Promoting informed consumer choice, Boards provide access to the full statewide ETPL, ensuring that program participants approved for training may choose the best program for their needs.

Since 2016, TWC has received $27.9 million in expansion grant funding and is using the funding to increase, expand, and integrate the RAP model into new occupations and new populations, further increasing RAP opportunities for which Boards may use their local formula funds.

TWC's Commissioners and Office of Apprenticeship promote the apprenticeship model to Boards, employers, and industry groups throughout the year, including at TWC's annual *ApprenticeshipTexas* conference.

Boards use allocated WIOA formula funds to train individuals based on training eligibility, need, skills, and interest. Work-based training is a priority for the state and Boards. The "earn while you learn" model helps participants gain a hands-on education while earning a salary. Boards promote pre-apprenticeship programs—such as Austin's MC3 building trades program or Houston's Trio Electric training program—to their younger community not only as a step toward apprenticeship programs but as a step toward financial security.

The apprenticeship program serves employers and job seekers by training workers for well-paying jobs with promising futures. Texas law and rule support only DOL-registered apprenticeship training programs, which pay part of the cost of job-related classroom instruction. TWC coordinates the state's apprenticeship training program, applying approximately $1.6 million in WIOA statewide-discretionary funds to supplement state general revenue appropriations. The Texas legislature has authorized approximately $5.3 million in general revenue each year of the current biennium. In FY'20, 6,810 apprentices participated in the apprenticeship training program, trending towards the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) performance measure of 7,685.

Beginning in FY'22 TWC's apprenticeship training performance measure will be increased from 7,685 to 10,135 individuals served/trained per year as established with the passage of the General Appropriations Act for FY'22–'23 (Senate Bill 1, 87th Texas Legislature, Regular Session

(2021)). The bill grants an additional $6 million to the program for FY'22 and FY'23, with which TWC may help address demand for apprenticeship opportunities across Texas.

3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

The application process for training providers largely remains the same as that of WIA; however, WIOA established additional requirements, specifically to provide more information and criteria for initial and continued eligibility to receive funds. These requirements ensure both the quality of the training programs and the opportunity for customer-informed choice regarding the available programs.

The Boards will continue to solicit training and education providers to submit applications for eligibility to receive WIOA funds for educational programs. Programs must support statewide targeted occupations and lead to a recognized credential, measurable skill gain, or employment. TWC will solicit Registered Apprenticeship sponsors at least annually for inclusion on the statewide ETPL. This solicitation serves to ensure the continuation of a robust list of training providers throughout the state and in rural areas, including distance-learning options.

Starting January 1, 2016, all training providers must submit information and criteria as established under WIOA §122(d) through (g). Training providers use TWC's Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) to provide all required information for initial eligibility for each program of study directly to local Boards. ETPS doubles as TWC's program certification system and the Statewide Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL), as required by WIOA §122 (a)(3). Boards then review and certify the provider and program if minimum requirements are met, as established by the governor or higher standards as determined by Board policy. Following local approval, Boards submit training provider and program information to TWC for final review before addition to the statewide ETPL. The Statewide ETPL is published on the agency's website. Eligible Training Providers are required to submit student-level data directly to TWC annually, in July. Continued eligibility determinations take place on a biennial basis.

Initial Eligibility Criteria

Prior to inclusion on the statewide ETPL, except for RAPs, a training provider must submit general information through the ETPS to its local Board, determined by the primary campus location. The required general information includes:

- data required by ETA-9171;
- contact information; and
- other information useful for the statewide ETPL, such as
    - a description of each training program offered by the provider;
    - presence of onsite child care for campus(es);
    - alternate hours for trainings; and
    - campus accessibility.

In addition to general information, a provider must submit to the Board evidence of each program's partnership with a business. The Board must ensure that each program aligns with an in-demand or targeted occupation in the state and is appropriately licensed or exempt in accordance with the Texas Education Code.

Following Board review, providers must submit student-level information, including Social Security numbers (SSNs) and credential outcomes where applicable, for all students connected to the trainings during the most recently reported ETP Performance Year (PY). TWC uses SSN data to gather WIOA performance indicator–related data for programs beyond the credential

rate information provided by the training providers. During initial eligibility determination, TWC may review existing programs for a provider, or exempt from student reporting for new programs, those which have not been delivered to any students at the time of application.

Continued Eligibility Criteria

Continued eligibility is determined by using the provider-submitted information from the most recent annual reporting period. The annual reporting information provided by ETPs includes information on alternate hours of trainings (for employed individuals) and accessibility-related features of campuses and programs. TWC is enhancing the ETP system to further align with WIOA requirements. This information is included on the statewide ETPL. Texas maintains a robust system of training providers and programs, including hundreds of online training programs available to students anywhere in the state, including in rural areas. TWC will revise its ETP guidance for Local Workforce Development Boards to include information on accessibility for individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities. This guidance will be available at https://twc.texas.gov/agency/laws-rules-policy/workforce-policy-and-guidance.

Continued eligibility for the statewide ETPL requires that programs, except RAPs:

- submit evidence of a partnership with a business;
- are aligned with an in-demand or targeted occupation in the state;
- are appropriately licensed, or exempt from licensure, in accordance with the Texas Education Code; and
- on or before the required reporting deadline, submit annual reports that:
    - provide TWC with data needed to determine performance outcomes related to WIOA employment and credential performance indicators;
    - identify whether a program leads to a recognized postsecondary credential; and
    - indicate the overall quality of provider programs.

Annual Reporting

All providers, except RAPs, shall be required to report information, including performance outcomes, on each program included on the statewide ETPL.

Annual reports require providers to submit, or verify, the following information:

- General provider, location, and program information (including contacts)
- Compliance with WIOA provisions and regulations
- Acknowledgment of TWC's Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) authority
- Student-level data for all students participating in programs during the previous PY
- Other information that TWC may determine to be necessary or useful for the statewide ETPL

Such information is required to be submitted no later than TWC's deadline each year, usually the end of July. Providers requiring assistance with completing these reports are encouraged to reach out to TWC for direct assistance before the reporting deadline. Reporting extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis to providers/programs when requested before the reporting

deadline. TWC will consider requests related to circumstances beyond the provider's control, such as:

- natural disasters;
- national emergencies; and
- unexpected personnel or technology issues (provided these occurred within 30 days or fewer from reporting deadline).

Providers failing to report information on a timely basis (that is, on or before the deadline or extended deadline), will have affected programs removed from the ETPL as described in the *Removal from ETPL* section.

TWC accepts schools in compliance with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) as eligible for the ETPL once they submit information required by WIOA. Additionally, proprietary schools in Texas must be licensed (or exempted from such licensure) by TWC's Career Schools and Colleges (CSC) Department. This licensure includes annual student performance reporting. TWC collaborates with TEA and THECB in a Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative known as 60X30TX. As part of this project, integrated reporting on all Texas schools and student outcomes is made available publicly at the following address: http://www.txhigheredaccountability.org/acctpublic/.

Performance Targets

Beginning November 26, 2018, TWC removed minimum performance standards for programs from eligibility standards but continues to collect this information during required annual reporting. Once sufficient baseline data are gathered, the data will be analyzed and evaluated for purposes of proposing new state performance standards. TWC continues to require providers, except RAPs, to submit performance outcomes annually. Program outcomes are included on the statewide ETPL for all programs, in aggregate form. (Any program with five or fewer student records to report in a single year, will not have data published in order to protect the individual's information.)

Removal from ETPL

Training providers may request voluntary removal of training programs from the ETPL at any time they no longer offer or wish to maintain training programs on the ETPL. Providers, including RAP sponsors, that violate WIOA Title I provisions or WIOA regulations (including 29 CFR part 38), or are found to have intentionally supplied inaccurate or false information, shall be removed from the statewide ETPL at such time as the violation is discovered. For such substantial violations, removal will result in ineligibility for the ETPL for a minimum of two years. Providers that fail to provide required annual performance and other information for programs, shall have such programs, except RAPs, removed from the statewide ETPL.

Providers may appeal involuntary removal decisions to the Board or TWC, as appropriate, in accordance with TWC's existing appeals process as set forth in the Chapter 823 Integrity of the Texas Workforce Commission rules (20 Texas Administrative Code). Providers may appeal Board decisions to TWC. TWC decisions are final.

Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Apprenticeship programs that are registered with the DOL Office of Apprenticeship are automatically eligible for inclusion on the ETPL because they undergo a rigorous application and vetting process by the Office of Apprenticeship within the US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA). RAPs are given an opportunity to request inclusion on the ETPL directly to TWC. RAP sponsors must provide basic program information,

which includes general descriptions of the sponsor and training sites, contact information, program details, and general cost information.

These data are used by Boards to inform participants of training expectations prior to referral. RAPs are not required to provide performance or outcome data to TWC. To ensure a robust system of consumer choice, RAP sponsors may choose to provide such data. Data submission will not delay, nor otherwise affect, RAP inclusion on the statewide ETPL.

Except where WIOA violations occur, RAPs will remain on the ETPL for as long as the program is registered with DOL or until they request to be removed.

Registered Apprenticeship Training Programs
Policy:https://www.twc.texas.gov/files/policy_letters/17-19-ch1-twc.pdf

https://twc.texas.gov/files/partners/rules-chapter-840-wioa-etps-twc.pdf

4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PRIORITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS, OTHER LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF WIOA SEC. 134(C)(3)(E), WHICH APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES FUNDED BY THE ADULT FORMULA PROGRAM

Priority for individualized career services and training services are provided on a priority basis, regardless of funding levels, to:

- public assistance recipients;
- other low-income adults; and
- individuals who are basic skills deficient.

The individuals who receive these services are prioritized accordingly:

1. Eligible veterans and eligible spouses (as defined in WD Letter 01-21) who also are recipients of public assistance, low-income, and/or basic-skills deficient
2. Foster youth and former foster youth, up to age 23, who also are recipients of public assistance, low-income, and/or basic skills deficient
3. All other individuals who are recipients of public assistance, low-income, and/or basic skills deficient
4. All other eligible veterans and eligible spouses
5. All other foster youth and former foster youth, up to age 23
6. All other individuals, including Boards' local priority groups

TWC ensures that local Board policies are in place to ensure priority for the populations described above. In addition, TWC allows Boards the flexibility to create a policy that includes a process that also gives priority to other individuals, as long as priority for those individuals come after the first five groups described above.

For example, Boards may establish local priority groups for older workers (age 40 or older) or employed individuals whose income is below the Board's self-sufficiency level, but these local priority groups do not replace the statutory priority given to individuals who are recipients of public assistance, low-income, or basic skills deficient. The Board's local priority groups must

fall within Group 6, "All other individuals, including local Boards' local priority groups" as listed above.

1. WD Letter 01-21 issued January 22, 2021, titled "Applying Priority of Service and Identifying and Documenting Veterans and Transitioning Service Members."

5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

TWC established a policy that allows Boards the flexibility to transfer up to 100 percent of funds between WIOA adult and dislocated worker allocations consistent with WIOA provisions. The policy states Boards that are under a Technical Assistance Plan or Corrective Action Plan for an adult or dislocated worker program may be subject to limitations on the amounts they can transfer.

C. WITH RESPECT TO YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AUTHORIZED IN SECTION 129 OF WIOA—

1. IDENTIFY THE STATE-DEVELOPED CRITERIA TO BE USED BY LOCAL BOARDS IN AWARDING GRANTS OR CONTRACTS FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AND DESCRIBE HOW THE LOCAL BOARDS WILL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE ABILITY OF THE PROVIDERS TO MEET PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES BASED ON PRIMARY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE YOUTH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 116(B)(2)(A)(II) OF WIOA IN AWARDING SUCH GRANTS OR CONTRACTS.[11]

State-Developed Criteria in Award of Grants or Contracts for Youth Workforce Investment Activities

TWC allocates youth formula funds to Boards, that in turn contract with service providers to deliver services to youth in their respective workforce areas. Boards are required to meet all federal and state programmatic requirements.

Boards will ensure that:

- contracts include clearly defined goals, outputs, and measurable outcomes which directly relate to program objectives;
- contracts include clearly defined sanctions or penalties for noncompliance with contract terms and conditions; and
- the contractor has implemented a formal program using a risk assessment methodology to monitor compliance with financial and performance requirements under the contract, including a determination of whether performance objectives have been achieved.

Board Assessment of Providers' Performance Accountability Measures

TWC maintains a rigorous performance and accountability system, holding Boards accountable for their performance as it pertains to the youth program as it does with other workforce programs, and Boards have rigorous standards in place for their contracted service providers. Boards ensure that all 14 program elements—to include financial literacy and services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in workforce areas—are available to youth participants.

2. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL USE TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH AS DESCRIBED IN 129(A)(1)(B), INCLUDING HOW IT WILL LEVERAGE AND ALIGN THE CORE PROGRAMS, ANY COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER

PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN, REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS, AND ANY OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE.

A segment of out-of-school youth are unemployed and may also be enrolled in public assistance programs or detained by the juvenile or criminal justice systems. In addition, many out-of-school youths are dropouts, which may present a significant employment barrier.

Youth who are no longer in the public school system and are seeking to enter the labor market for the first time are inexperienced. With this in mind, Boards design services that:

- acknowledge the problems and characteristics of inexperienced career seekers;
- outreach and engage with the growing out-of-school youth population;
- obtain and use information concerning the conditions of employment affecting youth and labor laws restricting their employment;
- develop and maintain effective relationships with schools, colleges, and other training providers; and
- develop employment opportunities with career potential for youth.

Texas operates an integrated workforce system that relies on collaboration and coordination amongst partners. This collaboration and coordination is necessary when developing strategies to achieve improved outcomes for out-of-school youth, as this population will often seek assistive services from public or private CBOs. As such, partner programs build on existing partnerships—and develop new partnerships as needed—with community-based providers such as child welfare agencies, social service organizations, group homes, probation or parole officers, and local schools to find and engage at-risk youth before they become disconnected.

3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT ALL 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2) ARE MADE AVAILABLE AND EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS UNDER THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ELEMENT. [12]

Texas shares the purposes of WIOA, including fostering integrated systems, coordinated services, career pathways, and multiple forms of engagement with businesses to benefit all customers, particularly youth. TWC recognizes that career and personal success is a result of lifelong learning and continued growth in skills and abilities.

Each Board develops a strategic and operational plan for implementing WIOA youth programs that is consistent with the governor's vision of strengthening the academic and future workplace outcomes for youth facing challenges and barriers to success. Boards design activities consistent with the specific eligibility criteria for two groups described in the WIOA Title I youth formula-funded program: in-school youth (ISY) and out-of-school youth (OSY).

Boards are encouraged to conduct thorough analysis of local gaps in youth-serving programs, and then identify the most appropriate education or training, or employment activities, to undertake. Certain services of WIOA youth programs are required, as proposed by regulation §681.460 of WIOA §129(c)(2), including the following:

- Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent or postsecondary credential
- Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services

- Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component, such as summer and non-seasonal employment, pre-apprenticeship programs, internships and job shadowing, and on-the-job training, in the private for-profit or nonprofit sectors
- Occupational skills training, which includes priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials in in-demand industries or occupations in the local area
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation
- Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors
- Support services, such as linkages to community services, assistance with transportation, child and dependent care, assistance with housing, needs-related payments, assistance with educational testing, reasonable accommodations for youth with disabilities, referrals to health care, and assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire and tools
- Adult mentoring for at least 12 months
- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after completing participation
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, such as drug and alcohol abuse, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate
- Financial literacy education
- Entrepreneurial skills training
- Services providing labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services
- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training

Boards ensure that all 14 program elements—including financial literacy and services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in workforce areas—are available to youth participants.

Every individual that meets the designated criteria for ISY or OSY eligibility may participate in the above services if he or she is formally enrolled in the program and participation is appropriate under the participant's assessment and individual service strategy. Continuous performance assessment, technical assistance, and monitoring are fundamental to the Boards' compliance with the design framework service of local youth programs, as proposed in regulation §681.420.

Outreach specialists dedicated to the Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) community collaborate with Boards to inform youth in this targeted population of educational, training, and employment services. Concurrently, local youth-serving agencies facilitate counseling of MSFW youth on programs to complete their secondary education and prepare for economically sustaining employment.

Boards recognize that the successful implementation of WIOA's purposes rests on youth programs that reconnect OSY to education and jobs. The OSY population consists in large part of high school dropouts who are likely to face significant barriers to employment. WIOA

increased the minimum OSY expenditure rate for youth formula-funded programs to 75 percent.

Youths who are no longer in the public school system and are seeking to enter the labor market may face extraordinary barriers. Boards design services that:

- acknowledge the challenges and characteristics of inexperienced career seekers;
- obtain and use information concerning the conditions of employment affecting youth and labor laws restricting their employment;
- develop and maintain effective relationships with schools, colleges, and other training providers; and
- develop career-potential employment opportunities for youth.

4. PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

TWC provides Boards the flexibility to define the "additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to obtain or retain employment" criterion, as set forth in WIOA. The state policy is as follows:

"The Board must establish definitions and eligibility documentation requirements for the 'requires additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to obtain or retain employment' criterion of ISY and OSY eligibility."

5. INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION, AS DEFINED IN LAW, FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND ATTENDING SCHOOL AS SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(I) AND SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(I). IF STATE LAW DOES NOT DEFINE "NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL" OR "ATTENDING SCHOOL," INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE AND PROVIDE THE STATE POLICY FOR DETERMINING WHETHER A YOUTH IS ATTENDING OR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL.

Texas law does not explicitly define the terms "attending school" and "not attending school."

For the purpose of determining in-school youth and out-of-school youth eligibility under WIOA, TWC has established that a youth is "attending school" if the youth is:

- enrolled in a school that leads to the attainment of a state-recognized high school diploma, including a public school, charter school, or private school; disciplinary alternative education program; or
- homeschooled;
- attending high school equivalency programs;
- a high school graduate who has registered for postsecondary classes, even if not yet attending postsecondary classes;
- attending postsecondary classes; or

- in between postsecondary school semesters and has registered for classes for a future semester or has paid all or part of the tuition for a future semester.

TWC has established that a youth is "not attending school" if the youth:

- has at least 10 consecutive days of unexcused absences and on the date of eligibility determination has not returned to school;
- is not attending postsecondary school on the date of eligibility determination;
- has not registered for postsecondary school classes on the date of the eligibility determination; or
- is enrolled only in non-credit-bearing postsecondary classes

The following programs are not considered "in school" under WIOA:

- Adult education provided under Title II of WIOA
- YouthBuild programs
- Job Corps programs
- High School Equivalency programs not funded by the public K-12 system
- Dropout reengagement programs not funded by the public K-12 system

Alternative Education—A disciplinary alternative education program is established in conformance with Texas Education Code §37.008. Alternative education is an educational and self-discipline alternative instructional program, adopted by local policy, for students in elementary through high school grades who are removed from their regular classes for mandatory or discretionary disciplinary reasons. Juvenile justice alternative education programs were created to serve the educational needs of juvenile offenders and at-risk youth who are expelled from the regular classroom or the school district disciplinary alternative education program. (Texas Education Code, Chapter 37)

6. IF USING THE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION WHICH MUST FURTHER DEFINE HOW TO DETERMINE IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS UNABLE TO COMPUTE OR SOLVE PROBLEMS, OR READ, WRITE, OR SPEAK ENGLISH, AT A LEVEL NECESSARY TO FUNCTION ON THE JOB, IN THE INDIVIDUAL'S FAMILY, OR IN SOCIETY. IF NOT USING THE PORTION OF THE DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE.

Texas uses the basic skills deficient definition contained in WIOA Section 3(5)(B), as follows:

An individual who meets either of the following criteria satisfies the basic skills deficient requirement for WIOA youth services is a youth who:

- has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th-grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or
- is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society.

D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)

3. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

N/A -- this section does not apply to Texas.

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

N/A -- this section does not apply to Texas.

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

N/A -- this section does not apply to Texas.

6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

N/A -- this section does not apply to Texas.

7. HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.

N/A -- this section does not apply to Texas.

8. COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

N/A -- this section does not apply to Texas.

E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

WAIVER REQUEST 1

Youth Individual Training Accounts

1. The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the State would like to waive

TWC is seeking a waiver of the requirement under WIOA rule at 20 CFR §681.550, which limits the use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for youth participants to out-of-school youth (OSY) ages 16 to 24. TWC is seeking a waiver of this rule to extend the use of ITAs to in-school youth (ISY).

2. Actions the State has taken to remove state or local barriers

There are no state or local statutory or regulatory barriers that would impede implementation of the requested waiver.

3. State strategic goal(s) and Department of Labor priorities (e.g. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.) supported by the waiver

This request is for a statewide waiver to grant ISY ages 14–21 the same participant choice options that OSY have by allowing workforce area staff to use ITAs when appropriate to provide education and training to ISY.

On October 11, 2017, DOLETA granted TWC this same waiver request. Then, on September 20, 2018, DOLETA authorized TWC's subsequent request for general use of the waiver for WIOA PY'18–'19 (July 1, 2018, through June 30, 2020). DOLETA subsequently granted conditional approval on June 30, 2020, for WIOA PY'19–'20. Of the ISY receiving training services, 58 percent in PY '18 and 31 percent in PY '19 were funded through ITAs.

Boards are using or have used ITAs to fund training for ISYs enrolled in several programs, including:

- Welding and welding technology
- Nursing, including CNA, LVN, and RN
- Non-destructive testing specialist
- Registered apprenticeship programs including plumbing, pipefitting, and steamfitting
- Pre-apprenticeship programs including plumbing and electrical
- HVAC
- Business management

Boards view this waiver as an excellent opportunity to promote apprenticeship programs and utilization of pre-apprenticeship standards, with a focus on non-traditional industries and occupations. This waiver can also better assist ISY in Texas by providing training that will result in training certificates for better employment opportunities, which will allow youth participants to continue furthering their education and become self-sufficient.

Once a youth enrolls in a WIOA program as an ISY, that youth maintains ISY status until exiting the program. Excluding ISY from receiving ITAs undermines WIOA's goals to expand program options, increase program flexibility, and enhance customer choice. DOL states in the preamble to the WIOA Final Rule that ISY age 18 or older may access ITAs through the adult program. This is problematic in that it excludes ISY from entering ITA-funded educational and training programs that may be critical to ISY who drop out or are at risk of dropping out of school. Youth caught in this gap are susceptible to leaving the workforce program and not achieving the education, training, and certifications that develop the skills employers require and that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Use of this flexibility is expected to be limited but nonetheless critically valuable. Successful program participation most often results in individuals who exit and no longer require TWC's services. Some participants continue to need services. These individuals are best served not by exit and re-enrollment in adult programs, but by continued service through the current program and with current staff who know the individual and their needs.

This waiver would permit Boards to provide certain ISY with ITAs. Such flexibility would allow workforce area staff the necessary flexibility to use youth formula funds, when appropriate, to meet the individual training and employment needs of certain at-risk ISY participants without delays that may be caused by untimely procurement processes to contract with training providers through standard youth channels. Without access to ITAs for these youth, Boards may need to contract with a school for delivery of one program to a single individual. Boards would be required to track performance for ISYs using ITAs.

Five of Texas' 28 Boards used this flexibility to fund ISY in training during 2019. More than 25 ISY participants benefitted from ITA-funded (dual-credit, apprenticeship, or stand-alone)

training programs, leading to skilled trades, nursing, and other health care careers. Additionally, seven more Boards had plans to implement strategies using ITA-funded trainings in early 2020. These programs largely focus on dual-credit and CTE programs through secondary schools, as well as engagement with youth in need of financial assistance who do not qualify for other financial aid programs.

This waiver is intended to benefit ISY ages 14–21. While the waiver would mostly be used for ISY ages 16–21, some ISY ages 14–15 may benefit if they are participating in dual-credit education and training programs.

Approval of this waiver request would allow TWC to meet the following state goals:

- **Increase in-school youths' access to educational and training programs:** Allowing Boards flexibility to use ITAs to provide education and training for ISY would increase the workforce opportunities available to youth and help at-risk ISY to pursue education and training that would lead to meaningful work and economic self-sufficiency
- **Decrease delays in service delivery:** By providing the flexibility to use the programs that are made available through the statewide Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) for all youth, Boards will be able to connect students to needed training. Delays caused by procurement may result in participants missing enrollment deadlines and being required to wait a full semester to begin training programs.

This waiver request aligns with DOL's policy priorities in that it:

- increases youths' access to and opportunities for the education, training, employment, and support services that they need;
- ensures that at-risk ISY do not fall into a regulatory gap that could prevent them from receiving the education and training necessary to securing meaningful work and economic self-sufficiency; and supports WIOA's goals to expand program options, increase program flexibility, and enhance customer choice.

4. Projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver

Disrupting a youth participant's access to education and training services increases the probability that the youth will not complete the program. The approval of this waiver would allow Boards to provide seamless service continuity to ISY who drop out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school. Through this waiver, ISY who drop out of school would not need to exit the youth program and then wait 90 days to re-enroll as an OSY.

By eliminating the 90-day period between ISY exit and OSY or adult enrollment, TWC expects this waiver to increase the number of at-risk ISY who enroll in and complete education and training programs.

5. Individuals, groups, or populations benefiting from the waiver

ISY who drop out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school.

6. How the State plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of waiver outcome information

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, TWC will communicate the waiver allowance to Boards and workforce system partner programs. TWC will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing monthly performance reports submitted by the Boards, through regularly scheduled conference calls with Board executive directors, and through its monitoring and performance accountability system. TWC will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then TWC will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

7. Assurance of State's posting of the request for public comment and notification to affected Local Workforce Development Boards

TWC included this waiver request as part of the agency's 2020–2023 WIOA Combined State Plan two-year modification when the plan was presented for public comment from February 15, 2022, to March 17, 2022.

Before posting the plan for public comment, TWC notified all Boards and sought their input regarding this waiver request.

No public comments were received during the 30-day comment period.

WAIVER REQUEST 2

Local Performance Accountability Flexibility

1. The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the State would like to waive

TWC is seeking a limited waiver from WIOA §116(c) pertaining to local performance accountability measures for Subtitle B.

2. Actions the State has taken to remove state or local barriers

There are no state or local statutory or regulatory barriers that would impede implementation of the requested waiver.

3. State strategic goal(s) and Department of Labor priorities (e.g. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.) supported by the waiver

TWC requests a waiver from WIOA §116(c) to allow greater flexibility when contracting performance measures with the Boards to allow TWC to promote further integration of services within Workforce Solutions Offices.

Specifically, TWC is requesting the flexibility to modify Board performance measures. Under this proposed waiver, TWC will continue to track and report the core indicators of performance at both state and Board levels as required by WIOA §116; however, the waiver will give TWC the continued flexibility to select among the statutory Title I measures and develop other measures to use in its Board contracts. TWC is interested in developing Board-contracted measures that support integration and minimize local administrative burden and that may be leading indicators for the statutorily prescribed measures to make them more useful to the Boards.

On September 20, 2018, and again on June 30, 2020, DOLETA approved this same waiver for TWC. Prior to WIOA, under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), TWC had a similar waiver that provided this flexibility in selecting and developing local performance accountability measures. This waiver was in place for more than 10 years and allowed TWC to use a set of more integrated outcome measures that were aligned with the old WIA common measures but that were applicable to all participants, regardless of program. Through the Local Accountability Flexibility Waiver, TWC improved program integration and streamlined the agency's performance accountability model.

However, WIOA implementation resulted in the loss of that historic waiver and reintroduced a focus on "siloed" program outcomes rather than purely customer-focused considerations into the Texas workforce system. WIOA's requirement to contract separate indicators of performance by program to the Boards unnecessarily siloes service delivery and may rebuild a barrier to integration that TWC was able to mostly remove under the prior waiver.

While this proposed waiver would provide TWC flexibility in selecting Board performance measures, WIOA §116(g) will continue to provide sanctions for a Board's failure to meet any of

the WIOA performance measures. Although the approval of this waiver would provide TWC with additional flexibility in determining which measures to formally contract to the Boards, accountability will not be impacted, as TWC would still apply the sanction provisions of WIOA §116(g) to those measures that are formally contracted.

Approval of this waiver request would allow TWC to meet the following state goals:

- **Increase integration of services to customers:** Boards are responsible for implementing many federal and state workforce development programs, allowing them the opportunity to integrate service delivery; however, programs are partially driven by how performance is measured. Programs with different measures of success require different means of management. Rather than focusing on employers' needs and finding job seekers to fill those needs, staff must focus on the specific outcome expectations of the program that funds the services that the customer receives.
- **Better alignment in performance accountability at the state, local, and service provider levels:** Because Boards are responsible for numerous workforce development programs, coenrollment of customers in multiple programs is becoming increasingly commonplace. Therefore, TWC believes that the most effective way to evaluate Boards and to promote accountability is to use integrated performance measures.
- **Greater flexibility to Boards in designing and implementing one-stop services:** By eliminating program-specific measures and applying integrated performance measures across all programs, TWC will promote service-delivery designs that are based on the needs of its customers, including employers, rather than siloed program requirements.

This waiver request aligns with DOL's policy priorities in that it:

- supports employer engagement by promoting service-delivery designs that are based on employer needs;
- improves job and career results by identifying employers' needs and connecting employers with job seekers to meet those needs;
- promotes more integrated case management across multiple programs, as WIOA envisions; and
- maintains and enhances state and local performance accountability.

4. Projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver

The approval of this waiver would result in the continued administrative relief that would remove barriers to coenrollment and promote more integrated case management across multiple programs, as WIOA envisions. TWC strongly supports the concept that programs with similar outcome objectives should be measured in a similar fashion.

Approval of this waiver would continue to allow the streamlining of administrative processes, resulting in maximized resources focused on employment outcomes.

5. Individuals, groups, or populations benefiting from the waiver

- Employers
- Job seekers
- Incumbent workers
- Workforce area staff

6. How the State plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of waiver outcome information

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, TWC will communicate the waiver allowance to Boards and workforce system partner programs. TWC will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing monthly performance reports submitted by the Boards, through regularly scheduled conference calls with Board executive directors, and through its monitoring and performance accountability system. TWC will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then TWC will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

7. Assurance of State's posting of the request for public comment and notification to affected Local Workforce Development Boards

TWC included this waiver request as part of the agency's 2020–2023 WIOA Combined State Plan two-year modification when the plan was presented for public comment from February 15, 2022, to March 17, 2022.

Before posting the plan for public comment, TWC notified all Boards and sought their input regarding this waiver request.

No public comments were received during the 30-day comment period.

WAIVER REQUEST 3

Reallocation Waiver

1. The statutory and/or regulatory requirements the State would like to waive

TWC is seeking a waiver from the provisions of WIOA §128(c)(3) and §133(c), regarding reallocation among local areas. This waiver would provide flexibility to TWC in redistributing funds among workforce areas.

2. Actions the State has taken to remove state or local barriers

There are no state or local statutory or regulatory barriers to implementing the requested waiver.

Since DOL first approved this waiver request on November 17, 2010, under WIA and then under WIOA in 2016, on September 20, 2018, and again on June 30, 2020, this waiver has provided TWC the flexibility to redistribute recaptured funds to workforce areas where the greatest potential may be realized, thus ensuring more effective and more efficient use of federal funds. TWC will continue to apply this strategy and monitor outcome success.

In June 2006, TWC adopted rules to integrate the agency's deobligation and reallocation policies for all Board-administered funds, thus establishing consistent procedures to apply to all workforce funds administered by the Boards, in support of a fully integrated system.

- Deobligations must pass a multilevel review process:
    - Expenditures are reviewed monthly (performance is also considered).
    - If expenditures are trending low, staff provides technical assistance to the Boards.
    - Boards are given an opportunity to get expenditures back on track.
    - When it becomes clear that Boards will not be able to meet the expenditure benchmark, discussion regarding the possible deobligation occurs and we

receive concurrence from the Board executive directors that they will not be able to use the funds.

    - The Commission takes final action in a public meeting.

- Reallocations also must pass a multilevel review process:
    - Expenditures are reviewed monthly (performance is also considered).
    - If expenditures are trending high, staff provides technical assistance to the Boards:
        - Boards are given an opportunity to explain why expenditures appear to be high.
        - Boards may identify that the numbers of participants to be served is higher than anticipated and additional funds are needed.
        - Staff verifies through the performance reports that the number of participants is consistent with the Board's explanation of need.
    - The Commission takes final action in a public meeting.

This process has worked well for several years with all Board-administered funds. This same process for reallocation would be used for WIOA funds upon approval of the waiver.

3. State strategic goal(s) and Department of Labor priorities (e.g. expansion of apprenticeship, improved employer engagement, etc.) supported by the waiver

TWC requests to continue this waiver of the WIOA statutes relating to the redistribution of recaptured local funds and proposes to base the redistribution of WIOA funds on TWC's allocation rules (40 TAC §§800.51-800.75). TWC ensures that financial reporting will be consistent with current DOLETA requirements and that federal funds will be effectively managed for maximum service provision and program performance.

Approval of this waiver request would allow TWC to continue meeting the following state goals:

- **Redistribution of recaptured funds to workforce areas based on factors established by TWC to ensure that funds are redistributed to workforce areas with the greatest need:** TWC will determine the amounts to be redistributed to workforce areas based on factors such as:
    - requested amount;
    - demonstrated need for and ability to use additional funds to serve low-income individuals, public assistance recipients, dislocated workers, and unemployment insurance claimants;
    - demonstrated capacity to expend the formula funds;
    - a Board's established plan for working with at least one of the governor's industry clusters, as specified in the Board's plan; and
    - performance in the current and prior program years.
- **Facilitation of maximum expenditure of recaptured federal funds:** TWC seeks to redistribute workforce funds to workforce areas that have achieved not only targeted expenditure levels but also established performance targets. Redistributing funds based solely on whether a workforce area achieves its expenditure target does not address performance issues, such as whether the workforce area met employers' needs for a highly skilled and job-ready workforce.

- **Improvement of administrative efficiencies:** Approval of this waiver will serve to minimize administrative processes and costs of contracting by using similar redistribution procedures that support workforce system integration.

4. Projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver

The statutory reallocation requirements can be fulfilled; however, the amount of funds available for reallocation may be so small that it is cost prohibitive. By using TWC's allocation rules for the redistribution of funds, TWC can ensure that federal funds will be more effectively and efficiently managed for maximum service provision and program performance. Approval of this waiver may not result in significantly higher performance outcomes, but it will provide the opportunity for recaptured funds to be redistributed to workforce areas where the greatest potential impact may be realized. This waiver will streamline administrative practices, allowing for greater efficiency in meeting the workforce development needs of employers and job seekers. Furthermore, it will enhance the quality of services in those workforce areas that have demonstrated consistent performance outcomes. Approval of this waiver will result in a reduction of unnecessary administrative processes.

5. Individuals, groups, or populations benefiting from the waiver

Workforce areas that provide quality services will have access to additional resources to meet the employers' needs, job seekers, and incumbent workers. Additionally, the waiver will allow TWC to continue to promote the cost benefits of improved administrative efficiencies, encouraging the increased leveraging of resources within the workforce areas. As a result, TWC will increase services such as enhanced education, employment, and training opportunities for disadvantaged populations and individuals with multiple barriers to employment.

6. How the State plans to monitor waiver implementation, including collection of waiver outcome information

Upon DOL's approval of this waiver request, TWC will communicate the waiver allowance to Boards and workforce system partner programs. TWC will monitor progress under this waiver by reviewing monthly performance reports submitted by the Boards, through regularly scheduled conference calls with Board executive directors, and through its monitoring and performance accountability system. TWC will report waiver outcomes in the state's WIOA Annual Report. If the state requests renewal of this waiver, then TWC will provide the most recent outcomes data available.

7. Assurance of State's posting of the request for public comment and notification to affected Local Workforce Development Boards

TWC included this waiver request as part of the agency's 2020–2023 WIOA Combined State Plan two-year modification when the plan was presented for public comment from February 15, 2022, to March 17, 2022.

Before posting the plan for public comment, TWC notified all Boards and sought their input regarding this waiver request.

No public comments were received during the 30-day comment period.

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient;	
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	Yes

ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	70.0%	70.0%	71.0%	70.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	64.0%	67.0%	65.0%	67.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5400	$5400	$5500	$5400
Credential Attainment Rate	73.0%	73.0%	74.0%	73.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	67.5%	67.5%	68.0%	67.5%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	71.0%	71.0%	72.0%	71.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter	72.5%	72.5%	73.5%	72.5%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
After Exit)				
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$8700	$9134	$8750	$9134
Credential Attainment Rate	75.0%	75.0%	76.0%	75.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	70.0%	70.0%	70.0%	70.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	69.0%	72.0%	70.0%	72.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	70.0%	70.0%	71.0%	70.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3200	$3200	$3250	$3200
Credential Attainment Rate	60.0%	60.0%	61.0%	60.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	55.0%	58.0%	55.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

TWC appreciates DOL's decision to provide states with increased flexibility in the administration of ES activities funded under the Wagner-Peyser Act. The flexibility created by the final rule removes unnecessary restrictions, thereby allowing TWC to manage the administration of the ES program in the most efficient and effective manner possible. TWC agrees that having the flexibility at the state level to use a staffing model that best fits our needs is beneficial to all customers of the Texas Workforce system, whether the staffing model consists of state staff members who comply with federal criteria for merit personnel systems, local area staff, contracted services staff, other alternatives, or all of these options. TWC is considering the options available in the final rule in order to make policy decisions that will generate results in employment service delivery.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

Wagner-Peyser-funded Employment Service (ES) staff receives professional development training at new employee orientation, in biannual and annual continuing education classes, and on an as-needed basis to ensure that ES staff is prepared and able to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers. ES staff receives training on how to conduct a job search, provide quality customer service, and use the automated state labor exchange, WorkInTexas.com. Performance is monitored closely. As needs arise, Boards also may respond with staff development activities, such as classroom instruction, webinars, and one-on-one training.

TWC implemented the "Texas Model" for the delivery of ES services, which restructured the oversight and responsibility for ES state merit staff. Under the Texas Model, Boards and their Workforce Solutions Offices have full responsibility for day-to-day guidance of state ES staff. TWC still maintains administrative responsibility, but Workforce Solutions Office managers share responsibility for directing daily work assignments, assigning individual performance goals, coordinating hiring, initiating disciplinary action, and evaluating staff performance.

Placing responsibility for ES staff with Workforce Solutions Offices supports an integrated workforce system. Many of the services provided by ES and WIOA are similar. The Texas Model gives Boards and their contractors the opportunity and flexibility to design integrated services, regardless of the program from which they are funded. All direction and guidance given to ES employees must be consistent with the provisions of state and federal laws, rules, and regulations governing the administration and delivery of the ES program. TWC provides technical support and quality assurance to Boards and contracted service providers through local Integrated Service Area Managers (ISAMs). ISAMs serve as the TWC supervisors for Texas Model staff. ISAMs coordinate all Texas Model staff-related actions with Boards and their contractors.

3. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

Wagner-Peyser-funded ES staff receives professional development training at new employee orientation, in biannual and annual continuing education classes, and on an as-needed basis to ensure that ES staff is prepared and able to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers. ES staff receives training on how to conduct a job search, provide quality

customer service, and how to use the automated state labor exchange, WorkInTexas.com. Performance is monitored closely. As needs arise, Boards also may respond with staff development activities, such as classroom instruction, webinars, and one-on-one training.

Unemployment claimants and employers are priority customers at Workforce Solutions Offices. Staff must promptly assist claimants and employers wishing to use Workforce Solutions Office resources to transmit materials to TWC for claims and appeals adjudication purposes. Customers must also be given access to space and telecommunications equipment necessary to participate in unemployment compensation hearings. Additionally, staff supports customers with dedicated resources—computers, telephones, and printed materials about claim filing and claimants' rights and responsibilities. Occasionally, staff members encounter situations in which they must speak with a claims specialist on behalf of a claimant. Each Board has a dedicated phone number specifically for staff to use in these situations. These dedicated phone numbers are available only to Workforce Solutions Office staff to assist unemployment benefits claimants in special circumstances.

TWC's Employment Service (ES) Guide:

- provides information on recognizing potential unemployment benefits eligibility issues;
- provides procedures for referring issues to UI staff for adjudication;
- outlines claimants' responsibility to be able and available to accept suitable work; and
- establishes work search requirements that claimants must meet.

As part of the work test requirement, staff must enter services into the WorkInTexas.com job matching system, which transmits job contact outcomes to the Unemployment Benefits System (UBS). The ES Guide lists the specific outcomes that are automatically reviewed by UBS and specifies other potential issues that require manual communication with UI staff.

TWC uses the Potential Unemployment Benefits Eligibility Issue reporting form, which lists examples of issues that could affect a claim and serves as a vehicle for reporting these potential issues. The ES Guide and the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Program Guide also outline activities staff must complete when assisting unemployment benefits customers.

In addition to the ES Guide, TWC provides training on unemployment claim investigations and eligibility issues as part of the UI Starter Kit. This tool kit has information on the Workforce and UI partnership, including services ES staff should provide to unemployment claimants, the claimant's responsibilities, and the process for identifying and reporting potential issues.

B. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

Unemployment claimants are priority customers at Workforce Solutions Offices. Staff promptly assists claimants wishing to use Workforce Solutions Office resources to transmit claim-related materials to TWC for claims and appeals adjudication purposes. Claimants are also given access to space and telecommunications equipment necessary to participate in unemployment benefits hearings. Additionally, staff supports customers with dedicated resources—computers, telephones, and printed materials—to help customers with unemployment-claim filing and claimants' rights and responsibilities.

Occasionally, staff members encounter situations that require that they speak with a claims specialist on behalf of a claimant with urgent and/or time sensitive claim-related issues. Each Board has a dedicated phone number specifically for staff to use in these situations. These dedicated phone numbers are available only to Workforce Solutions Office staff to assist unemployment benefits claimants in special circumstances.

C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Wagner-Peyser-funded ES staff in the Workforce Solutions Offices serves all customers. However, TWC has made unemployment claimants a priority population and, in so doing, staff is charged with providing claimants with a wide array of resources and employment services that support reemployment as quickly as possible.

Among those services is the RESEA program, which incorporates the DOLETA-approved statistical model based on the nationally recognized Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) system. This statistical model is used to analyze claimant characteristics, as well as Board-level economic indicators, to assess the likelihood of a claimant exhausting unemployment benefits. Each week, TWC identifies claimants who are most likely to exhaust their unemployment benefits and who have received their first payment of unemployment benefits. Claimants who have likely-to-exhaust scores that are at or above the Board's cutoff score are outreached for services and provided appropriate reemployment services. At a minimum, claimants outreached under RESEA must receive four services; among those services must be RESEA orientation, the provision of customized labor market information tailored to the claimant's individual needs, and one-on-one meetings to develop a reemployment plan and complete an unemployment benefits eligibility assessment.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

Texas benefits from the joint-administration of the unemployment compensation program and workforce services by TWC, which allows efficient coordination between programs. Computer linkages coordinate and provide services between WorkInTexas.com and UBS. These links ensure that unemployment claimants who are required to register have done so and that claimants comply with their work search requirements.

TWC also administers the work test requirement through the link between WorkInTexas.com and UBS. This linkage confirms that proper notification is provided when unemployment claimants fail to register for work or to comply with their work search requirements, including negative referral results or failure to report for an orientation or to employment. Unemployment claimants who fail the work test are held ineligible for benefits until they meet their requirement. TWC's rules regarding unemployment claimants' work search requirements set a minimum weekly search effort, although each Board may raise or lower the number depending upon the local labor market.

Although DOLETA defines "long-term unemployed" as someone who has been jobless for 27 weeks or longer, TWC works to assist and place individuals in jobs before they reach that point. TWC has developed a performance measure that tracks a Board's success in placing job seekers in employment within 10 weeks of their initial monetary eligibility. Boards achieve this measure by providing quality job postings and job development activities coupled with increased outreach to participants to ensure better job applications and quality job referrals.

TWC uses the RESEA program to help claimants find new employment as quickly as possible. As mentioned above, all claimants who are outreached are required to attend an orientation and receive staff assistance in developing an individualized employment plan. Claimants are offered other staff-assisted services as well, including job referrals and job development activities to help in the work search. By contacting their Workforce Solutions Offices or searching TWC's

Training and Education web page, claimants also can find educational opportunities, occupational or vocational training, and other resources to help develop their skills.[1]

[1] https://twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/training-education

TWC's joint-administration of the UI program and workforce services allows for efficient communication and coordination between programs. WorkInTexas.com and UBS are linked through interfaces, which improves program coordination and the provision of services between programs. Computer system linkages ensure that unemployment claimants who are required to register have done so and that unemployment claimants comply with their work search requirements.

TWC also administers the UI work test requirement through the link between WorkInTexas.com and UBS. This linkage confirms that proper notification is provided when unemployment claimants fail to register for work or to comply with their work search requirements, including negative referral results or failure to report to an outreach request or to employment. Unemployment claimants who fail the UI work test are ineligible for benefits until they meet that requirement. TWC's rules regarding claimants' work search requirements set a minimum weekly search effort while allowing each Board to raise or lower the number depending upon the local labor market.

Texas promotes effective and efficient coordination between the UI program and workforce services through collaborative program administration and computer system linkages that share information and allow staff to coordinate activities and provide services to unemployment claimants. These program and system links ensure that claimants who are required to register in WorkInTexas.com have done so and that claimants comply with their work search requirements.

TWC's link between WorkInTexas.com and UBS also provides a seamless method for administering the UI work test requirement. This linkage confirms that proper notification is provided when unemployment claimants fail to register for work or to comply with their work search requirements, including negative referral results, failure to respond to outreach requests, or failure to report to employment. Unemployment claimants who fail the UI work test are ineligible for benefits until they meet that requirement.

Although DOLETA defines "long-term unemployed" as someone who has been jobless for 27 weeks or longer, TWC strives to assist and place individuals in jobs before they reach that stage. Boards achieve this by providing high-quality job-posting and job-development activities coupled with increased outreach to participants to ensure better applications and quality referrals.

TWC uses the RESEA program to help claimants find new employment as quickly as possible. As priority customers, unemployment claimants are promptly assisted through outreach, orientations, and staff-assisted services that include developing individualized reemployment plans, providing job referrals, working with employers to provide job development activities, and job placements. By contacting their Workforce Solutions Offices or searching TWC's Training and Education web page, claimants can also find educational opportunities, occupational or vocational training, and other resources to help develop their skills.[1]

[1] https://twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/training-education

TWC promotes full integration of its workforce system across all programs, which benefits unemployment claimants by making a wide range of publicly or privately funded education, employment, and training programs readily available and easily accessible. By working with

staff in their Workforce Solutions Offices or searching TWC's Training and Education web page to explore career and training opportunities, claimants can find educational opportunities, occupational or vocational training, and other resources to help develop their skills.

TWC also helps claimants by helping them, when appropriate, develop a reemployment plan—with education and training goals when appropriate—that includes referrals to appropriate programs and resources as well as application assistance for entry into these programs. Boards also prioritize services for claimants, ensuring prompt assistance through outreach, orientations, and staff-assisted services that include developing individualized reemployment plans and evaluating labor market information to ensure that the claimant is seeking employment or training in a career field that offers potential for economic growth and financial prosperity.

E. AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED. AN ASSESSMENT NEED DESCRIBES THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

In Texas, one of every seven working Texans (14 percent) is in an agriculture-related job. The average age of Texas farmers and ranchers is 58 years. Moreover, Texas has more farm operations owned by women and minorities than any other state. The needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs) are best understood by considering Texas' agricultural industry.

Based on the National Agricultural Workers Survey, in Texas, 91 percent of farmworkers are Hispanic/Latino. Family characteristics indicate that 36 percent are married with children. The average income is under $24,999 and 40 percent live in poverty. Data indicates that 74 percent of MSFWs have no high school diploma, and 56 percent have limited English proficiency. MSFWs and their dependents represent some of the lowest paid and most vulnerable groups in the United States, due in part to hazardous working conditions, low wages, employer-provided housing, and limited access to health care. Additionally, factors such as seasonality, crop conditions, weather, and economic shifts make farmworker income unstable.

According to our National Farmer Job Program (NFJP) partner (MET) data, 95 percent of NFJP clients experienced at least one barrier to employment, such as limited English proficiency (39 percent), reading below grade level (56 percent), and long-term agricultural employment (72 percent). Wages below the poverty level and unsanitary working and living conditions are linked to malnutrition, communicable diseases, and disabilities in children, which undermines the well-being of MSFWs and impedes the success of their dependents. Because of unstable housing and home lives, MSFW youth are more likely to have poor school attendance and limited English skills and lack social connections with their peers. These conditions may result in a higher likelihood of dropout, increased criminal behavior, and low educational attainment, thereby facilitating a cycle of generational poverty.

Farmworkers often live in substandard and overcrowded housing conditions. When housing conditions are unaffordable, farmworkers are faced with the choice of paying for housing costs at the expense of other necessities. These issues complicate the ability to participate in training, limit employment prospects, and affect their mental and physical well-being.

One-third of Texas' MSFWs have a permanent home-base residence in seven counties that are ranked among the poorest in the nation. These counties are Hidalgo, Cameron, Willacy, and Starr (in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in South Texas along the Texas-Mexico border) and Dimmit, Zavala, and Maverick (in the Winter Garden region in Southwest Texas). All the counties are within 35 miles of the Texas-Mexico border and are home to colonias in which most farmworkers reside. These communities lack basic utility and public services such as potable water, paved streets, and electricity. Safety, health, and privacy issues are inherent with homes built from boxes, cars, storage containers, wood scraps, and Styrofoam. Sanitation is a serious issue and raw sewage spills into yards and roads.

Housing barriers faced by MSFWs and the underlying issues that impact the ability of MSFWs to maintain housing include unsafe self-built homes, ownership issues that occur due to lack of legal protections, lack of access to affordable rental housing, lack of references, and fair housing and discrimination issues. Substandard housing contributes to a myriad of health concerns associated with unsanitary and overcrowded housing, all of which have a significant impact on employment and training opportunities.

The economic impact of Texas agriculture on the national economy is significant. Texas is in third place with respect to national agricultural production, behind California and Iowa. Texas leads the nation in the number of farms and ranches, with 241,500 covering nearly 130 million acres, and it leads the nation in value of farm real estate. Additionally, Texas leads the nation in the production of cattle, cotton, hay, sheep, goats, wool, and mohair.

Rural lands, including privately owned forest, comprise 144 million acres, which is 86 percent of the state's land area. Twelve percent of Texas' population lives in rural areas, and 98.5 percent of Texas farms and ranches are family farms, partnerships, or family-held corporations.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics services, US Department of Agriculture; the Texas Department of Agriculture; and the Center for North American Studies, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the top 10 sources of cash receipts from the sale of US-produced farm commodities are cattle and calves, broilers, dairy products, cotton, greenhouse and nursery products, corn, chicken eggs, grain sorghum, wheat, and hay. The food and fiber sector totals more than $100 billion annually. Additionally, during 2020, Texas sold $5.81 billion in agricultural exports to foreign countries.

Texas Agriculture National Rankings, 2020

National Rank	Commodity	Value (Millions of Dollars)
6	Total Agriculture Exports	5,814
1	Cotton	1,702
2	Beef and Veal	1,030
3	Other Cattle and Livestock Products	255
4	Dairy Products	438
4	Broiled Meat	239
4	Other Oilseeds and Products	142
4	Hides and Skins	87
5	Tree Nuts	67

National Rank	Commodity	Value (Millions of Dollars)
7	Other Plant Products	521
9	Feeds and Other Feed Grains	320
9	Wheat	191
9	Grain Products, Processed	138
9	Fruits, Fresh	45
9	Fruits, Processed	37
10	Other Poultry Products	78
12	Corn	187
14	Pork	89
14	Vegetables, Processed	63
14	Vegetables, Fresh	38

Source: Economic Research Services, USDA/ERS

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE

Texas Agricultural Regions

Texas ranked sixth nationally in the value of agricultural exports in 2020 and 14th in fresh vegetable production, accounting for about 2 percent of US vegetable production. The leading counties for vegetable acres harvested were Hidalgo, Starr, and Cameron. Other important counties include Frio, Uvalde, Duval, Webb, Hale, Yoakum, and Zavala. Texas ranked ninth in fruit production and fifth in tree nut production, with combined fruit and nut production values at $148 million.

Land preparation, planting, irrigating, and harvesting are ongoing activities; therefore, agricultural employment occurs year-round at numerous locations. Usually, employment for farmworkers begins in the Lower Rio Grande Valley region, served by the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Cameron County Boards, and the Winter Garden and South/Central region, served by the Middle Rio Grande Board. Employment of migrant farmworkers moves northward to the Texas Panhandle as the agricultural season progresses. Workers who follow this crop pattern may migrate to other states as well.

Review of Previous Year's Agricultural Activity in Texas

For the Program Year 2020 (PY'20) Agricultural Outreach Plan, TWC used the most recent available data. Although Texas regions support a wide variety of agricultural activities, data is not collected by a single entity using consistent time frames and methods. Data is limited for agricultural activities such as producing wheat, grain, and other labor-extensive crops and for labor-intensive production such as cotton ginning. Furthermore, available data sources do not collect production or forecast data based on the federal program year. For the purposes of this

plan, calendar years are used when no other data is available. TWC is working with agricultural associations and other sources to improve the data available for planning.

Table 1 summarizes the agronomic crop production statistics for each of Texas' primary growing regions for Calendar Years 2018–2020 (CY'18–20). Regional production statistics for horticultural crops are currently unavailable. For agronomic crops, the vast acreages of grain and row crops in the high plains and rolling plains make up most of the 8.59 million acres planted in the plain's region. The eastern region of the state accounted for the majority of the remainder of agronomic crop production in Texas. Agronomic crops are typically less labor intensive because more capital machinery is used in planting and harvesting as compared to most horticultural crops.

It's important to note that some inconsistencies can be observed during 2020 due to a lack of fully reported data from some regions. Most notably, there is a lack of reporting for cotton in all regions, which explains part of the large decrease in planted and harvested acres of the Far West region.

Table 1

Region	Area Planted (in acres) 2018	Area Planted (in acres) 2019	Area Planted (in acres) 2020	Area Harvested (in acres) 2018	Area Harvested (in acres) 2019	Area Harvested (in acres) 2020	Main Crops
Lower Rio Grande Valley	506,200	328,300	302,300	414,230	339,100	261,600	corn, cotton, sorghum, sugar cane
Plains	7,787,180	8,587,100	4,300,700	3,960,660	5,411,410	2,116,060	corn, cotton, peanuts, sorghum, wheat
Eastern	2,844,300	2,480,300	1,962,000	2,404,710	2,212,.050	1,518,060	corn, cotton, rice, sorghum, soybean, wheat
Far West	437,700	522,600	13,300	46,100	382,800	2,430	cotton, wheat
Winter Garden and South Central	1,049,900	1,120,900	733,200	654,290	832,960	369,530	corn, cotton, sorghum, wheat
Texas Totals	**12,625,280**	**13,039,200**	**7,311,500**	**7,479,990**	**9,178,320**	**4,267,670**	

Source: Data is from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, and Center for North American Studies, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.

Review of the Previous Year's Agricultural Worker Activity in Texas

The Lower Rio Grande Valley has the most labor-intensive production, accounting for most of the horticultural crops in Texas. The top five labor intensive crops include onions, watermelons, citrus, sugar cane, and leafy greens, plus a variety of other produce including cabbage, carrots, potatoes, cucumbers, cilantro, and spinach. Peak harvest seasons typically run from mid-March through late June. The citrus harvest starts in early-to-mid-September and, depending on the quality of the crop, may run through early May. The harvest season in the Winter Garden and South/Central regions runs from mid-May through early July, with onions, melons, greens, squash, and corn as the top five labor intensive crops. Both regions grow winter crops year round. The South Plains harvest season typically runs from mid-July through October, with the top five crops including melons and gourds, greens, potatoes, peas, and beans. Additionally, this area is known for growing winter wheat, sorghum, and other seeds. The cotton ginning peak season typically runs from October through January, depending on the quality of the crop production. In the El Paso region, the peak harvest season runs from late September through early December or the first frost. Crops in this area include chili (jalapeño) peppers, onions, cabbage, pecans, bell peppers, cauliflower, eggplant, broccoli, and cotton. Horticultural crops also are grown throughout the state. Table 2 provides data on Texas vegetable production and average monthly labor, with crop information for CY'18–20. Fruit and vegetable production is typically the most labor intensive.

Table 2

Crop	CY'18 Acres	CY'18 Labor Est.	CY'18 Months	CY'19 Acres	CY'19 Labor Est.	CY'19 Months	CY'20 Acres	CY'20 Labor Est.	CY'20 Months
Citrus (1,000 Boxes)	7,000	4,144	8	6,640	3,329	8	4,960	2,937	8
Peaches (Tons)[1]	2,400	61	3	2,400	61	3	2,400	61	3
Pecans (1,000 Pounds)[1]	33,600	101	3	37,500	113	3	42,600	128	3
Bell Peppers[1]	175	295	6	175	295	6	175	295	6
Cabbage	5,000	510	5	(D)	N/A	5	6,400	663	5
Cantaloupes[1]	2,000	321	2	2,000	321	2	2,000	321	2
Carrots[1]	1,418	58	3	1,418	58	3	1,418	58	3
Chile Peppers[1]	2,500	1,385	5	2,500	1,385	5	2,500	1,385	5
Cucumbers	4,900	4,288	5	(D)	N/A	5	5,700	4,968	5
Honeydews[1]	302	34	2	302	34	2	302	34	2
Onions	11,000	1,587	4	900	1,296	4	11,000	1,587	4

Crop	CY'18 Acres	CY'18 Labor Est.	CY'18 Months	CY'19 Acres	CY'19 Labor Est.	CY'19 Months	CY'20 Acres	CY'20 Labor Est.	CY'20 Months
Potatoes	17,500	257	4	14,800	218	4	15,300	225	4
Pumpkins	4,800	183	4	(D)	N/A	4	3,700	138	4
Spinach, Fresh	210	504	4	(D)	N/A	4	2,800	672	4
Squash[1]	1,500	455	6	1,500	455	6	1,500	455	6
Sweet Corn[1]	2,329	70	4	2,329	70	4	2,329	70	4
Sweet Potatoes[1]	622	13	3	622	13	3	622	13	3
Tomatoes[1]	706	530	7	706	530	7	706	530	7
Watermelons[2]	23,000	711	6	21,500	664	6	19,000	587	6
Total Acreage	**79,952**	**15,506**	**N/A**	**56,852**	**8,853**	**N/A**	**75,452**	**15,135**	**N/A**

Source: National Agricultural Statistics Services, NASS/USDA

[1] Production acreage is based on production data from the previous year.

[2] Acreage is based on yearly yield per acre.

(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individuals' operations

Projected Level of Agricultural Activity in Texas for the Coming Year

As seen nationally, some areas that historically have had high concentrations of agricultural work have experienced industry reduction relative to other types of work, such as employment in the oil and gas, construction, and retail industries. With that industry reduction, there has been a shift in the labor market. While some workers and their families who have long performed agricultural work are now being employed in nonagricultural industries, other workers are struggling to identify transferable skills that will allow them to obtain nonagricultural jobs. A good example is the Eagle Ford Shale boom in the Winter Garden region (in South Texas, north of Laredo and southwest of San Antonio) and the Cline Shale in West Texas. Although employers in the oil and gas industry have a relatively large demand for qualified employees, they find few qualified applicants, in part because the local migrant and seasonal farm worker (MSFW) population lacks the relevant transferable skills and training. The industrial shift has created a challenge for agricultural employers as well. Texas is designated as an agricultural supply state, yet many agricultural employers will have fewer laborers to meet demand. With other employment options available that may be less physically taxing, and fewer immigration controls in place, more workers seek nonagricultural jobs. The state's major citrus growers' associations have said that the labor shortage is one of their most critical issues.

In addition to the issues of labor moving to industries outside of agriculture, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further decreased the number of farmworkers in Texas. Business disruptions and lockdowns diminished agricultural productivity throughout the course of the pandemic, resulting in fewer acres of planted products. Health concerns from workers to avoid exposure to

the virus, as well as being at home to provide child care, also contributed to the shortage of farmworkers in the state.

Despite Texas being considered an agricultural supply state, the factors mentioned above continue to result in agricultural employers having fewer laborers to meet their needs. Major citrus growers' associations in Texas have said that labor shortages have been one of their most challenging issues.

Projected Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFW) in Texas

According to data from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA, and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, TWC estimates that 255,000 MSFWs will be active in Texas in the coming year. Although it is possible that jobs may be lost because of natural disasters and other adverse events, the number of MSFWs that reside in Texas is anticipated to decrease. Currently, there are more than 9,876 active agricultural employers in Texas, based on the North American Industry Classification System codes reported for each employer's UI tax accounts.

Table 3

Agricultural Employers

	PY'19[2]	**PY'20[3]**
Number of Job Postings[1]	1,047	1,307
Number of Job Openings	3,433	3,049
Number of Job Openings Filled	457	105
Percentage of Job Openings Filled	13.3	3.4

[1] Number of job postings does not accurately reflect the number of employers because employers may file multiple postings within a year. Each posting may contain multiple job openings.

[2]PY'19 data represent the July 1, 2019–June 30, 2020 period.

[3]PY'20 data represent the July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021 period.

Table 4

Agricultural Employers (H-2A Only)

	PY'20[1]	**PY'21[1]**
H-2A Job Orders Received	739	938
H-2A Job Orders Certified	703	827

1PY'20 and PY'21 data represents the October 1, 2019–September 30, 2020 period, and PY'21 represents the October 1, 2020–September 30, 2021 period. Data is from the USDOL/OFLC Disclosure Data page.

Several economic, natural, or other factors affect agricultural production in Texas. The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty in production and the reliable need for labor, as well as a moderate increase of H-2A Job Orders certified. Moreover, according to PY'21 program statistics, Texas is now listed for the first time in the top 10 states for H-2A filings by number of workers certified. The following list does not assign these factors an order of importance, as more than one issue may exist at any time:

- COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty of migration for reliable labor
- Increase of H-2A workers

- MSFWs chosen to seek employment locally due to fear of the ongoing pandemic and other matters related to family income, social economic issues, and other factors
- Lack of affordable housing and other risk factors in shared housing
- Ongoing fears of the COVID-19 pandemic and unvaccinated workers and families
- The cost of fuel
- Secondary sources of income related to energy production
- Varied weather patterns. Dry years interspersed with wet years has a critical effect on agricultural production. Because of the size of Texas—268,820 square miles (171,891,725 acres)—weather varies dramatically by geography
- The amount of snowfall in midwestern states can have a negative effect on agricultural production in Texas in relation to the water allotment for irrigation methods along the Rio Grande River.
- Tax policy as it relates to succession from generation to generation. The high average age of farmers—58 years of age—is part of this issue.
- Environmental policies enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- The policy requirements for the agricultural industry established by the Food Safety Modernization Act
- Immigration law and enforcement, particularly as it affects the availability of labor for fruit and vegetable production but also in other agricultural sectors
- Invasive species coming from other parts of the United States or from other countries, which can negatively affect the agricultural production
- The changing nature of US agriculture's domestic policy to a more crop-insurance-based program
- The conversion of agricultural land to developed land for housing and commercial uses
- Water availability affected by weather, the increased need for urban water, and issues related to the 1944 US-Mexico Water Treaty ("Treaty Utilization of Waters of the Colorado and Tijuana Rivers and of the Rio Grande")
- Uncertainty of trade agreements with Mexico and the global economic impact of tariffs that affect agricultural imports and exports

Economic Impact of Imported Fresh Produce from Mexico

Produce imports from Mexico are a major source of economic activity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The United States imported $12.9 billion of produce and products from Mexico during 2017, including fresh, frozen, and processed fruits; vegetables; and nuts. About 98 percent of these imports entered the United States by land ports between Mexico and Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. When considering only fresh fruits and vegetables, which comprise nearly 90 percent of the total, imports totaled $11.7 billion.

Based upon a forecasting approach that includes ongoing trends and input from industry, it is estimated that US produce that is imported from Mexico via truck will increase nearly 35 percent, as shown below in Figure 1. Most of this growth will occur through Texas ports, with imports expected to grow in Texas by 44 percent. By 2025, it is projected that imports to Texas will account for slightly more than half of US produce imports from Mexico. This growth in

imports has implications throughout the border economy, and for the Texas economy especially.

The prognosis of continued expected growth in US imports of fresh produce in general and especially in Texas is based on several factors. One important factor is that US interest rates are beginning to rise, causing the dollar to appreciate, which will spur even more imports. Another important factor is the expanded use of Mexican Federal Highway 40 between Mazatlán and Reynosa for shipments of produce. Further, an expanded infrastructure of trade-services providers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley area has been built to accommodate recent and expected increases in imports, illustrating industry's belief that increased shipments through Texas are likely to continue.

Figure 1: Texas Agricultural Economics Forecast

https://www.twc.texas.gov/files/partners/texas-agricultural-economics-forecast-twc.jpg

http://cnas.tamu.edu/Index/Mexican%20FFV%20Imports%20through%20US%20Land%20Borders%202025%20March%202018.pdf

Estimated Economic Impact

The economic impact of produce imports on agricultural and farmworker activity in the state is compelling. In 2017, direct economic activity attributed to the produce import industry was $401.1 million, requiring an additional $448.5 million in economic activity from supporting industries, resulting in a total economic impact of $849.6 million. By 2025, this economic effect is expected to grow to $577.5 million in direct activity and $645.7 million in supporting activity for a total of $1.2 billion in economic activity throughout the Texas economy. Truck transportation is anticipated to lead direct output at $169.4 million, to be followed by warehousing ($132.1 million); sorting, grading, and packing ($123.6 million); customs brokering ($91.5 million); and miscellaneous border services ($61.0 million).

During 2017, 7,836 jobs were required across Texas to support import operations. Sorting, grading, and packing required 2,021 jobs; customs broker services, 1,069 jobs; warehousing, 1,028 jobs; truck transportation, 779 jobs; and miscellaneous border services, 347 jobs. Another 2,592 jobs were required in supporting sectors. By 2025, 11,281 jobs will be required throughout the Texas economy to support these imports. Sorting, grading, and packing will require 2,910 jobs, followed by customs broker services (1,538 jobs); warehousing (1,479 jobs); truck transportation (1,121 jobs); and miscellaneous border services (500 jobs). Another 6,643 jobs will be required in supporting sectors by 2025.

Table 5.

Summary of Economic Activity from US Produce Imports from Mexico over Land Borders, 2017 and 2025 Forecast with Industry Input

Economic Activity Indicators	**2017**	**2025 Forecast**
Total Truckloads	235,288	338,716
Direct Economic Output	**In Millions**	**In Millions**
Truck Transportation	$11.76	$169.4
Warehousing	$91.8	$132.1
Sorting, Grading and Packing	$85.8	$123.6
Customs Brokering	$63.5	$91.5

Miscellaneous Border Services	$42.5	$61.0
Total Direct Economic Output	$401.1	$577.5
Economic Activity Indicators	2017	2025F
Total Supporting Economic Output	$448.5	$645.7
Total Economic Output	$849.6	$1,223.2
Total Jobs Supporting Produce Imports	7,836	11,281

Source: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA and Center for North American Studies, Department of Agricultural Economics, Texas A&M University/Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service/Texas A&M AgriLife Research

3. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWS IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

MSFW Characteristics

Each geographic area is different and unique in terms of peak season workforce demands. TWC estimates that during peak harvest seasons there will be an estimated 210,000 MSFWs and during non-peak seasons there will be approximately 155,000 MSFWs in the Texas workforce. MSFWs are a unique and very important segment of society and of the US economy. The most recent statewide data from PY'20, below, shows the approximate number of MSFWs by farmworker category:

Farmworkers	PY'20[1] Total Available for Service
Migrant	897
Seasonal	2,127
Year-round	4,150
Total MSFWs	2,783

Characteristics of MSFWs include the following:

- Education: The educational level among MSFWs tends to be low.
- Language: General lack of ability to speak and read English and sometimes lack of ability to read Spanish
- Economic Status: The income level of MSFWs frequently falls well below the poverty level.

- Certain parts of Texas tend to have a larger number of undocumented farmworkers.
- Uncertainty of MSFWs having a safe working environment regarding exposure of COVID-19 and low vaccination rates
- Citizenship: Large percentages of MSFWs are citizens of Mexico or of a Central American country or are of Mexican or Central American ancestry.
- Communication: Other workers may include H-2A workers from countries such as Ukraine and Romania, and workers from countries where a variety of dialects are spoken, such as South African and Central American countries.

Problems and issues facing MSFWs with barriers to employment include the following:

- The mobility of migratory workers, which often means that they do not remain in one location long enough to receive social services.
- Large number of farmworkers do not have medical insurance, making them extremely vulnerable to serious illnesses and COVID-19.
- Due to COVID-19 and the uncertainty of employment, workers are choosing not to migrate.
- Because of the unpredictability of inclement weather, workers are sometimes displaced and liable to lose income. One example of this would be the February 2021 freeze.

Due to the uncertainty of foreign H-2A workers and legal permanent residents, effective January 22, 2022, US citizens from Mexico must show proof of vaccination through all land border entries.

Most MSFWs have limited English proficiency; therefore, they are unable to communicate effectively with social services counselors and other individuals involved in delivering much-needed services.

- The limited vocational skills of many MSFWs
- Public transportation is not available in most rural communities
- Limited access to medical services, including available medical services during off-work hours (agricultural-seasonal cycle), limited access to medical coverage, and adequate access to COVID-19 vaccine and testing

Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff are developing and sharing strategies to meet the following needs:

- Low skills in education/literacy/computers—Workforce Solutions Office staff is trained to identify signs and behaviors that indicate a job seeker with education, literacy, and language barriers. Staff provides one-on-one assistance to those needing individual service.
- Providing resources, COVID-19 pandemic information, social distancing, and other CDC guidelines and workforce solutions training programs and services.
- Workers lack transportation to the work sites—Board and Workforce Solutions Office staffs work with local community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary transportation services during peak production seasons.
- Child care for field workers—Workforce Solutions Office staff works with local community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary child care during peak production seasons.

- Limited knowledge of social and workforce services—Workforce Solutions Office staff shares information with MSFWs regarding the public services of various entities in the local community.
- Lack of trust in government/social service agencies and changes in local service delivery systems—Social service organizations sponsor fairs where Workforce Solutions Office staff provides information regarding local services available to farmworkers and their families. Fairs include attractions such as entertainment, door prizes, and refreshments donated by participating and sponsoring entities. Other sponsored events include employer job fairs, all of which encourage trust and social capital between MSFWs and outreach staff.

Other resources for overcoming employment barriers are as follows:

- Spanish-language brochures covering the range of services available are provided by Workforce Solutions Offices designated as MSFW significant and bilingual offices. Highlighted services include adult education and literacy programs, which provide English language, math, reading, and writing instruction designed to help individuals succeed in the workplace, earn a high school equivalency diploma, and/or enter postsecondary education or career training.
- Regional Community Partnership Network Groups—MSFW significant and monolingual Workforce Solutions Offices plan to establish community network groups to strengthen the community resources available to MSFWs, including working with our National Farmworker Jobs Grantee (NFJP) MET, Inc.
- Community partnerships—Board and Workforce Solutions Office staff simultaneously engage in developing partnerships with educational, housing, and support services, and other community assistance.
- Access to computer information and long-distance telephone services—Boards provide computers in public locations (usually county courthouses or libraries) and encourage community- and faith-based organizations to refer farmworkers to these resources. MSFWs can also call Workforce Solutions Offices toll-free to inquire about or access services.
- Electronic service resources—Boards provide up-to-date information to agribusiness, rural areas, and colonias through online systems such as TWC's website and WorkInTexas.com. These systems ensure easy access to information and user-friendly data and allow communication through public access automation points.

4. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

See e.4.A.

Outreach Activities

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, outreach activities continue through any means necessary, whether in person or virtually. If or when MSFWs are unable to go to the Workforce Solutions Offices, the MSFW outreach program takes the full range of employment services directly to MSFWs where they live and work. The MSFW outreach program provides the framework necessary for Workforce Solutions Office staff to locate, contact, and enhance the employability of MSFWs in Texas. Outreach specialists may provide other assistance at the point of contact or at the Workforce Solutions Office. If needed services are not available through the Workforce

Solutions Office, outreach specialists then make referrals to other agencies and organizations that provide appropriate assistance.

TWC and Workforce Solutions Offices' goals are to ensure that MSFWs are offered employment and training referral services, benefits, and protections, including counseling, testing, and job training referral services that are qualitatively equivalent and proportionate to services provided to non-MSFWs. Outreach specialists help with work registration and job leads, information about the complaint system, and the submission of complaints and referrals for support services. Outreach specialists in certain Workforce Solutions Offices have iPads and laptops and thus are equipped to provide live job searches and job posting referrals.

Year-round outreach activities are conducted in MSFW-significant Workforce Solutions Offices. Workforce Solutions Office staff that is responsible for outreach gains familiarity with the labor market and needs of local MSFWs. To be most effective, outreach specialists must understand the issues unique to MSFWs and be able to speak English and Spanish.

Outreach specialists are responsible for the following preliminary referral to employment and training, post-COVID-19 information, state and federal agency information, community resources, and job-placement functions:

- Contact MSFWs to explain the services available at Workforce Solutions Offices
- Solicit jobs, training opportunities, and employment-related services for MSFWs
- Notify MSFWs of job openings and of their rights and benefits under state and federal employment-related laws. Provide information on the Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System, including sexual harassment and human trafficking
- Assist MSFWs in filing work registrations, completing applications, preparing worker complaints, and arranging appointments and transportation
- Provide information in TEGL 5-20, US DOL guidance, regarding CDC guidelines and other related materials regarding COVID-19 pandemic resources for outreach materials to share with MSFWs and employers
- National Center Farmworker Health Information regarding COVID-19 facts and materials and other related information.
- Provide information about services available through electronic means and how to access this information
- Identify qualified MSFWs seeking employment, according to guidelines of the federal regulations at 20 CFR Parts 651, 653, and 658. The initial and follow-up outreach contacts are made to assist MSFWs in becoming employed or improving their employability

Outreach specialists also perform the following partnership activities:

- Contact agricultural and nonagricultural employers, program operators, community- and faith-based organizations, and education and training providers on behalf of MSFWs
- Attended virtual agricultural employer and other similar trainings conducted by DOL's Wage and Hour Division in several areas of the state
- Present information to school students about migrant education programs in the state either virtually or in person

- Outreach, virtually or in person, to local public and private community agencies and MSFW organizations to establish community referral networks
- Provide advocacy group presentations in person or virtually
- Coordinate with other office partners in serving MSFWs
- Distribute MSFW-assistance brochures, including the farmworker rights brochure
- Perform joint outreach and recruitment missions with National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP). Motivation, Education and Training (MET, Inc.)
- Attend staff training virtually or in person conducted by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and DOLETA, Wage and Hour Division
- Present and participate in meetings at the Texas A&M University, Colonias Program Center for Housing and Urban Development Community Centers (this includes the Promotora program)

Outreach specialists perform the following job placement activities:

- Provide agricultural and nonagricultural employers with information, services, and assistance related to labor issues and needs
- Accept job postings while performing outreach activities in the field or virtually
- Refer MSFWs to the nearest Workforce Solutions Office and one-stop centers to receive services
- Refer qualified MSFWs from the MSFW Outreach Log and from previous contacts through follow-up activities, when there is a job or jobs available for referral or any other follow-up activity needed
- Select qualified MSFWs from the MSFW Outreach Log and offer a job development plan to enhance the MSFWs' applications with additional and/or transferable occupational skills, and matching options for nonagricultural jobs, when there are no job openings available for referral of MSFWs to suitable employment

To ensure that Outreach staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff receive technical assistance and professional development to improve services to MSFWs, training and technical assistance is provided and includes the following areas:

- MSFW equity performance indicators—proper identification and coding of MSFW customers
- Setting up local benchmark or baseline targets for Equity Indicators and Minimum Service Levels
- Technical Assistance on the new MSFW regulations, participants enrolled under the Wagner-Peyser Act, MSFW accountability performance measures, and recommendations for related enhancements to services, including career pathways
- Strategies in strengthening collaboration with Workforce Solutions partners
- Workforce Solutions Office coordination and intake procedures
- Data collection requirements for reportable ES services, Equity Ratio Indicators, and accountability measures

- MSFW carryover applicants (WorkInTexas.com active file) and the impact on Equity performance measures
- Annual staff training conducted by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Office of the Attorney General, Human Trafficking section; by Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, Inc., which provides legal services to farmworkers; and by DOLETA Wage and Hour Division, US Department of Justice, Immigrant/Employee Rights section
- Provide continual statewide in-person or virtual WIT Web Based Training on MSFW enrollments and entering participant services conducted by TWC's Workforce Automation staff or Monitor Advocate.
- Attend virtual migrant coalition and service-provider meetings throughout the state
- Provide virtual TA and Training to Business Services Unit (BSU) representatives and key staff on services to agricultural employers as outlined in the WIOA/AOP with emphasis on the supply and demand areas of the state (ARS)
- Annual training on the Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System
- Agricultural employer seminars throughout the local workforce development areas
- Yearly staff training conducted by the State Monitor Advocate (SMA)
- Employment Service Guide, which includes provisions pertinent to MSFW in general and specifically to the National Job Registry for H-2A Temporary Agricultural Job Posting requirements
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program: Service Delivery, Outreach and Reporting
- Complaint procedures related to MSFWs to include informal resolution
- Program integration strategies for MSFW
- Agricultural Recruitment System procedures and consequences
- Establishing local community partnerships (for example, bringing community groups together, formalizing the traditional migrant subcommittee groups, and forming coalition meeting groups)
- Identifying opportunities to coenroll and integrate program design with Motivation Education and Training, Inc. (MET), WIOA §167, and National Farm Worker Jobs Program Grantee with other center services
- TWC efforts to develop local, regional, and state planning strategies in the agricultural industry with emphasis on supply and demand areas of the state for workers
- Coordinate agricultural business forums. The intended focus of these forums would be relative to pertinent issues that affect both agricultural employers and workers to include laws that affect the agricultural industry sector.
- Coordinate a pre-harvest forum for MSFWs through the migrant education, workforce, community, and farmworker organizations
- Facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce investment system, assist in the creation of jobs within the agricultural industry (permanent year-round), and determine the viable need for a skilled workforce to increase wage gain earners

- Develop strategies to increase opportunities for the MSFW summer youth program to implement goals and objectives that include a tracking system, coenrollment, and coordination with MET's youth program

The Texas workforce system supports the delivery of core services within local communities to assist individuals who need education and training to obtain the basic skills that will enable them to find and sustain employment and become self-sufficient. Workforce Solutions Office staff receives professional development to ensure that each staff member knows about core programs whose purpose is to provide high-quality services to both job seekers and employers.

Outreach workers as well as Workforce Solutions Office staff members receive training on service to MSFWs, ensuring complete enrollment in the WPA labor exchange system as well as performance accountability through biannual training. Additionally, Workforce Solutions Office staff members ensure MSFWs have access to all workforce programs and services available to non-MSFWs, including UI services. UI assistance is provided to MSFWs returning from other parts of Texas or the nation.

To ensure that Board and Workforce Solutions Office outreach staffs receive technical assistance and professional development to improve services to MSFWs, training and technical assistance is provided virtually or in person to include the following areas:

- MSFW equity performance indicators—proper identification and coding of MSFW customers under the Wagner-Peyser Act participant program
- Workforce Solutions Office and outreach staff are trained to understand the unique needs of MSFWs, receive ongoing training and technical assistance to navigate communication challenges with MSFWs, and receive interview refresher training to establish unique relationships with MSFWs and families
- Workforce Solutions Office and outreach staff engage in joint outreach and recruitment with our NFJP partner (MET) and participate in staff development training in the MSFW significant areas. This includes all staff development training conducted by the SMA annually, as well as biyearly training to maximize quality customer service to MSFWs and increase agricultural employer engagement
- Establishing local benchmark or baseline targets for Equity Indicators and Minimum Service Levels performance measures
- Maximizing referral network with other local farmworker organizations to increase outreach capabilities, such as with our NFJP partner (MET) and community-based partners
- SMA provides specialized professional development training (at minimum annually) and technical assistance on engaging MSFWs as local advocates when outreaching and serving MSFWs
- MSFW outreach staff attend, along with other key staff from Workforce Solutions Offices, MSFW coalition meetings and migrant education meetings, as well as engage in local Head Start programs and meetings and other local farmworker organization meetings to enhance coordinated service delivery and outreach strategies
- MSFW outreach and Workforce Solutions Office staff attend agricultural employer seminars conducted by USDOL's Wage and Hour Division and other similar trainings
- Workforce Solutions Office staff and MSFW outreach staff attend biannual or annual training conducted by USDOL's Wage and Hour Division, EEOC, or TWC's Civil Rights Division on sexual assault or coercion and human trafficking

- Strategies for strengthening collaboration with Texas Workforce Solutions partners and other organizations serving MSFWs in the area
- Summary of farmworker rights; OSHA's Water, Rest, and Shade initiatives; migrant education programs; and other support service programs throughout Texas and the nation
- Workforce Solutions Office coordination and intake procedures
- MSFW carryover applicants (active file in WorkInTexas.com) and the impact on Equity performance measures
- MSFW Program: service delivery, outreach, and reporting
- WD Letter 41-10, National Electronic Job Registry for H-2A Temporary Agricultural Job Posting
- Complaint procedures related to MSFWs to include informal resolution
- Program integration strategies for MSFWs
- Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) procedures and consequences
- Establishing community partnerships (for example, bringing community groups together to formalize the traditional migrant subcommittee groups and coalition meeting groups)
- Identifying opportunities to coenroll and integrate program design with MET, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §167, NFJP grantee with other Workforce Solutions Office services
- Initiatives to develop local, regional, and state planning strategies for workers in the agricultural industry, with emphasis on supply and demand areas of the state
- Coordinate agricultural business forums and compliance seminars. The intent of these forums would relate to pertinent issues that affect agricultural employers and workers, including laws that affect the agricultural industry sector.
- Texas workforce system and MET participation in joint outreach and recruitment efforts designed to identify additional clients and immediately expand the range of available services for MSFWs
- Coordinate a pre-harvest forum for MSFWs through the migrant education, workforce, community, and farmworker organizations
- Facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce investment system, assist in the creation of jobs within the agricultural industry (permanent year-round), and determine the need for a skilled workforce to increase wage gain earners
- Provide specific Business Services Unit or key merit ES staff professional development training annually on agricultural employer engagement
- Develop strategies to increase opportunities for the MSFW summer youth program to implement goals and objectives that include a tracking system, coenrollment, and participation in MET's YouthBuild program

The State's Strategy

TWC will continue to coordinate efforts with the US Department of Labor's National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees and other agencies and groups.

TWC entered a statewide memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the NFJP grantee in Texas, MET, Inc., effective January 31, 2014, which has been extended through February 28, 2023. As the DOLETA designated grantee, MET operates NFJP in Texas. This MOU assists in establishing and demonstrating effective outreach coordination coupled with increasing registration activities by MET staff and ES staff. TWC and MET are revising the MOU to reflect WIOA language and support and improve coordination, joint outreach responsibilities, core programs, and performance accountability measures.

TWC and the NFJP grantee in Texas maintain an effective working relationship by coordinating outreach efforts with Boards and community service providers.

Referral and placement of the MSFW customer remains a challenge for states' workforce systems. The capacity to share responsibility for this constituency and efficiently coordinate available resources can leverage local areas' mutual effectiveness as well as improve the customer service experience. Texas encourages coenrollment of MSFW customers in services provided by TWC, Boards, and the NFJP grantee in Texas. The SMA examines coenrollment activity during an annual review of each MSFW-significant Workforce Solutions Office.

The advantages of TWC's statewide MOU with the NFJP grantee in Texas include the following:

- A streamlined information exchange process, which improves the currency and accuracy of shared information
- Coordinated activity among organizations, including immediate services
- Planned participation in joint outreach and recruitment efforts designed to increase customer identification and expand services for MSFWs
- Increased staff awareness about emerging issues within the MSFW community
- A vehicle for periodic review and assessment of the quality of services

TWC and the Workforce Solutions network continue to increase coenrollments with its NFJP partner. This collaborative effort has help to expand the opportunities available for MSFW customers.

TWC's SMA meets quarterly virtually or in person with the NFJP grantee in Texas to discuss improving the coordination and administration of the employment and training services offered to MSFWs. Additionally, the SMA meets regularly with the local MET Regional Coordinators and staff during the MSFW monitoring reviews at the local level to discuss new and improved shared responsibility.

This streamlined approach allows new and improved client programs to receive immediate intervention and fully integrate all programs with the Boards and contract managers. It also allows TWC to:

- provide Board oversight to fully implement WIOA-required changes with our NFJP partner; and
- provide technical assistance and training on the Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System to local Workforce Solutions Office staff.

Outreach Plan for MSFW in Texas

Outreach efforts to the MSFW population will be coordinated between TWC outreach staff and the state's NFJP grantee staff to the fullest extent possible. Coordination efforts will include, but

are not limited to, providing required information on the partner's programs and/or services during outreach, conducting joint outreach, and reporting outreach activities and contacts to the other party. Outreach plans will be shared and compared to identify efforts that could be combined and to identify areas where outreach and/or service delivery is inadequate.

Strategies will be developed to ensure that service delivery collaboration exists for MSFWs in areas where no TWC MSFW outreach staff members are present. This may include the use of technology and other outreach protocols, as well as collaborative partnerships with other state, regional, or local social service agencies.

The state's NFJP grantee responsibilities are as follows:

- Encourage direct service providers throughout the state to enter into a WIOA-based MOU with the local Workforce Solutions Office. These MOUs should describe the specific types and levels of shared responsibilities, participant processes, and joint outreach and case management strategies.
- Ensure that all NFJP participants are registered in WorkInTexas.com and, when needed, registered in The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST) for reporting purposes as needed for their career development.
- Work with the TWC MSFW outreach staff in the development of joint outreach strategies, coordination of participant data files, and coenrollment processes; the conduct of joint WIOA-related professional development for NFJP partner and TWC outreach staff; and the exploration of ways to better serve out-of-school MSFW youth.
- Ensure that data for federal reporting is shared in a timely fashion.

5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

Services for Farmworkers and Agricultural Employers

To meet agricultural employers' needs, Texas Workforce Solutions outreach staff will continue to improve the agricultural referral process by performing the tasks in person or virtually, that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Integrating services for farmworkers and agricultural employers and workers
- Identifying workers who are job-ready when arriving at the work site
- Providing employers with industry information, farmworkers' rights, and support services
- Engaging agricultural employers to determine short- and long-term employment and training needs
- Serving agricultural employers by creating local and regional economic employment opportunities for MSFWs
- Developing strategies to:
    - facilitate and coordinate the engagement of the agricultural industry into the workforce investment system;
    - assist in the creation of jobs within the agricultural industry (permanent year-round); and

    - determine the viable need for a skilled workforce to increase wage gain earners
- Helping employers analyze state and local peak production seasons and recruiting an adequate labor supply
- Promoting the usage of the ARS with Boards' demand and supply areas, as well as encouraging state-to-state coordination
- Collaborating and coordinating with the Texas Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, to increase viability and sustainability in agricultural areas of state

TWC has created communication resources to support Texas Workforce Solutions partners in providing meaningful service to agricultural employers and farmworkers. These communication resources are intended to help find solutions to their employment and training needs. TWC provides these resources by means of the following:

- Electronic service
- Media and printed information
- Organizational coordination

Additionally, TWC's Foreign Labor Certification (FLC) unit, Office of the Monitor Advocate (MA), and Boards partner with agricultural associations to provide educational seminars for employers and to distribute information on various employment topics. TWC may assist in locating resources and speakers for these educational events.

Additionally, FLC also updates and publishes the Texas Directory of Farm and Ranch Associations. This publication lists contact information for state organizations with agricultural business interests. This directory and other resources are included on TWC's AgriculturalServices web page,[1] which links to numerous agriculture-related reports.

Agricultural employer and farmworker services are based on each Board's service delivery plan. Each plan details the programs that the Board provides through the Workforce Solutions Offices under its direction. Additionally, Boards have established Business Services Units (BSUs) to reach out to employers. The goal of BSUs is to understand the needs of their business communities, including agricultural employers, by collaborating with MSFW outreach workers, community partners, chambers of commerce, and industry associations.

BSUs are charged with helping businesses recruit qualified farmworkers and helping job seekers find employment suited to their skills. The Boards address the following issues:

- Lack of transportation to work sites—Board and Workforce Solutions Office staffs work with community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary transportation services during peak agricultural seasons.
- Limited knowledge of state and federal employment laws and regulations—Workforce Solutions Office staff hosts forums to educate employers and agricultural crew leaders on state and federal laws and regulations.
- Lack of efficient use of local human resources—Workforce Solutions Office staff facilitates communication between growers, such as cooperatives, about farmworkers' specific needs. One resource is the AgriLife county extension agent.
- Lack of skilled workers—Workforce Solutions Office staff coordinates short-term training on local crops and farming (for example, forklift certification, food safety, and how to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL)).

- Lack of facilities and/or staff to screen and interview potential farmworkers—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides space in the Workforce Solutions Office for agricultural employers to interview workers. Workforce Solutions Office staff also provides intake and referral activities at the growers' locations.
- Limited administration of farm labor contractors—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides forms and instructions for completing crew leader registration, ensures that farm labor contractors' registration cards are current, and maintains crew leader logs in the offices.
- Limited or inadequate housing—The Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) requires employers to provide no-cost housing to workers who cannot reasonably return to their place of residence after work each day. This is one of the challenges employers face when using ARS, especially in providing housing options suitable for families. TWC participates in MET's Regional Farmworker Housing Summit. (MET is the housing grant coordinator for the NFJP grantee under the WIOA §167 housing grant for Texas.) This regional summit illustrates the valuable collaboration undertaken with housing authority municipalities and nonprofits throughout Texas.

[1] https://twc.texas.gov/businesses/agricultural-services

TWC partners with agricultural associations to provide educational seminars for employers and distributes information on various employment topics, such as the ES and Employment-Related Law Complaint System. TWC may assist in locating resources and speakers for these educational events. Through these seminars and other interactions with agricultural employers, TWC strives to expand and improve services.

In collaboration with other TWC areas, these special units are a resource to help Boards implement strategies that increase coordination among federal and state agencies and private organizations. FLC and MA continue their efforts to encourage the use of the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to link employers that need agricultural labor in Texas with the areas of the state that can potentially supply MSFWs. TWC continues to encourage Boards to think of new and innovative ways to serve agricultural employers and engage communities in rural development.

Workforce Solutions Offices and the Office of the Monitor Advocate continue to market the ES and Employment-Related Law Complaint System at community-agency partnership meetings in areas of Texas that have significant MSFW populations, at training sessions and conferences conducted by the Human Trafficking Task Force, and at meetings and training sessions held by legal advocacy, state, and federal agencies, and community- and faith-based organizations.

Outreach specialists assist with work registration and job leads and ensure that information about the ES and Employment-Related Law Complaint System, farmworker rights brochure, and submitting complaints and referrals for support services is available. Outreach specialists in certain Workforce Solutions Offices have iPads and laptops and thus are equipped to provide live job searches and job posting referrals.

Year-round outreach activities are conducted in MSFW-significant Workforce Solutions Offices. Workforce Solutions Office staff responsible for outreach maintains familiarity with the labor market information and the needs of local MSFWs. To serve this population effectively, outreach specialists must understand the issues unique to MSFWs and be able to speak English and Spanish.

Outreach specialists:

- contact MSFWs to explain the services available at Workforce Solutions Offices;

- notify MSFWs of job openings and of their rights and benefits under state and federal employment-related laws;
- provide information on the ES and Employment-Related Law Complaint System, including sexual harassment;
- assist MSFWs in filing work registrations and applications, preparing worker complaints, and arranging appointments and transportation;
- provide information about services available through electronic means and how to access this information;
- identify qualified MSFWs seeking employment, according to guidelines of the federal regulations at 20 CFR Parts 651, 653, and 658 (The initial and follow-up outreach contacts are made to assist MSFWs in becoming employed or improving their employability.);
- contact agricultural and nonagricultural employers, program operators, community- and faith-based organizations, and education and training providers on behalf of MSFWs;
- present information to students about migrant education programs in the state;
- outreach with local public and private community agencies and MSFW organizations to establish community referral networks;
- provide advocacy group presentations;
- coordinate with other office partners in serving MSFWs;
- distribute MSFW-assistance brochures;
- perform joint outreach and recruitment missions with National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP);
- attend staff training conducted by US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and DOLETA, Wage and Hour Division;
- present and participate in meetings with the Texas A&M University's Colonias Program and Center for Housing and Urban Development, which includes the Promotora program;
- solicit jobs, training opportunities, and employment-related services for MSFWs;
- provide agricultural and nonagricultural employers with information, services, and assistance related to labor issues and needs;
- accept job postings while performing outreach activities in the field;
- refer MSFWs to the nearest Workforce Solutions Office to receive services;
- refer qualified MSFWs from the MSFW Outreach Log and from previous contacts through follow-up activities, when there is a job or jobs available for referral; and
- when there are no job openings available for referral of MSFWs to suitable employment, select qualified MSFWs from the MSFW Outreach Log and offer a job development plan to enhance the MSFWs' applications with additional and/or transferable occupational skills as well as matching options for nonagricultural jobs.

To meet agricultural employers' needs, Texas Workforce Solutions will continue to improve the agricultural referral process, including, but not limited to:

- integrating services for farmworkers and agricultural employers and workers;
- identifying workers who are job-ready when arriving at the work site;
- providing employers with industry information, farmworkers' rights, and support services;
- engaging agricultural employers to determine short- and long-term employment and training needs;
- assisting employers in analyzing state and local peak production seasons and recruiting an adequate labor supply;
- collaborating and coordinating with the Texas Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, to increase viability and sustainability in agricultural areas of the state; and
- using the job-matching process for temporary agricultural work on an intrastate and/or interstate basis through ARS.*

*Texas is primarily a labor supply state for ARS.

TWC has created a variety of communication resources to support Texas Workforce Solutions partners in providing meaningful service to agricultural employers and farmworkers. These communication resources are intended to help find solutions to their employment and training needs. TWC provides these resources by means of the following:

- Electronic service
- Media and printed information
- Organizational coordination

Additionally, TWC partners with agricultural associations to provide educational seminars for employers. FLC and/or the SMA distributes information on various employment topics such as the Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System. TWC may assist in locating resources and speakers for these educational events. Through these seminars and other interactions with agricultural employers, TWC strives to expand and improve FLC and/or SMA services.

FLC also updates and publishes the *Texas Directory of Farm and Ranch Associations*. This publication lists contact information for state organizations with agricultural business interests.

This and other resources are available on TWC Agricultural Services web page, which links to numerous agriculture-related reports.[1]

Agricultural employer and farmworker services are based on each Board's service delivery plan. The plan details programs that the Board provides through Workforce Solutions Offices under its direction. Additionally, Boards have established BSUs to reach out to employers. BSUs strive to understand the needs of their business communities, including agricultural employers, by collaborating with MSFW outreach workers, community partners, chambers of commerce, and industry associations.

BSUs are charged with helping businesses recruit qualified farmworkers and helping job seekers gain employment suited to their skills. The Boards address the following issues:

- Lack of transportation to worksites—Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff work with community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary transportation services during peak agricultural seasons.
- Limited knowledge of state and federal employment laws and regulations—Workforce Solutions Office staff hosts forums to educate employers and agricultural crew leaders on state/federal laws and regulations.
- Lack of efficient use of local human resources—Workforce Solutions Office staff facilitates communication among growers, such as cooperatives, on farmworkers' specific needs. One resource is the AgriLife County Extension Agent.
- Lack of skilled workers—Workforce Solutions Office staff coordinates short-term training on local crops and farming (for example, forklift certification, food safety, and CDL).
- Lack of facilities and/or staff to screen and interview potential farmworkers—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides space in the Workforce Solutions Office for agricultural employers to interview workers. Workforce Solutions Office staff also provides intake and referral activities at the growers' locations.
- Limited administration of farm labor contractors—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides forms and instructions for completing crew leader registration, ensures that farm labor contractors' registration cards are current, and maintains crew leader logs in the Workforce Solutions Offices.
- Limited or inadequate housing—ARS requires employers to provide no-cost housing to workers who cannot reasonably return to their place of residence after work each day. This is one of the challenges employers face when using ARS, especially in providing housing options suitable for families. TWC participates in MET's Regional Farmworker Housing Summit. (MET is the housing grant coordinator for the NFJP grantee under the WIOA §167 housing grant for Texas.) This regional summit illustrates the valuable collaboration undertaken with housing authority municipalities and nonprofits throughout Texas.

MSFWs in Texas often face poverty, low academic achievement, limited English proficiency, and inadequate job training and readiness, as well as various social problems. The Texas workforce system's approach focuses on those barriers to acquire and retain productive employment. To this end, Workforce Solutions Offices reaffirm existing community partnerships and continuously establish new community partnerships to meet the needs of local businesses and MSFWs, while providing job seekers with job search workshops, job placement services, referrals, and support services.

1. https://twc.texas.gov/businesses/agricultural-services

To meet agricultural employers' needs, Texas Workforce Solutions outreach staff will continue to improve the agricultural referral process by performing activities in person or virtually, that include, but are not limited to:

- integrating services for farmworkers and agricultural employers and workers;
- identifying workers who are job-ready when arriving at the worksite;
- providing employers with industry information, guidance on farmworkers' rights, and support services;

- engaging agricultural employers to determine short- and long-term employment and training needs;
- assisting employers in analyzing state and local peak production seasons and recruiting an adequate labor supply;
- collaborating and coordinating with the Texas Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, to increase viability and sustainability in agricultural areas of the state; and
- using the job-matching process for temporary agricultural work on an intrastate and/or interstate basis through ARS.*

*Texas is primarily a labor supply state for ARS.

TWC has created a variety of communication resources to support Texas Workforce Solutions partners in providing meaningful service to agricultural employers and farmworkers. These communication resources are intended to help find solutions to their employment and training needs. TWC provides these resources by means of the following:

- Electronic service
- Media and printed information
- Organizational coordination

Additionally, TWC works with agricultural associations to provide educational seminars for employers. FLC and/or the SMA distributes information on various employment topics such as the ES and Employment-Related Law Complaint System. TWC may assist in locating resources and speakers for these educational events. Through these seminars and other interactions with agricultural employers, TWC strives to expand and improve FLC and/or SMA services.

FLC also updates and publishes the *Texas Directory of Farm and Ranch Associations*. This publication lists contact information for state organizations with agricultural business interests.

This and other resources are available on TWC's Agricultural Services web page, which links to numerous agriculture-related reports.[1]

Agricultural employer and farmworker services are based on each Board's service delivery plan. The plan details programs that the Board provides through Workforce Solutions Offices under its direction. Additionally, Boards have established BSUs to reach out to employers. BSUs strive to understand the needs of their business communities, including agricultural employers, by collaborating with MSFW outreach workers, community partners, chambers of commerce, and industry associations.

BSUs are charged with helping businesses recruit qualified farmworkers and helping job seekers gain employment suited to their skills. The Boards address the following issues:

- Lack of transportation to worksites—Board staff and Workforce Solutions Office staff work with community- and faith-based organizations and other entities to provide temporary transportation services during peak agricultural seasons.
- Limited knowledge of state and federal employment laws and regulations—Workforce Solutions Office staff hosts forums to educate employers and agricultural crew leaders on state and federal laws and regulations.
- Lack of efficient use of local human resources—Workforce Solutions Office staff facilitates communication among growers, such as cooperatives, on farmworkers' specific needs. One resource is the AgriLife County Extension Agent.

- Lack of skilled workers—Workforce Solutions Office staff coordinates short-term training on local crops and farming (for example, forklift certification, food safety, and CDL).
- Lack of facilities and/or staff to screen and interview potential farmworkers—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides space in the Workforce Solutions Office for agricultural employers to interview workers. Workforce Solutions Office staff also provides intake and referral activities at the growers' locations.
- Limited administration of farm labor contractors—Workforce Solutions Office staff provides forms and instructions for completing crew leader registration, ensures that farm labor contractors' registration cards are current, and maintains crew leader logs in the Workforce Solutions Offices.
- Limited or inadequate housing—ARS requires employers to provide no-cost housing to workers who cannot reasonably return to their place of residence after work each day. This is one of the challenges employers face when using ARS, especially in providing housing options suitable for families. TWC participates in MET's Regional Farmworker Housing Summit. (MET is the housing grant coordinator for the NFJP grantee under the WIOA §167 housing grant for Texas.) This regional summit illustrates the valuable collaboration undertaken with housing authority municipalities and nonprofits throughout Texas.

Boards receive assistance from TWC in implementing strategies that address these issues through coordination among federal and state agencies and private organizations. TWC's efforts encourage the use of ARS to link employers needing agricultural labor in Texas. Using ARS enables employers to recruit workers without the use of foreign labor, which is particularly critical because of the cap on the number of H-2B workers allowed to obtain visas and the complexity of the H-2A process.

TWC also collaborates with Boards to develop innovative ways to serve agricultural employers and engage communities in economic and rural development. To these ends, TWC coordinates and facilitates Agricultural Employer Forums (Forums) in partnership with agriculturally significant areas of the state, including the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Middle Rio Grande, Upper Rio Grande, and South Plains Boards, and TWC's MA. The Forums are a cooperative effort between federal and state governments and the private sector to keep the public informed about issues that impact agricultural employers and workers. The Forums may cover laws that affect the agricultural sector; they also provide education, outreach, and information on regulations to spur greater compliance by employers and better working conditions for agricultural workers. Depending on the needs of agricultural associations and employers, the following agencies may participate:

- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Internal Revenue Service
- US Social Security Administration
- US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- US Department of Justice/Office of Special Counsel
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- TWC's Tax Department
- DOL, Wage and Hour Division

- DOLETA
- US Department of Homeland Security
- US Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- MET, Inc.
- Agricultural institutions of higher education
- Local and regional water allotment and irrigation districts

[1] https://twc.texas.gov/businesses/agricultural-services

6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A. COLLABORATION

Organizational Coordination

Boards receive assistance from the FLC and/or the SMA in implementing strategies that address these issues through coordination among federal and state agencies and private organizations. FLC's and/or SMAs efforts encourage the use of the agricultural recruitment system to link employers needing agricultural labor in Texas with MSFW supply. Use of the agricultural recruitment system enables employers to recruit workers without the use of foreign labor, which is particularly critical because of the cap on the number of H-2B workers allowed to obtain visas and the complexity of the H-2A process.

TWC also collaborates with Boards to develop innovative ways to serve agricultural employers and engage communities in economic and rural development. To these ends, TWC coordinates and facilitates Agricultural Employer Forums (Forum) in partnership with agriculturally significant areas of the state, including the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Middle Rio Grande, Upper Rio Grande, and South Plains Boards, and TWC's SMA. The Forums are a cooperative effort between federal and state governments and the private sector to keep the public informed about issues that impact agricultural employers and workers. The Forums may cover laws that affect the agricultural sector; they also provide education, outreach, and information on regulations to spur greater compliance by employers and better working conditions for agricultural workers. Depending on the needs of agricultural associations and employers, the following agencies may participate:

- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Internal Revenue Service
- US Social Security Administration
- US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- US Department of Justice/Office of Special Counsel
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- TWC's Tax Department
- US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division
- US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration
- US Department of Homeland Security

- US Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- MET, Inc.
- Agricultural institutions of higher education
- Local and regional water allotment and irrigation districts

B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

Transmission of the Combined State Plan (Plan) includes assurances that interested parties were given an opportunity to review and provide public comment on the Plan; such parties include, but are not limited to, WIOA §167 National Farmworker Jobs Program grantees, other appropriate farmworker groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested employer organizations.

This agricultural outreach plan was posted for public comment, February 15, 2022, through March 17, 2022. No public comments were received during the 30-day comment period.

C. DATA ASSESSMENT

Performance Indicators Reflecting Equity

TWC will continue to work with Boards to maintain and improve performance for the equity-ratio indicators and minimum service-level indicators. For the past several years, in order to ensure that optimal performance is being adequately measured, Texas has attempted to meet all equity-ratio indicators and minimal service level indicators to better examine the new reporting structure and WIT (VOS) web-based system collection. During the SMA's visits in PY'19–20, the SMA discussed performance for these measures with Board management, Workforce Solutions Office management, and MSFW outreach staff. Monitoring efforts during PY'19–'20 have focused on the changes in performance.

Meeting the placement minimum service level indicators for PY'20 may pose challenges for TWC, as experienced in PY'19. The following conditions contribute to this challenge:

- Due to post-COVID-19 office closures and current MSFW minimum service level indicators, MSFW labor supply states, such as Texas, are at a disadvantage. Because of the mobility of MSFWs—many workers move to take jobs in other states—the measurable outcome, assuming UI wage data matches with TWC's data, out- of-state farmworkers augment performance accountability measures
- MSFWs reside in areas that experience the highest rates of unemployment.
- Many states do not require UI claimants who file interstate claims to register in the local job matching system or to participate in the UI availability-for-work requirement.
- Wages are depressed in areas with high unemployment, which increases the migration of local workers to other parts of the state and to other states.
- Much of the work performed by MSFWs has been paid on a piece-rate basis.

Texas is known to provide labor to most of the nation. Performance accountability standards are based on rolling quarter UI data and can pose a challenge to measuring accountability measures. Historically, placements were measured at an hourly rate, thus excluding placements paid by piece rate. Therefore, reported performance does not accurately reflect all activity in the wages at placement category. Workforce Solutions Office staff can increase placements and meet the minimum service level indicators by developing strategies to serve MSFWs by:

- emphasizing services that will result in more MSFWs being placed in agricultural and nonagricultural jobs;

- providing local agricultural peak-season plans to assist agricultural employers and to engage in the agricultural sector while creating job placement initiatives for MSFWs;
- referring MSFWs to Workforce Solutions Office services;
- stressing the use of electronic, self-service systems to encourage MSFWs take an active role in their job search;
- coordinating with Workforce Solutions Office partners to foster an effective outreach program—including maintenance of the MOU with MET and other farmworker organizations and community partners; and
- promoting economically self-sustaining, year-round jobs through skills development under the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), MET, and curriculum development with local community colleges.

MSFW-Significant Workforce Solutions Office Affirmative Action Plans

DOLETA has designated the Edinburg, Mission, and Weslaco Workforce Solutions Offices (Lower Rio Grande Valley Board) as representing the top 20 percent of MSFW activity nationally. These Workforce Solutions Offices have implemented affirmative action plans to ensure that the number of MSFW outreach specialists on the staff continues to reflect the local MSFW population.

The composition of TWC's ES staff at these Workforce Solutions Offices has not significantly changed during the past 10 years; however, there has been some turnover in outreach specialists. TWC and the Texas workforce system have announced job vacancies through various farmworker organizations, including MET, which is TWC's NFJP partner. Most ES staff members are long-term employees who are familiar with the employment issues of MSFWs and are sensitive to their needs. Approximately 70 percent of ES staff in these significant locations have worked in or been involved in agriculture and are familiar with the industry. Staff has traditionally worked closely with outside agencies, organizations, and workforce service providers to coordinate services for MSFWs. Additionally, staff is familiar with ongoing agricultural activities and trends, employment-related issues, and the laws and regulations that protect this population.

D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

An assessment of progress is noted throughout this AOP section.

E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

The Texas SMA has had the opportunity to review and comment on the agricultural outreach plan and has approved the plan as submitted. The SMA contributed to the design, scope, and priorities of this plan as a method of continuing to serve and meet the needs of Texas agricultural employers, workers, and industry.

WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time (sec 121(e)(3));	Yes
2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;	
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and	Yes
4. SWA officials: 1) Initiate the discontinuation of services; 2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued; 3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued; 4) Approve corrective action plans; 5) Approve the removal of an employer's clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days; 6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs' behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and 7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.	Yes

WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	61.0%	61.0%	62.0%	61.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	61.0%	63.0%	62.0%	63.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5900	$6300	$5950	$6300
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Gains				
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS

Texas Adult Education and Literacy Content Standards were finalized, meeting the requirement that, by July 1, 2016, TWC content standards for adult education align with state-adopted challenging academic content standards under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended. TWC curriculum aligned with the new standards on October 1, 2016. These content standards align with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) state-adopted academic content standards, as adopted under §1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as well as the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards; the high school End-of-Course Exams for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR); the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency; and the Texas Success Initiative, the Texas college readiness assessment.

TWC contracted to facilitate the addition of entry-level industry expectations to the AEL content standards. Four lead organizations, along with industry experts and adult educators, worked with TWC to align standards with four target industries. The result of this project, which was completed in 2018, was the Texas Adult Education and Literacy Content Standards 2.0 (Standards 2.0), which updates and aligns the 2016 Texas Adult Education and Literacy Standards with the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in in-demand entry- and intermediate-level jobs in four industry clusters: advanced manufacturing; construction and extraction; health care sciences; and transportation, distribution, and logistics. While the 2016 content standards were unchanged with this update, Standards 2.0 aligns academic standards with jobs and provides a resource for workforce development specialists and educators to focus instruction and career guidance, guide the skills development needed for work, and to define skills and tasks not easily identified in academic standards.

In fall 2020, TWC began planning the next phase of content standards enhancement, the Standards 3.0 project, which adds Family Literacy and Civics Education benchmarks to the Standards 2.0. TWC developed training on implementing these benchmarks in adult education classrooms. TRAIN PD, the statewide professional development center, held regional training events in late spring 2021. With the publication of these Family Literacy and Civics Education standards, beginning Program Year 2021–2022 (PY'21–'22), AEL grants and TWC policy amendments required that all ESL coursework include a civics component.

B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

In fall 2017, Texas conducted a statewide competition of services, under RFP 320-18-01, to fund contracts through June 30, 2020. Thirty-six AEL grant recipients were awarded grants. The grant period is for two years (that is, 24 months) with an option for TWC to renew the grant for an additional one-year period, as many as three times. The start date for the original two-year

period (24-month period) was July 1, 2018, and TWC is currently renewing grants on a one-year basis through June 30, 2023. However, if TWC determines at the end of each contract renewal period that the grantee is not performing or that the outcomes are not being achieved, TWC can allow the grant to expire. If the grantee is struggling and TWC has an enhanced technical assistance plan in place to support the grantee, TWC can authorize the grant for another year to reassess at the end of that year whether to continue to fund the grant.

Fall 2022 Statewide RFA

For the next statewide RFA, which will be published in fall 2022 for grant awards to be effective July 1, 2023, state staff will revise application items that were addressed during OCTAE's 2019 virtual monitoring review of the 2017 statewide grant application process related to demonstrated effectiveness. In the upcoming RFA, TWC will:

- separate the past effectiveness criteria, one of the 13 considerations, from demonstrated effectiveness, ensuring all applicants meet provider eligibility requirements.
- screen for an applicant's demonstrated effectiveness before the review of that application.
- require all consortium members to submit information on their demonstrated effectiveness prior to the application being reviewed as well.

TWC will explicitly outline the thirteen considerations specified in WIOA §231(e) as grant award requirements required of eligible providers, and as it relates to instructional services, require that applicants respond to how they will respond to each of these considerations.

As in previous grant competition cycles, TWC will not run different grant competitions for funds under 231, 225 corrections, or 243 IELCE in the next statewide RFA. TWC will continue to require that AEL grant recipients provide all required AEFLA activities for 231 and 243 activities based on the allocation methodology, which includes a proportionate share based on census data for the service delivery area to conduct the following activities:

1. **Intensive Services,** will include the following services. AEL grantees must provide services in one of these areas:
    a. Workplace AEL Activities,
    b. Services for Internationally-trained ELL Professionals (as allowed under 243 as services for English language learners, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native counties), and
    c. Transition to Re-entry and Post-Release Services (as allowed under Section 225 for individuals who are institutionalized).

TWC assigns enrollment targets to each grantee for Intensive Services, which are further described in the Texas AEL Guide,. The guide was last published in 2017 and will be revised by July 2023.

2. **Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs** to provide AEL activities contextualized for Workforce Training, including workforce preparation activities. IET programs include those funded with 231 funds and 243 IELCE funds for programs for English Language Learners that are in combination with IET. All IET programs include workforce preparation activities and Integrated education and training that provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster and is for the purpose of educational and career advancement. TWC guidance for IETs is outlined in AEL Letter 02-16, Change 1, which provides the

regulatory guidance in 34 CFR Part 463. Additionally, TWC guidance for IELCE programs in AEL Letter 04-16, Change 2 requires that all grantees provide IELCE in combination with IETs as required under WIOA.

TWC assigns enrollment targets to IET programs, and grantees are required to provide IELCE in combination with IET for ELLs in their service area.

3. **AEL Activities**, or as TWC has named "Popular Adult Education Services," improve an eligible individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English and perform mathematics or other activities necessary for the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent; transition to postsecondary education and training; and obtain employment. Popular services include EL civics education programs for English language learners (with 231 funds) and IELCE programs (with 243 funds but not in combination with IET), English Language Acquisition programs, HSE preparation coursework, and on-ramp to postsecondary education and training programs.

As with current grants, the next RFA will allow the following activities:

1. Family Literacy Activities, as defined in WIOA, which are activities that are parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency, including:

    a.

        i. engaging in interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children, training parents or family members on how to be the primary teacher for their children and how to be full partners in the education of their children, and

        ii. modeling how to provide age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

2. **Corrections Education** to provide educational programs for individuals in correctional institutions and other institutionalized individuals. All WIOA Sec. 225 funded academic programs must serve individuals that are institutionalized, even those who are post-release and may include the following:

    a.

        i. Basic education

        ii. Special education programs as determined by the Texas Education Agency

        iii. English literacy programs

        iv. Secondary school credit programs

        v. IET

        vi. Concurrent enrollment

        vii. Peer tutoring

        viii. Transition to reentry initiatives and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism

C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS

TWC's AEL grant recipients may use funds, as allowable, to provide educational programs for individuals in correctional institutions and other institutionalized individuals. Academic programs include the following:

- Basic education
- Special education programs as determined by the Texas Education Agency
- English literacy programs
- Secondary school credit programs
- IET
- Concurrent enrollment
- Peer tutoring
- Transition to reentry initiatives and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism

Corrections is an optional activity for grantees, and the solicitation of §225 funds is combined with the overall grant application, with grantees proposing corrections activities. Programs who choose to implement Corrections Education programs utilizing Sec. 225 funds must support individuals who are institutionalized, including those in post-release.

TWC is continuously working to implement IET in correctional facilities (where permitted) to support the successful transition of individuals from prison to employment. In spring 2021, OCTAE accepted TWC AEL to participate in a national technical assistance initiative to develop IET in corrections models to support the expansion of such models in Texas. In September 2021, TWC approved a state-leadership–funded initiative to support the expansion of IET models in correctional facilities through a contract with Windham School District (the statewide school district serving incarcerated individuals) to develop and expand IET models for an estimated 500 incarcerated individuals who are within two years of pre-release, provide reentry and post-release services to those individuals, and disseminate best practices on developing such models for AEL and workforce system stakeholders. Both the national technical assistance project and the IET in corrections initiative will enable state staff to provide enhanced technical assistance to AEL programs on §225-funded corrections programs.

Fall 2022 Statewide RFA

As in previous grant competition cycles, TWC will not run different grant competitions for funds under 231, 225 corrections, or 243 IELCE in the next statewide RFA, which will be published in fall 2022. TWC will continue to provide grantees the option of implementing Corrections programs with 225 funds as an optional activity. Additionally, all grantees are required to provide Intensive Services and must choose one of three Intensive Services models to fulfill this requirement; one of these models is Transition to Re-entry and Post-Release Services (with 225 funds). All WIOA Sec 225 funded programs will serve individuals that are institutionalized, including those who are post-release.

D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Describe how the State will establish and operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education programs under Section 243 of WIOA, for English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, including how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities.

TWC requires the implementation of IELCE program activities into all of its statewide grants. In the upcoming RFA , TWC will continue to require that all grantees implement an IELCE program. Each grantee receives a proportionate share of 243 funds based on census data to implement an IELCE program. The RFA will require grantees to deliver a service approach that assists individuals who are ELLs, including Internationally-trained Professionals, achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of the English language and that leads to:

- attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and transition to postsecondary education and training, or
- employment, and
- may include Workforce Training.

Starting in PY'21–'22, statewide contracts were amended to state that all ESL activities include a civics component. This change was supported through policy revisions via three AEL Letter updates that require all ESL coursework to include a civics component that aligns with the content standards' new civics standards. This new policy required that grantees ensure all ESL services and curricula include a civics component that aligns with the AEL content standards' civics standards. This approach enabled TWC to simplify enrollment targets, which were previously in five enrollment categories, to three.

The three AEL letters revised to reflect this new policy that went into effect July 1, 2021, and which will be reflected in the upcoming AEL RFA as are follows:

- AEL Letter 04-16, Chg 2, "Implementing Integrated Education and Training English Literacy and Civics Education—Update". This letter restates requirements in 34 CFR 463 and outlines how grantees must implement an Integrated Education and Training English Literacy and Civics Education 243 program in combination with IET. This updated AEL Letter adds a requirement that all English as a Second Language (ESL) services and curricula include a civics component beginning July 1, 2021. This letter requires that grantees deliver Integrated EL Civics education through a program of study delivered as follows:
    - Instructional services in:
        - English as a Second Language and literacy instruction and
        - Civics education instruction, which emphasizes the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation, and US history and government, to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to become active and informed parents, workers, and community members.
    - Delivery:
        - In combination with Integrated Education and Training (IET) in specific occupations or occupational clusters, provides workforce training opportunities for eligible participants to prepare and place participants in unsubsidized employment in in-demand occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency; and
        - in collaboration with Boards to carry out the activities of the program.
- AEL Letter, 07-17, Change 1, "Required Syllabus Design for Adult Education and Literacy Instruction—Update. This letter provides guidance on developing syllabi for AEL instructional programs, including specific guidance on ESL programs. The ESL program

syllabus must describe how the course aligns with the content standards, including a civics component that aligns with AEL content standards' civics standards; fit into a sequence of courses leading to attainment of a certificate of HSE and/or enrollment in postsecondary education, training, or employment; or be part of a career pathway.

- AEL Letter 01-17, Chg 1, "Implementing Programs, Activities, and Services for English Language Learners—Update". This letter includes information, guidance, and capacity-building support related to implementing programs, activities, and services for English language learners.

Describe how the State will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, an Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program and how the funds will be used for the program.

The upcoming statewide RFA will provide be allocated to grantees. (TWC will not run separate grant competitions for these two funding streams.) TWC rule §800.68 outlines the allocation methodology for AEL programs and provides that at least 82.5 percent of the federal funds provided to TWC from amounts under AEFLA §243 for EL/Civics will be allocated by the TWC's Commission among the workforce areas according to the established federal formula, as follows:

- The relative proportion based on:
    - 65 percent of the average number of legal permanent residents during the most recent 10-year period, available from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services data; and
    - 35 percent of the average number of legal permanent residents during the most recent three-year period, available from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services data;
- a base amount of 1 percent for each workforce area; and
- the application of a hold-harmless/stop-gain procedure.
- No more than 5 percent of the funds expended as part of this workforce area allocation shall be used for administrative costs, but can be negotiated to a higher rate if necessary, reasonable, and allocable.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

TWC requires and will continue to require in the upcoming RFA that IETs include integrated services that provide a pathway for ELLs, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, to engage in IET models that align to AEL Content Standards and must:

- be designed to prepare adult ELLs for, and place them in, unsubsidized employment in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors or targeted occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency;
- include instruction for English literacy and fluency; and
- include rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation.

This is also outlined in AEL Letter 04-16, Change 2, which provides that AEL grantees provide Integrated EL Civics services. Integrated EL Civics must:

- include instruction as outlined in the content standards on:
    - literacy and ESL; and
    - the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation;
- be provided in combination with IET, including AEL activities, Workforce Preparation Activities, and Workforce Training outlined in AEL Letter 02-16, Change 2, and any subsequent issuances;
- be designed to prepare adult ELLs for, and place them in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency; and
- be integrated with Board and Workforce Solutions Office functions to carry out the activities of the program.

Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under section 243(a) of WIOA will be designed to integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

When implementing an Integrated EL Civics program, AEL grantees must coordinate with Boards and Workforce Solutions Offices when identifying in-demand industries and occupations and carrying out employment placement in such industries and occupations. Examples of integration include: identifying existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors or target occupations for IET training in the local workforce development area; providing workshops or services as part of IET-required Workforce Preparation Activities; providing employment assistance; using data and wage information for the workforce area or region; and identifying employer partners to support program design, implementation, and employment placement. The upcoming statewide RFA will require applicants to describe the IETs aligned to the Board plan's In-demand or targeted occupations or occupational clusters required for attaining a Credential in order to provide a pathway for ELLs, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries.

E. STATE LEADERSHIP

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

TWC continues to use state leadership funds to support activities that strategically position the statewide system not only for continuous improvement across program outcomes but also for innovation in new directions related to full system integration with core programs and postsecondary education and training.

TWC will continue to focus the allowable grant funds made available under WIOA §222(a)(2) to carry out state leadership activities that enhance the quality and compliance of the AEL system and support the development of innovative models of service delivery. Updates provided in this Combined State Plan modification include initiatives that have since been approved by TWC's three-member Commission (Commission) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other strategies of statewide significance.

In April 2020, shortly after Governor Abbott declared Texas a disaster site in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission approved state leadership–funded initiatives to provide AEL grantees with additional resources needed as a result of the pandemic.

On June 30, 2021, the Commission earmarked AEL state leadership funds for a comprehensive statewide strategy to end the middle skills gap (SGM123 initiative strategy) in Texas to address job preparedness, connection, and progression to help put more Texas workers on a path

toward a career in a rewarding middle skills job. Middle skills gap initiatives funded with state leadership funds are further described in this section and include the acronym SGM123.

Required projects under WIOA §223 for which TWC has designated State Leadership funds, and anticipated projects that will be continued or designated for development and implementation, are further described below.

Commission Approval of State Leadership-Funded Initiatives

Initiatives that are funded with AEL state-leadership WIOA §223 funds must be approved by the Commission; furthermore, Labor Code and Texas Administrative Code rules provide that the Commission must review and approve AEL grant awards, including state-leadership funded initiatives**.**

Sec. 223(a)(1)(A) for the alignment of AEL activities with other core programs

Both the Career Pathways Professional Development Center (CPPDC), previously known as the Career Pathways Expansion grant, and the Accelerate Texas initiatives support the continued development of content and delivery models that support career pathways as required under Section 223(a)(1)(A), supporting alignment with other core programs. The CPPDC, approved by the Commission in June 2021, supports professional development to improve AEL integration across WIOA Titles serving priority populations through cross training of stakeholder groups such as AEL grantees, Boards, Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), and Career and Technical educational providers. The CPPDC will provide evidence-based professional development to stakeholders on:

- quality career pathways models,
- coenrollment across WIOA Titles, and
- strategies that support student success, system alignment, and improved performance outcomes.

In fall 2021, as part of the Commission's SGM123 initiative strategy, the CPPDC contract was amended to allow the grantee to develop curriculum for the construction trades, enhancing IET models for the trades statewide to support AEL programs and Boards as they work to upskill workers and job seekers in Texas.

Another initiative approved by the Commission in fall 2021 to address the middle skills gap and support integration through career pathways expands IET models in correctional facilities. Through this initiative, Windham School District will develop and expand IET models for an estimated 500 incarcerated individuals who are within two years of release, providing reentry and post-release services to those individuals, and sharing best practices with workforce stakeholders to build similar models.

Similarly, the Accelerate Texas initiative supports the expansion of IET models and other postsecondary transition models, including workplace and apprenticeship projects with employers.

In fall 2021, as part of the agency's response to closing the middle skills gap in Texas, the Commission approved funds for a pre-apprenticeship bridge training program (SGM123), further expanding career pathways foundations in the state. This initiative will require grantees to provide remediated instruction to applicants entering building trades–related Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) to build and practice reading and math skills before transitioning into the first year of a RAP. Grant activities include reading and math support, workforce preparation activities, and digital literacy services to ensure that participants are prepared for the rigor of the RAP.

These initiatives increase the capacity to expand, develop, and implement IET models that focus on career pathways service approaches that include workforce training, development, and integration efforts with Texas Workforce Solutions, Texas community colleges, employers, and other system stakeholders.

Sec. 223(a)(1)(B) for the establishment or operation of high-quality professional development programs

Funds for Texas' three professional development centers were earmarked by the Commission in summer 2020. The statewide professional development center supports high-quality professional development to AEL providers and other system stakeholders and provides:

- data-driven professional planning services and implementation delivered through a structure of professional development institutes of routine and concentrated support to AEL providers;
- maintenance of the Texas AEL contract trainer database;
- event planning for statewide, regional, or local conference or business events;
- research activities to evaluate professional development effectiveness; and
- information resources (including an AEL professional development web page, toll-free AEL hotline, and a resource library collection of curricula and other materials).

Funds provided by this center are dedicated to supporting volunteer-based providers and developing administrative and instructional leadership among AEL practitioners through the Leadership Excellence Academy (LEA), and to enhancing the Content Standards in order to help facilitate the publication of, and training on, content developed aimed at improving the Content Standards. In 2021, the statewide professional development center trained AEL administrators and instructors on the Standards 3.0 updates, which included the addition of Family Literacy and Civics standards.

The CPPDC will develop professional development modules for instructors and stakeholders, host yearly statewide institutes and academies, expand the statewide trainer database of on-call subject matter experts, train-the-trainer events, and development of a research-based project each year.

The Distance Education Professional Development Center (DEPDC), awarded in fall 2021, will create a statewide system to deliver distance education and remote learning training, technical assistance, and capacity building services for AEL grantees, workforce system stakeholders, and students.

Sec. 223(a)(1)(C) for the provision of technical assistance to eligible AEL providers

While TWC staff continues to use strategic evaluation and monitoring processes that allow staff to provide just-in-time technical assistance, several state leadership projects augment the state technical assistance efforts as required under §223(a)(1)(C). The statewide professional development center described above supports the following:

- The development and dissemination of instructional programmatic practices and related technical assistance as required under §223(a)(1)(C)(i) and based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate to support eligible providers in implementing reading, writing, mathematics, career pathways, ELA, and distance learning
- Training to providers on content

- The development of Leadership Excellence Academies for instructors and administrators
- Coordination of activities with the CPPDC and DEPDC
- Distance learning and technology development, deployment, and support as required under §223(a)(1)(C)(iii), including increased distance learning professional development and a statewide learning management system to provide online professional development for staff training
- Data-driven professional development planning, services, and implementation
- Routine and concentrated support to AEL grantees and providers
- Management and development of the Learning Management System (LMS), the Texas AEL PD Portal, including information on contract trainers vetted and often trained by the professional development center
- Management and development of the agency-provided LMS (Texas AEL PD Portal)
- Event planning for statewide, regional, or local conference or business events
- Research activities to evaluate professional development effectiveness and for other purposes as approved by TWC
- Provision of information resources to the public, educators, and students
- Development of virtual learning resources in the areas of basic education, digital literacy, workforce preparation, and job search assistance, to provide additional learning resources in response to the pandemic

The statewide professional development center manages the LEA program and builds leadership capacity within AEL local-grantee management, with the objective to develop, implement, and sustain LEAs that provide access to LEA workshops, webcasts, online courses, technical assistance, and electronic portfolios. TWC will continue to provide access to both an Instructional LEA and an Administrator LEA to support providers through an intensive, year-long professional development opportunity to support program growth and performance.

Additionally, the DEPDC provides support to providers on technology and remote learning practices.

Sec. 223(a)(1)(D) to support the monitoring and evaluation of the quality and improvement of services and innovation expansion

Evaluation of local provider services is a priority for the AEL program. TWC staff has worked to develop a strategic evaluation and monitoring process that draws from best practices developed across TWC's divisions. Each of the professional development center grants requires an evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development provided through the grant.

Texas AEL is exploring the possibility of funding additional evaluative studies to further support quality program development, which may be considered and approved by the Commission.

Career Pathways Evaluation Study

One such initiative may evaluate the current status of workforce integration WIOA Titles I, II, and IV programs providing local delivery; facilitate regional discussions with workforce system partners to identify ways to improve integration efforts, including career pathways development; provide state-level and evidence-based recommendations to further support a "One Workforce" system (as promoted by DOL in TEN 13-20) in Texas; and develop resources related to regional career pathways ladders.

To support student success and continuous program improvement, Texas is implementing a program quality model that links deployment of WIOA program enhancements, evaluation of monthly program performance, and information and findings from TWC's monitoring department to just-in-time technical assistance and the deployment of targeted professional development. WIOA §223 funds support activities within this quality improvement model, including the dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices through mentoring and professional development projects. In July 2020, the Commission approved funding for a Quality Performance Enhancement Initiative to support continued performance improvement and operational effectiveness statewide. This Request for Proposals was released in winter 2020, but TWC received no applications for this grant.

Update on Evaluation of Quality of Comprehensive Intake Services

In addition to regular programmatic monitoring and evaluation, TWC AEL staff is working with the TWC I|3 division on a large-scale evaluation process that will analyze the effectiveness of comprehensive intake services, such as student intake, orientation, and onboarding, as they relate to programmatic outcomes.

TWC has invested heavily in providing technical assistance and professional development to the AEL system. I|3 will be working with AEL to see whether TWC can measure the effectiveness of more comprehensive assessment services by looking at student engagement, retention, and outcomes and by comparing students who received more key services as part of a comprehensive assessment to those who received less comprehensive assessment services.

TWC has been accepted into the PY'19 American Institute for Research National Reporting System Evaluation Learning Community sponsored by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) to develop enhanced models based on principles of evaluation and learn how to conduct valid evaluations to answer critical questions around program practices and procedures. TWC participated in the showcase of our findings through the Evaluation Learning Community project via webinar hosted by American Institute for Research. The findings were published by TWC in April 2021 and can be found at https://twc.texas.gov/files/agency/ael-intake-services-study-twc.pdf. These findings were shared in a session at TWC's AEL summer institute in August 2021.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

The Commission may designate other activities of statewide significance that promote the purpose of WIOA, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Assistance to local providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve WIOA's objectives, and in measuring the progress of those programs in achieving the objectives, including meeting state performance
- Promotion of workplace AEL activities
- Continued development and dissemination of curriculum frameworks
- Continued rollout and professional development on content standards updates
- Outreach, develop, and pilot strategies for improving teacher quality and retention
- Development and implementation of programs and services to meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities or limited English-language proficiency
- Performance enhancement mentor initiatives to support performance accountability
- Performance follow-up and case management activities

- Support and promotion of integration efforts between workforce system partners
- Promotion and support for reaching special populations in receiving AEL services
- Expansion of family literacy activities
- Other activities of statewide significance that promote or support AEL activities

The following descriptions provide more detail on allowable state leadership activities for which the Commission has approved and designated Section 223 funds and may continue to provide funds and potential new initiatives. As with all AEFLA-funded grant activities, staff may present initiatives for Commission consideration and approval.

AEL Performance Quality Improvement Awards

The Performance Quality Improvement Awards support AEL grant recipient project performance and innovation through dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices in the state. These awards recognize AEL grant recipients' overall program performance and coenrollment efforts with WIOA Title I programs.

Pell Grant Ability to Benefit Capacity Expansion (potential initiative)

The Ability-to-Benefit initiative provides funding to support colleges in developing services for students who lack a high school diploma or high school equivalency and qualify for Pell Grants under new federal Ability-to-Benefit provisions in federal financial aid regulations. The Commission has previously approved funds for Ability-to-Benefit program models, and the most recent grants ended in fall 2021.

The Math Assistance Call Center

The purpose of the Math Assistance Call Center (MACC), an update to the previously funded Student Support Call Center, is to support AEL students with a focus on high school equivalency mathematics instruction. This initiative was funded by TWC's Commission in April 2020 in order to provide additional learning resources in response to the pandemic. The objective of the MACC is to provide just-in-time math assistance to students enrolled in AEL programs who are preparing for the mathematics portion of the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE) exam or who lack sufficient skills in mathematics to participate effectively in employment, community, and/or home settings. The MACC, which went live in fall 2020, provides 20–30–minute sessions of one-to-one virtual math support to AEL participants via phone calls, screen sharing, and virtual whiteboards.

Learning Management System

The Learning Management System (LMS) is a cloud-based, full-featured, off-the-shelf secure system with course registration and management for in-person, hybrid, and online training events. Funds support access to a cloud-based course library and interactive resources, a web conferencing integrated add-in, and training fees to sufficiently accommodate instructors, administrators, and software content to provide a full array of professional development services across Texas. The LMS:

- enables the statewide professional development center to deliver training using a variety of methods, including online, face-to-face, and hybrid;
- allows for content authoring, training materials storage, and content import/export;
- centralizes and automates the registration, management, and tracking of both external and internal professional development trainings and certifications at individual, subrecipient, grant recipient, and statewide levels;

- provides transcripts for staff trained through the AEL system; and
- provides a 24/7 option for professional development, increasing skills, knowledge, and abilities for AEL staff and stakeholders.

Professional Development for Nonprofit Adult Literacy Organizations

Professional Development for Nonprofit Adult Literacy Organizations include professional development services for tutors, instructors, program administrative staff, and trainers of nonprofit adult literacy organizations. These services include:

- training on literacy volunteer management, which may include volunteer recruitment, training, placement, monitoring, and retention;
- low literacy instruction/tutoring for either native English or nonnative English speakers;
- development of collaborative partnerships and data sharing relationships with AEL grant recipients, libraries, Boards, and VR;
- data sharing relationships with collaborating entities; and
- other services based on the results of a statewide needs assessment and in collaboration with TWC.

Texas AEL Content Standards Update

In PY'19, Texas advanced the standards by incorporating civics and community and family content competencies to the standards to ensure that all facets of AEL activity are aligned with recognized proficiencies. The Commission may approve enhancements to the Content Standards to include additional competencies in the future.

Performance Follow-Up and Case Management

The Performance Follow-Up and Case Management program supports performance data on exit-based measures. Funds support an allocation for grant recipients to provide staff time for follow-up and case management or to purchase such services from entities, including Workforce Boards for students who are not coenrolled in Board services. Funds are allocated through a proportionate distribution with a base amount. This grant expired in 2021, although Texas AEL may consider future funding opportunities for this initiative's purpose.

Performance Enhancement Mentor Initiative

The Performance Enhancement Mentor Initiative supports poor-performing providers through intensive program support and mentoring delivered by the initiative, with high-performing peer providers. This RFA received no applicants, although the Commission may consider future funding opportunities for this initiative's purpose.

Integration Funding (potential initiative)

The objective of the Integration Funding initiative is to promote and facilitate integration efforts between WIOA core programs and other workforce system partners. The Commission has funded these integration initiatives in previous program years, most recently with the Workforce Integration Initiative to support referrals between Boards and AEL programs and post-exit tracking, and will pursue continuous improvement around integration in the future.

Potential Initiatives for Special Populations

The Commission may consider creating special initiatives that support efforts to reach special populations in receiving AEL services, such as, but not limited to, serving opportunity youth and

skilled immigrants, expanding reentry and post-release service models, and providing capacity-building activities for workplace AEL models.

Employer Engagement Initiative

In fall 2021, as part of TWC's response to closing the middle skills gap in Texas, the Commission approved funds for an employer engagement initiative (SGM123) to further workplace literacy models in the state. Grantees will offer workplace literacy activities, workplace literacy activities with employer-provided training, and workplace literacy activities with integrated education and training, leading to industry-recognized credentials through this grant. Grantees are required to develop curricula for workplace programs as a deliverable, which will be disseminated to workforce system stakeholders as educational resources for job readiness and progression within the industry sector.

Family Literacy Supports

Another initiative approved by the Commission to support closing the middle skills gap in Texas (SGM123) is a math family literacy initiative, which enhances and develops math supports for families in Texas by:

- supporting English language learners and their family members' advancements in math;
- offering interactive math services through interactive instruction conducted via telephone or online applications for English language learners and their children;
- being accessible to eligible adult education participants with their children throughout Texas, both online and to those with limited broadband connection; and
- enhancing students' digital skill building.

Adult Educator Teacher Academy (potential initiative)

This initiative responds to an ongoing teacher shortage in Texas and supports the certification of adult educators who provide instruction in AEL statewide, the majority of whom work part-time and/or have a K–12 teaching background. AEL program administrators report high turnover, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which provides a great challenge in creating set class schedules and retaining students. An adult educator support initiative would support the increase of the number of AEL instructors certified to teach adult education. The Commission may consider such an initiative for funding approval.

Statewide Virtual Provider Pilot

This initiative was approved by the Commission in fall 2021 and supports TWC AEL's goal of increasing the number of adults in Texas with a high school diploma or its equivalent. The initiative provides an option for adults in Texas to connect to educational services virtually to attain such credentials.

Digital Inclusion (potential initiative)

Texas AEL will continue to explore ways to incorporate digital literacy activities in AEL instruction in order to increase Texans' ability to access AEL services, regardless of geographic location in the state. The Commission may consider such initiatives for funding approval.

F. ASSESSING QUALITY

Ongoing Program Monitoring and Oversight

Evaluation of local provider services is a priority for the AEL program. TWC staff has worked to develop a strategic evaluation and monitoring process that draws from best practices developed across TWC's divisions. Texas is implementing a program quality model to support student

success that links evaluation of monthly program performance and information and findings from the agency's monitoring department to just-in-time technical assistance and the deployment of targeted professional development to support continuous program improvement.

The AEL Department provides a Monthly Performance Report (MPR) to the director of the Workforce Development Division. The MPR meeting is facilitated by AEL program and contract management staff and led by the AEL director and AEL program supervisor. It includes a monthly snapshot of both program and financial performance across all AEFLA programs, including section 223 projects.

The MPR is the result of a multiphase process that uses timely data gathered from the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) to measure program performance against contract deliverables as well as state and federal performance targets. TEAMS is Texas' state-of-the-art, web-enabled system that maintains student-level data, including demographic, assessment, and outcome data, as well as class, site, program, and provider information. TEAMS users can analyze class, site, or program information using standard reports generated at the user level. TEAMS provides a wide range of information about adult education, including snapshots of student and program performance, personnel qualifications, and staff development activities.

AEL program providers are required to validate their data monthly and submit quarterly Data Sign-off Reports through TEAMS. The Data Sign-off Report requires program providers to describe areas of strength as well as concern. Program providers also are required to submit monthly expenditure reports in TWC's Cash Draw and Expenditure Reporting (CDER) system and quarterly narrative reports using a predetermined template that requests information on specific TWC objectives and overall program objectives.

AEL contract deliverables reflect TWC's commitment to strong performance and accountability. These deliverables include a combination of program and financial accountability and encourage program providers to exhibit strong planning through the development of project plans, continuous improvement plans, and standard operating procedures.

To prepare for the MPR, AEL program staff members meet to evaluate the overall health of each program, which is measured against contract deliverables; progress toward measures; state performance measures; and expenditures. Program staff members discuss trends in data and issues of concern and develop support plans to address those issues. Because services are aligned to workforce areas, staff can see where specific issues are isolated throughout the state. This provides a structure under which staff can engage TWC's Statewide Professional Development Center and other Section 223–funded professional development and technical assistance support projects to address concerns.

If a program does not show improvement after being placed on a support plan, TWC places it on a Technical Assistance Plan (TAP). TAPs use a timeline of deliverables to improve and support program function. TAP actions may include additional targeted professional development support, one-on-one training in specific areas of weakness or concern, and technical assistance visits by TWC staff to meet and address issues. Members must meet specific benchmarks for a period of four consecutive months to have a TAP lifted. Programs that consistently fail to meet contract deliverables once placed on a TAP are placed on a Corrective Action Plan. Programs that fail to meet objectives beyond this point are subject to sanctions and deobligation of program funds. TWC Chapter 800 General Administration rules on the deobligation and reallocation of AEL funds outline the deobligation criteria and time frames when TWC may deobligate from an AEL grantee that is not expending funds or meeting performance, as well as the criteria grantees must meet in order to receive reallocated funds. TWC is reviewing these rules and considering amendments that may provide the agency with greater flexibility to ensure that AEFLA funds are used efficiently during the statewide grant cycle.

Responsive professional development efforts funded under section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA is a central component of the quality model. TWC AEL assesses the quality and responsiveness of professional development through multiple approaches, including the review of local program improvement and remediation of deficiencies that may result after professional development and technical assistance efforts.

For example, through the quality model, a provider that month to month shows poor performance in reading or oral language scores will be advised by their TWC AEL program support specialist or assigned professional development specialist to schedule professional development in these areas. Once the program receives professional development services, the AEL department monitors program improvement to report in the MPR. Professional development is only one remedy to address program improvement and is deployed with other forms of technical assistance.

While changes in local program improvement is perhaps the most direct means of assessing the quality and effectiveness of professional development, it is not the only method of quality review in place. Professional development trainers are required to meet established quality and professional criteria developed and assessed by the state PD Center and AEL staff; training is reviewed by AEL staff to assure alignment with agency objectives and best practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available Specific professional development efforts funded under section 223 focus on developing curricula and training, including training-of-trainer models on ensuring support for instruction in the essential components of reading instruction and instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners. The Literacy Institute within the state PD Center is focused on professional development in the essential components of reading instruction and instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners. TWC AEL reviews both training curricula deliverables and training for these projects against best practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available. Section 223-funded projects, such as Literacy Texas and the Career Pathways Professional Development Center, focus on specifically training volunteers in the content areas, including reading and career pathways implementation and quality. These projects all have deliverables supporting the dissemination of information about relevant models and promising practices.

Additionally, all professional development events include session evaluations and these evaluations are provided to the AEL office, which reviews them monthly.

Subrecipient Monitoring

TWC's Subrecipient Monitoring (SRM) department works with TWC AEL staff to ensure that all 37 grantees are compliant and are serving as good stewards of federal funds. Grantees are selected annually for on-site reviews based on a robust risk analysis that includes both objective criteria and input from AEL. All AEL grantees are monitored either in person or through a desk review, with all programs receiving on-site monitoring once every three or four years.

While on-site, SRM reviews expenditures that include, but are not limited to disbursements, cash management, financial reporting, and records management (including eligibility and assessment documentation). To ensure that the grantee has adequate internal controls, staff will conduct interviews with key staff to confirm that internal processes for participant intake, screening, and placement comply with TWC's AEL policy. Testing samples are identified using the Texas Educating Adult Management System (TEAMS) database and compared with on-site records, testing will include the review of student test scores, credentials, and Measurable Skill Gains.

SRM hosts a preplanning meeting with TWC AEL staff to discuss any potential issues before the on-site visit. This gives SRM the opportunity to ask questions about specific items of interest identified during the desk review. It also provides SRM with any technical assistance items that AEL staff has reviewed and discussed with the grantee, including performance issues. The

process ensures that SRM obtains an accurate review of program and financial activity and any ongoing issues

Before a review, SRM will request that the grantee submit documents for SRM to conduct a review and analysis to determine each area that will be tested on-site. At the end of the on-site review, SRM conducts an exit conference with the grantee, in which staff identifies any findings or areas of concern that will be identified later in an official report.

The results of SRM reviews improve the technical assistance targeted to local projects. In addition to these annual reviews, SRM also conducts data validation annually of select grantees, as coordinated with AEL staff and as required by OCTAE PM 19-1.

Data Validation

Annually TWC SRM conducts data validation per OCTAE Memo 19-1 to provide accurate joint reporting requirements established in OCTAE Memo 17-2.TWC SRM also conducts the same monitoring or other WIOA titles, providing consistent processes and implementation of this requirement across WIOA partner programs. This coordinated effort ensures that reported performance maintains TWC integrity standards.

Deobligation of Funds

TWC is keenly focused on performance to ensure that funds are used effectively to serve customers and produce positive results. Contracted performance benchmarks and performance standards highlight TWC's expectation that grantees will maintain or exceed performance standards through effective service delivery and innovation. TWC rule §800.78 allows funds to be deobligated, including voluntarily, if they are not being used effectively and at expected levels at specified time frames to serve individuals who need AEL services. However, TWC staff works diligently with grantees to provide technical support and assistance in developing strategies to ensure that funds are used to serve customers efficiently and effectively, thereby mitigating risks. TWC is reviewing these rules and considering amendments that may provide the agency with greater flexibility to ensure that AEFLA funds are used efficiently during the statewide grant cycle.

Self-Evaluation and Monitoring of Local Programs

As part of their deliverables, all TWC grant recipients (sole providers and lead grant recipients for consortia of providers) are required to:

- submit a detailed project plan and expenditure projections for AEL-funded activities;
- submit a detailed local professional development plan;
- develop and maintain a procedure that outlines a process for continuous monitoring of subrecipients; and
- if applicable, use TEAMS to regularly monitor program performance across all providers.

Programs use the detailed project plan as an opportunity to analyze their performance, determine the cause of areas of weakness or concern, and develop strategies for improvement in the coming year. Programs are required to tie their professional development activities to this plan to ensure adequate training and support for program improvements.

TWC AEL staff also holds regular conference calls and biannual meetings for program members to share challenges as well as best practices. These forums build on what is working in the field and provide peer-mentoring opportunities.

Additionally, programs are required to regularly solicit student evaluations to assess satisfaction with curricula, instructors, and institutions.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	Yes
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	Yes
5. A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	Yes
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	Yes

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);	Yes
2. The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	Yes
3. The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not “eligible individuals” within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;	
4. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	Yes
5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).	Yes

AUTHORIZING OR CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	**Enter information in this column**
Applicant's Organization	Texas Workforce Commission
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	**Enter information in this column**
First Name	Edward
Last Name	Serna
Title	Executive Director
Email	Edward.serna@twc.texas.gov

SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA)

TWC grants for AEFLA-funded activities, including the 2017 AEL statewide grants, which began July 1, 2018, adhere to §231(c) and ensure that eligible providers have equitable access to apply and compete for grants and contracts. All TWC AELFA-funded grants and contract opportunities are published on two statewide websites: the Texas SmartBuy-Electronic State Business Daily Search and Texas.gov eGrants Application to ensure equal access to application information.

Furthermore, TWC provides notifications to public parties that wish to be notified of these grant and procurement opportunities via email notification, which they may register for on the TWC website.

TWC also ensures equitable access to and participation in all projects and activities conducted with federal adult education funds. The 2017 statewide AEFLA grant required offerors to describe how they effectively met the 13 considerations under WIOA, which includes how responsive the offeror is to serving individuals in need of AEL services and the ability to serve individuals with disabilities. Before awarding contracts, which went into effect July 1, 2018, for the AEL statewide grant, TWC required AEFLA grantees to describe the steps to be taken to address the access needs of students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries to overcome barriers to equitable participation. Barriers addressed were those based on gender, race, color, national origin, disability, and age.

Additionally, general contract terms for all AEL contractors, including those funded under AEFLA §223 (state leadership activities) and §231, are required to comply with the nondiscrimination provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. General contract terms for all AEFLA-funded contracts require grantees not to discriminate against any employee, applicant for employment, or beneficiary because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, temporary medical condition, political affiliation or belief, or citizenship, and to ensure that the treatment of employees and applicants are free of discrimination.

Regarding AEFLA administrative funds, which fund TWC staff administering the AEFLA program in Texas, TWC's equal opportunity policy conforms to all applicable federal and state laws to provide equal opportunity in employment and maintains processes to ensure nondiscriminatory practices are enforced within the agency's hiring practices. AEFLA-funded staff and TWC staff are required to take training on diversity, equal opportunity employment, and discrimination prevention.

Programs must address the special challenges that students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries face in overcoming barriers to participation and are required to describe how individuals will benefit from equitable access to services, including access in the areas of facilities, assessment, orientation, and overall service delivery.

TWC ensures equal opportunities for all eligible students, teachers, and other program beneficiaries to participate in any project or activity carried out under the applicable programs, including AEL, and promotes the ability of such students, teachers, and beneficiaries to meet high standards. AEL grantees are required to provide accessible, safe, and convenient instructional facilities that are ADA-accessible, near public transportation, close to free parking, and secure and safe.

TWC ensures that local providers give equal access to, and afford equitable participation in, all such projects and activities through the monitoring and technical assistance process, and that they follow the applicable laws.

2022 Statewide RFA

For the next statewide RFA, which will be published in fall 2022 for grant awards to be effective July 1, 2023, state staff will revise application items that were addressed during OCTAE's 2019 virtual monitoring review of Texas' grant application process. This includes separating the past effectiveness criteria, one of the 13 considerations, from demonstrated effectiveness, ensuring all applicants meet provider eligibility requirements. Demonstrated effectiveness of an applicant will be considered before the review of that application. All statewide grants will ensure that GEPA requirements are met.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	37.0%	37.0%	39.0%	39.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	36.0%	36.0%	38.0%	38.0%
Median Earnings	$5150	$5150	$5200	$5200

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
(Second Quarter After Exit)				
Credential Attainment Rate	35.0%	35.0%	41.0%	41.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	43.0%	43.0%	45.0%	45.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) meets quarterly with the leadership of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) - Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) as a part of RCT's regular meetings. During these meetings, VRD provided quarterly updates and RCT provided input and made recommendations regarding VR services and program matters.

RCT uses a committee structure to review and provide comments to VRD. These committees are:

- the executive committee;
- the program planning and review committee, which is composed of all RCT members;
- the policy, procedures, and personnel development committee;
- the customer satisfaction and needs assessment committee; and
- the membership and education committee.

While the detail work is done in the committee structure, all comments and recommendations are from RCT as a whole.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

The following is a summary of the input and recommendations made regarding the combined state plan.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (C), Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System, RCT is unsure whether the

reference to the Texas Health and Human Services (HHSC) Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (ODHHS) Specialized Telecommunications Assistance Program (STAP) is accurate information. STAP is to be used for personal telecommunication devices and other assistive technology (personal use and not for employment). RCT recommends reaching out to the STAP program to ensure that the information in the combined state plan is an accurate representation of the STAP program.

Response: VRD concurs with RCT's recommendations, and the reference to the STAP program will be removed from this section.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (G), Coordination with Employers, RCT recommends expanding who will have access to pre-employment training to include more than solely high school students and include students with disabilities.

Response: VRD concurs with RCT's recommendations and revised the language to include all students with disabilities.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (H), Interagency Cooperation, it is apparent that VRD is working in collaboration with HHSC regarding individuals who need long-term supports, including supported employment services. RCT recommends that VRD and HHSC work together to have the same providers for supported employment services. This will ensure a smooth transition from one program to the other.

Response: VRD currently collaborates with the HHSC Office of Disability Services Coordination to recruit supported employment providers already established with HHS and will continue to do so. VRD revised the language in this section to include, "VRD continues to collaborate with the HHSC Office of Disability Services Coordination to recruit supported employment providers already established with HHSC to ensure a seamless transition from one program to another when applicable."

Recommendation: Regarding Section (L), State Goals and Priorities, RCT recommends including the actions being taken to reduce the number of approval steps needed for service delivery. Additionally, RCT recommends adding a goal for VRD to strengthen relationships with employers. In order to improve successful outcomes, the agency would benefit from knowing the demands of the labor market. Also, working closer with employers will help VRD understand what employers are looking for when hiring employees.

Response: VRD concurs that reducing the number of approval steps is important and notes that there is current language discussing VRD's priority to streamline approval processes. Additional information regarding this is included in Section (O), State's Strategies. A sixth goal was developed in response to RCT's feedback to increase and enhance partnerships with employers.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (L), State Goals and Priorities, RCT recommends adding to Goal Area One that VRD will create a way to enter providers into the system timely so that services may be provided. RCT also recommends that VRD staff provide timely feedback to the providers with any contractual questions.

Response: VRD revised Goal Area One to include the statement, "VRD is working to improve provider onboarding through a process improvement effort to decrease the time from contract initiation to direct service delivery to customers. Additionally, VRD is committed to providing timely feedback to providers for both contractual- and programmatic- related questions."

Recommendation: Regarding Section (E), Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations, RCT recommends revising the statement in which VRD refers to American Sign Language (ASL) as a communication skill when it is actually considered a foreign language in Texas.

Response: VRD concurs that ASL is indeed a language and is not defined as a "communication skill," so these references were removed. VRD revised the language to include, "…working with different disability populations and specializations." There is additional information further in the section regarding specific target populations and associated premiums.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (E), Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations, RCT recommends changing "deaf," to "Deaf or hard of hearing." RCT recommends to be consistent with references to Deafness, Deaf, hard of hearing, and/or blind and visually impaired throughout the state plan.

Response: VRD concurs with this recommendation and made revisions where necessary. VRD will ensure that consistent language is used throughout the state plan when referencing these groups of individuals.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (I), Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development, RCT recommends including the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA), a national organization that brings together professionals from vocational rehabilitation, mental health, chemical health, education, interpreting, and related fields to share best practices in working with individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind to address policy and program concerns and to network.

Response: VRD proposes to join ADARA. Joining this association allows for additional professional development for staff that serves individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind and increases the quality of services provided to this population.

Recommendation: RCT recommends adding the Texas School for the Deaf to the list of professionals to be included when conducting seminars or workshops for the ARD or IEP process.

Response: VRD concurs with RCT and added the Texas School for the Deaf to this section.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (J), Statewide Assessment, RCT recommends adding a goal regarding obtaining providers. VRD has lost a large number of providers, and as a result, there are either no providers in areas or a very limited number of providers. VRD must make an effort to obtain providers, including assistive technology providers.

Response: Increasing providers in all service areas is one of the main goals for VRD and for the Business Transformation Project. There is language in Section (O), State's Strategies, about expanding VRD's provider base. Additionally, language was revised in this section to include the word "recruit" to highlight VRD's efforts to expand the current provider base.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (O,) State's Strategies, RCT recommends adding and/or building more providers to provide VR services.

Response: VRD agrees, andthere is a statement in this section that captures information about expanding the provider base.

Recommendation: Regarding Goal Area Two in Section (O), State's Strategies, RCT recommends that VRD add an increase in funds spent on services as a measure of success.

Response: VRD agrees that increasing the amount of funds spent on client services is critically important. VRD believes that Goal Area Five addresses this concern. One of the measures for Goal Area Five is an increase (accounting for seasonality) in VR engagement rate (that is, arranged, provided, or purchased VR/Pre-ETS/CCRC services), counseling and guidance, started or amended plan, employment (90-day clock), successful closure, or enrollment in education and/or training. The enhanced service delivery to VR customers and a higher engagement rate will likely lead to increases in client expenditures.

Recommendation: Regarding Section (O), State's Strategies, RCT recommends revising Goal Area Six to say, "Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working with VR and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers."

Response: VRD concurs with RCT's suggestion, and Goal Area Six was revised to include these recommended edits.

Recommendation: Regarding the measurement under Goal Number Six in Section (O), State's Strategies, that states, "An increase in the number of VR customers participating in postsecondary education and training, leading to a degree, certificate or industry-recognized credential," RCT asked, "(A) Can you explain how that measurement of success will show an increase in working with employers; and (B) could another measure of success be tracking the number of internships provided to consumers?"

Response: VRD understands that this is an indirect measure of success and has removed it from this goal. The proposed measure ties directly to TWC's initiative to close the middle skills gap by providing employers with candidates who have skills for jobs that require more than high school degree but less than a four-year degree. The success measure was intended to be another way to indicate our efforts to meet employers' need for skilled workers; however, this data is already collected and may be reported as supplemental information. In response to the latter part of the question, internships are a type of work-based learning, which is addressed in the second success measure for Goal Number Six.

Recommendation: Regarding the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) policy update discussed in Section (O), State's Strategies, RCT stated that the best practice that is missing is the support that VR customers will need to achieve their employment goals. RCT recommends that VRD add support services for all individuals with a recognized SUD. Peer support is a best practice to initiate and sustain recovery. The support provided will be available throughout the VR employment process for success and recovery. RCT also asked for clarity regarding the word "treatment." RCT understands that treatment has many modalities, practices, and paths and could be an inpatient or outpatient experience. The treatment path will be determined by the counselor and customer; however, it is also determined by the severity of the SUD or SUD assessment. There are many paths of recovery to which customers will have access, and those will come mainly from peer providers. RCT recommends that when stating treatment, VRD add support services for the SUD population. Less than 10 percent of SUD cases in Texas receive treatment. To be innovative and advance VR employment goals, mental health and SUD support services need to be advanced by VRD's activities, education, and language.

Response: VRD is in the process of identifying the SUD support services that need to be put in place to support customers. VRD is currently developing a Peer Support Services pilot in Region 2 that will likely begin this fiscal year. As RCT suggested, there are several different means of treatment for SUD. VRD currently has several treatment options in the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual and will consider adding support services to this list.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

VRD concurred with and incorporated most of RCT's recommendations. Where applicable, VRD offered alternate options to address RCT's input, which are included in VRD's responses in the previous section.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;

VRD is not requesting a waiver of statewideness.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

VRD is not requesting a waiver of statewideness.

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

VRD is not requesting a waiver of statewideness.

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

To ensure that individuals with disabilities receive appropriate services, VRD has the following cooperative arrangements with various federal, state, and local agencies and programs to use their services and facilities:

- Collaboration with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to provide VR services to individuals eligible for home and community-based services under a Medicaid waiver or Medicaid State Plan Amendment. HHSC is the state agency that provides services to individuals with developmental disabilities. VRD also works collaboratively with the Texas Department of State Health Services to provide cooperative VR services to individuals receiving mental health services.
- Coordination with HHSC in referral processes between VR and the Blind Children's Program, the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services Program, and the Independent Living Services Program
- Coordination with HHSC in implementation of legislation passed by the 86th Texas Legislature.
- MOUs with TEA and independent school districts (ISDs) to enhance coordination of services provided through programs like Project SEARCH and other community programs and support available to improve and expand services for transition-age students with disabilities
- Coordination with the Texas School for the Blind or Visually Impaired to provide specialized programs that prepare students for the transition to postsecondary life and the workplace
- Coordination with the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD) to provide specialized programs that prepare students on the transition to postsecondary life and the workplace
- MOU with the Texas Department of Insurance's Division of Workers' Compensation to enhance referrals for return-to-work efforts
- Coordination with the Social Security Administration (SSA) on employment incentives and support to maximize Social Security Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation (SSA/VR) reimbursement activity through the Ticket to Work Program

- MOU with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to maximize case service funds through better access to comparable benefits, and to enhance the case management process while avoiding duplication of services.
- Coordination with the Texas Veterans Commission to help identify veterans who need additional support in securing benefits, gaining employment, and accessing advocacy services.
- Coordination with the Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services to help identify trends that have an adverse effect on the veteran population, and create strategies to address and resolve those issues at the state level
- Coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs to create statewide symposiums and job fairs to meet the federal regulation that requires federal contractors to ensure that no less than 7 percent of their workforce includes individuals with disabilities
- Coordination with the Purchasing for People with Disabilities program in providing training to CRPs
- Coordination with the Texas Center for Justice and Equity for juveniles and adults to assist and strengthen supports and employment goals by exploring career opportunities
- Coordination with the Texas Department of Transportation on addressing the issue of inadequate transportation, often a major factor in a customer's ability to maintain employment. As opportunities arise, VR regions collaborate with local municipalities and county governments on strategies to increase access to public transportation for people with disabilities. Following are three examples on VRD's ongoing work.

VRD's Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC) meets twice yearly with CapMetro – Austin Public Transit. At these meetings, CapMetro presents the latest information about the transit plan to both CCRC staff and current VR customers receiving training at the center. CapMetro requests feedback from CCRC on their plan and poses specific questions for CCRC input regarding accessibility on their fixed route and para transit systems. A CCRC staff member also serves on CapMetro's Access Advisory Committee, the purpose of which it so advise CapMetro on transportation policies and changes that may affect people with disabilities.

VIA A Metropolitan Transit (VIA) is an active partner of VR in San Antonio. Rideshare Administrators and Community & Business Outreach Specialists serve as points of contact (POCs) for VR regional staff. These partnerships develop transportation solutions and connect VR customers to support and resources. Currently, VIA is collaborating with VR to develop a comprehensive paid internship program at the Toyotetsu Campus in San Antonio. This partnership has opened opportunities for candidates that didn't have access to reliable and affordable transportation. VIA has also offered other options such as the renting of a vehicle through their Vanpool program. Via continues to explore other options to advance access to transportation.

The RTA Committee on Accessible Transportation (RCAT) is tasked to give advice and insight to Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority (CCRTA) on community transportation for disadvantaged riders and services. A key initiative launched by this partnership was connector routes to Port Aransas, Gregory, Robstown, and Driscoll, TX. These enhanced routes allow individuals with disabilities easier access to localities. The RCAT Committee, which reports to the RTA Board, are instrumental in advising on budget, policy development, vehicle specification review, and contractor performance review. RCAT represents the grass roots level of people who utilize local public transportation.

Additionally, VRD uses TWC's internal structure to:

- verify for Texas businesses that job applicants under the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program are receiving, or have received, VR services under an individualized plan for employment;
- access electronic wage data to verify employment history and income for customers for closure data and SSA/VR reimbursement submission; and
- collaborate with Workforce Solutions Offices regarding customer training and support for employment goals, including participation in symposiums, job fairs, and providing disability awareness training.

2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

VRD works with organizations across the state to ensure that it meets customers' assistive technology needs, including transition services for students and youth with disabilities and pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities. The organizations include contracted assistive technology evaluation sites across the state and VRD's own Assistive Technology Unit.

Contract providers are required to participate in a thorough testing program to ensure that they meet minimal standards of proficiency to become approved assistive technology providers. VRD uses programs such as the Computer/Electronics Accommodations Program when a customer is interested in employment with the federal government

Each Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Services unit has trained assistive technology staff that are responsible for sharing knowledge and resources so that updated technology purchases can address the needs of customers with various disabilities, including those who are blind or visually impairmed.

VRD now has a MOU with the Texas Technology Access Program (TTAP), the implementing entity designated by the governor under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 (29 U.S.C. 3003) §4 whom VRD works cooperatively with to coordinate activities, including the referral of individuals with disabilities. Currently, VRD refers customers to TTAP demonstration centers located throughout the state to ensure that they have an informed choice of assistive technology and that equipment purchased by VRD meets each customers' needs.

VRD participates in annual joint presentations with TTAP at Ability Expo in Houston, Ability Expo in Dallas/Ft. Worth, and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) statewide conference, which provide opportunities for customers and counselors to learn about new adaptive equipment and assistive technology that can assist in maintaining competitive, integrated employment.

3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

VRD coordinates with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and Texas AgrAbility to assist customers with modifications of agricultural equipment and tools, allowing for agricultural producers with disabilities to continue with farming and ranching.

4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

VRD works with the following:

- Community Resource Coordination Groups (CRCGs), which are local interagency groups composed of public and private providers that come together to develop individualized

service plans for children, youth, and adults whose needs can be met only through interagency coordination and cooperation

- Local Workforce Development Boards that provide services to out-of-school youth

5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

VRD has a contract with WorkQuest, formerly Texas Industries for the Blind and Handicapped and the Texas State Use Program to provide services in support of agency and divisional operations.

D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

1. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AS WELL AS PROCEDURES FOR THE TIMELY DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE STUDENTS

The provision of quality VR services for Texas students with disabilities is a strategic priority for the Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD). VRD policies and procedures have been updated to align with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §413(B)(F), which sets forth that the individualized plan for employment (IPE) must be developed as soon as possible, but not later than a deadline of 90 days after the date of the determination of eligibility, unless the counselor and the eligible individual agree to an extension to a specific date.

Transition planning by VR counselors and school personnel facilitates the development and implementation of a student's individualized education program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act §614(d). The goals developed in the IEP are considered in the development of the IPE. The development and approval of an IPE is initiated by a VR counselor. Planning includes conversations about informed choice and program information so that students understand the available options for additional education, training, service providers, and employment.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the transition planning activities and service delivery expanded to include virtual options to accommodate transition students and their families. VRD has continued to enhance virtual service delivery options and intends to maintain virtual options when providing greater opportunities to work with students and families.

2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;

VRD maintains collaborative working relationships with public education entities in Texas. VRD services emphasize and provide a coordinated set of age-appropriate activities that enable transition students, parents, education personnel, and others to actively plan for and assist the student to prepare for life after leaving high school, including proactively developing partnerships with communities, service providers, and businesses to create opportunities for students to obtain postsecondary education, training, and competitive integrated employment.

State Education Agency Partnership

VRD works closely with TEA to coordinate transition planning services for students between ages 14–22 who receive special education services in Texas. As required in 34 CFR §361.22(b), VRD has collaborated with TEA to develop an MOU, current from August 31, 2017 to August 31,

2022, that outlines the responsibilities of the VRD for the provision of transition planning services as well as the fiscal responsibility of TEA for the provision of services as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The MOU represents each agency's commitment to collaborate and cooperatively facilitate the successful transition of students with disabilities from high school to competitive integrated employment using VR services. The MOU includes the addition of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) as defined in CFR §361.48, and other Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements, operationalizing a referral process for students with disabilities, and a process for inviting counselors to Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings.

The MOU provides for consultation and technical assistance in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services; transition planning for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and completion of the IEP; clarification of the agencies' respective roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities for providing transition planning services to students with disabilities; and a description of procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of transition services.

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;

VRD develops partnerships with schools and community organizations to help students with disabilities make a smooth transition to adulthood and work. VRD's counselors throughout the state who are assigned to high schools have a role in preparing students with disabilities for entry into the workplace. VR counselors coordinate closely with high schools to ensure that appropriate students are referred to the VR program. They serve as information resources for teachers and other educational staff and provide resources and information about blindness and other disabilities to parents and transitioning students. They work closely with parents, education staff and community service providers to promote development of skills needed for students to become as independent as possible, as well as competitive in terms of integrated employment. Counselors work with schools to identify students receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as early as possible in the process to address concerns regarding impact of employment on benefits and to provide resources for benefits counseling.

Pre-ETS are provided to students with disabilities. Required Pre-ETS activities are job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary educational programs, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

TWC launched the Pathways to Careers Initiative (PCI), an initiative to expand Pre-ETS to Texas students with disabilities. The first strategy launched under PCI in summer 2017 was Summer Earn and Learn. VRD partnered with each of the 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and their employer partners to provide employability skills training and work experience for students with disabilities. Summer Earn and Learn has continued in subsequent summers. Another strategy is Charting the Course: Planning for Life after High School. This strategy engages students with disabilities and their families in a series of education, awareness, and planning events beginning with the students' eighth grade year. Engaging families earlier in preparing their children for high school promotes better planning for student transition activities in high school and supports a successful transition to further education and employment after high school. Explore STEM! is a PCI strategy that was implemented in summer 2018 and has been held in subsequent summers. Explore STEM! provides students with disabilities the opportunity to explore STEM fields, hear from professionals working in those fields, and experience hands-on activities in various STEM fields. The objective is to encourage more students with disabilities to consider careers in STEM fields.

Other PCI strategies include Capacity Building, Advise TX, Pre-ETS Tools for Students, and a Pre-ETS curriculum. Capacity Building is a strategy to operationalize the MOU between TWC and TEA by engaging VR and school personnel in a series of meetings designed to encourage and assist with relationship building, strategies for successful collaboration, and a better understanding of the VR and Special Education systems. A second initiative using the same model and focusing solely on working with younger students has been proposed to begin in 2022. Advise TX is an initiative conducted in partnership with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB). The program employs recent college graduates who are trained to serve as full-time, near-peer college advisers in high schools that have historically low college-going rates. Advisers provide one-to-one assistance to students with disabilities to match their academic and career goals to optimal postsecondary options. Pre-ETS Tools for Students started with the development of a Transition module to be added to the existing Texas OnCourse platform, an electronic tool focused on career and postsecondary exploration. The second phase of this strategy is the development of a resource for parents that will provide information and guidance about topics related to the transition process. It aims to identify and address gaps in existing information and targets all parents, with a concerted effort to reach parents who may not be familiar with the process of transitioning to postsecondary school or work. The tool is expected to launch in January 2022. TWC has also partnered with Texas A&M University to develop a Pre-ETS curriculum that schools can adopt and use as an elective. The curriculum is currently undergoing field testing and is expected to be finished in 2022.

Fostering Transition is an initiative designed to increase VR staff knowledge of the foster care system and develop strategies for connecting students in foster care with VR services. The initiative is currently in the planning phase.

VR has recently implemented a service called Embedded Pre-ETS. Through partnerships with the schools and providers, providers can become embedded in the schools, which allows them to provide services that build on and enhance what students are already receiving in school. Using this service, students will gain a more in-depth understanding of work-related concepts and will have greater opportunities to practice these concepts in a protected environment.

As a result of a contract with Texas A&M, the Work-Based Learning initiative has recently begun to support schools in developing work-based learning opportunities for students. The schools will develop and implement work-based learning activities that range from school-based enterprises, for example, coffee carts and greenhouses, to more traditional employer partnerships for work-based learning.

Explore Apprenticeship 2.0 is the second generation of an initiative that was implemented in 2019. Partnerships with San Jacinto College (Houston) and Dallas College (Dallas) enable students to participate in on-campus activities to learn more about apprenticeship as a path to employment. The second phase of the initiative will involve students participating in work-based learning in jobs in which apprenticeship is a typical part of the career path.

VRD also contracts with providers to deliver Pre-ETS to students with disabilities. There are currently more than 100 fee-for-service contracts in place for Pre-ETS.

VRD counselors work with the high schools to provide consultation and technical assistance regarding the VR process and appropriate services that may be available to customers, such as engaging in apprenticeships.

Consultation and technical assistance are provided at ARDs, and attendance may be in person or through alternative means, including videoconferencing or conference calls (based on 34 CFR §361.22(b)(1)).

When necessary, VRD counselors and school personnel coordinate to satisfy documentation requirements for students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment, as set forth in 34 CFR §397.4(c). VRD does not pursue subminimum wage

employment for customers. The MOU between VRD and TEA specifies that neither TEA nor Local Education Agencies (LEA) will, in accordance with 34 CFR §§ 397.31 and 361.22(b)(6) enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR § 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage. When a customer chooses to pursue subminimum wage employment, counseling on other employment options is provided. When, after counseling, subminimum wage employment is still the customer's choice, the VR case is closed. Those customers who choose subminimum wage employment receive counseling, guidance, and referral services within the first six months of employment and annually thereafter.

TWC has regional and state office transition specialists who provide support to VR counselors and VRD field office managers in developing collaborative partnerships with and increasing cooperation between VRD, local school districts, and other community organizations as resources for students with disabilities. These transition specialists assist with the development of policy, training, and strategies that lead to effective provision of transition services.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;

Local education agencies maintain fiscal responsibility for transition services that are also considered special education or related services, and that are necessary for ensuring a free, appropriate public education to children with disabilities within Texas, including those outlined in the IEP (34 CFR §361.22(c)).

Additionally, House Bill 617, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013), requires that each ISD have an individual identified as the Transition and Employment Designee (TED). The TED is responsible for providing information and resources about effective transition planning and services. VRD has counselors throughout the state assigned to high schools to assist students with disabilities in preparing for entry into the workplace. Nothing related to VRD's responsibilities and requirements under WIOA should be construed as a reduction in local education agencies' responsibility under IDEA to provide and pay for special education and related services as a part of a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities (WIOA §101(c)).

VR counselors (VRCs) coordinate closely with high schools to ensure appropriate students are referred to the VR program. Transition program specialists support the work of VR counselors and VRD field office managers in developing collaborative partnerships with and increasing cooperation between VRD, local school districts, and other community organizations as resources for students with disabilities. VRD has transition VR counselors and general VR counselors who act as liaisons for high schools and partner with the educational system to more appropriately serve transition-age students seeking assistance to access adult vocational services.

VRD partnered with other health and human services agencies to assist TEA in developing the Texas Transition and Employment Guide (https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/parent-and-family-resources/texas-transition-and-employment-guide) for parents and their children who are enrolled in special education programs. The guide provides information on statewide services and programs that help facilitate the transition to life outside of the public-school system.

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.

Texas Workforce Commission's current MOU with TEA includes the addition of Pre-ETS, as defined in 34 CFR §361.48, and other WIOA requirements, operationalizing a consistent referral process for students with disabilities, and a process for inviting counselors to attend ARD

meetings. TWC also receives a dataset from TEA each year which shows the special education and 504 student counts. This data is mapped so that TWC can identify concentrations of students with disabilities in Texas to ensure Pre-ETS services are being offered statewide and in the areas of greatest need.

VRD has specialty transition VR counselors and general VR counselors who act as liaisons for high schools and partner with the educational system to more appropriately serve transition-age students seeking assistance to access adult VR services. These counselors work closely with school personnel and education service centers to share information about VR services, including Pre-ETS, and identify students who may be in need. Partnering with ISDs allows counselors to be available to students and school staff to discuss VR services, resources available through the Texas workforce system, community, businesses, and other partners necessary to build a network of support. Additionally, it allows counselors to arrange or provide relevant seminars, workshops, camps, and summer work experiences throughout the state.

Additionally, VRD has established procedures to serve students with disabilities who are designated as "potentially eligible" for services. To receive Pre-ETS and be considered potentially eligible for VR services, an individual must meet only the definition of a student with a disability. The individual is not required to apply for VR services but has the option to do so. Designating individuals as potentially eligible gives more students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in Pre-ETS.

E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Private Nonprofit Providers

Private nonprofit providers of rehabilitation services are an important part of the VR service delivery process for many customers. VRD routinely works with national organizations, in addition to local private nonprofits to purchase and arrange services that help customers prepare for, obtain, maintain, or advance in employment. For the provision of extended services in Supported Employment, VRD makes arrangements with public and nonprofit agencies or organizations within the state, employers, natural supports, and other entities.

Availability of Information on Service Providers

To assist customers in making informed choices regarding VR providers, VRD maintains ReHabWorks, an electronic case management system. ReHabWorks contains information specific to each Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP). VRD staff shares information about qualified providers for a service, as it relates to a CRP's experience in working with different disability populations and specializations, ensuring that a customer can make an informed choice when selecting a service provider.

Provider Contracting Process

VRD establishes contractual relationships with providers of VR services, including private nonprofit providers. To expand opportunities and increase efficiency related to recruiting providers, VRD posts notification of contracting opportunities on the Electronic State Business Daily (ESBD), where organizations can complete an application to become a service provider if the organization meets the requirements listed in the ESBD posting.

Service Provider Contracts

The VRD Standards for Providers (Standards-SFP) are published on the TWC website and specify the scope of work for providing contracted goods and services. Contracted providers are required to follow the VR Standards, which specify the terms and conditions of the contractual relationship, approved services, expected outcomes, fees, staff qualifications, and required documentation. Revisions to the Standards are made periodically, and notices of upcoming changes are published on the TWC Provider Resource website at least 30 days in advance of the

effective date of the changes. GovDelivery notices are sent out to announce posted changes, and the CRP contacts reference the VRD-SFP for updates every 30 days. Providers are contractually responsible for complying with the most recent standards and their individual contract. Examples of services include:

- orientation and mobility;
- assistive technology training;
- diabetes education;
- communication access;
- durable medical equipment (DME);
- employment supports for brain injury;
- environmental work assessment;
- hearing aids and related accessories;
- independent living services for older individuals who are blind;
- job placement;
- job skills training;
- personal social adjustment training;
- Pre-Employment Transition Services;
- Project SEARCH;
- supervised residential services for individuals in recovery;
- self-employment, including supported self-employment;
- supported employment services;
- vehicle modifications;
- vocational adjustment training;
- vocational evaluation and assessment;
- wellness recovery action plans (WRAP);
- work adjustment training; and
- work experience.

Oversight and Monitoring of Contracted Service Providers

TWC purchases services from providers that follow the VR Standards. TWC-contracted service providers are subject to both ongoing and periodic programmatic and financial monitoring. Risk assessment tools are used at the state and the regional level to identify service providers to be monitored. On-site monitoring visits may be scheduled. Additionally, service providers not identified through the risk assessment tools may also be monitored. A monitoring team includes representatives from VRD and VR Contract Oversight Monitoring. Contractors found in noncompliance with VR Standards may be placed on a corrective action plan. Sanctions vary and may include financial restitution where appropriate. All contractors are provided ongoing

technical assistance. In addition to monitoring, VR Standards also require ongoing self-evaluation by each contracted service provider.

Credentialing Requirements

Most VR-contracted service providers, for services such as employment services, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, and wellness recovery action plans must have one individual designated as the director for VRD communication and accountability purposes. These contracted service providers must have a director who possesses University of North Texas director credentials.

To ensure that employment service providers are fully equipped to provide the highest-quality services that support obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment, VRD has partnered with the University of North Texas to develop training and maintain a credentialing system related to employment services. The current employment credentials are for work readiness, job skills training, job placement, and supported employment.

VRD also has partnered with the Center for Social Capital to develop the training and the Certified Business Technical Assistance Consultant (CBTAC) credential, which must be obtained and maintained by vendors from whom VR purchases self-employment services, including supported self-employment services. Having the CBTAC credential ensures that service providers are knowledgeable about various components of self-employment and supported self-employment. Additionally, VRD is now offering this training to select VR field staff members in order to improve knowledge and access to self-employment services. Premiums are payments made to service providers in addition to the base rate paid for services when the VRD customer and/or service provider staff meets certain criteria. Premium payments are available for services such as orientation and mobility, assistive technology, vocational adjustment training, job skills training, job placement, and supported employment.

VRD has both mileage and travel premiums available for providers to cover travel costs when serving customers in underserved areas of the state.

Other premiums are available to service providers that serve individuals who are deaf/hard of hearing, have autism, have criminal backgrounds, and/or have a bachelor's degree or higher and are seeking a professional occupation to encourage development of higher skills among the provider community. Staff members who serve Deaf customers must hold a certification from the Board for Evaluation for Interpreters, a Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf certification, or a Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) rating of intermediate or higher. For service providers to earn the premium when working with individuals with autism, they must show proof that they have retained staff possessing the Autism Specialization from the University of North Texas.

Approved providers also receive training in the field from VR counselors, state office program specialists, employment assistance specialists, University of North Texas online continuing education courses, and Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center staff. Training may include:

- disability awareness, including blindness, to give providers a better understanding of the challenges and limitations faced by customers;
- education on Americans with Disabilities Act requirements to ensure that providers understand the guidelines and law governing provision of accommodations to customers;
- education on other employment-related laws and recruitment, job matching, job customization, work accommodations, and retention; and

- Texas Confidence Builders training, which provides the philosophy VRD has adopted to help customers gain personal independence, acceptance, and adjustment to blindness, and find meaningful work.

Identifying and Developing Vendors

Designated regional program specialists are responsible for identifying and developing entities that are interested in providing services described in the VR Standards. Program specialists and local provider liasions provide technical assistance and guidance as new providers are approved and as existing providers add new services.

VRD staff works with a network of CRPs across the state, including those that provide disability education, work readiness, and employment services. To increase the competencies of these providers, VRD:

- requires Employment Service Providers (ESPs) staff to obtain training and credentialing to ensure that job skills trainers, job placement specialists, supported employment specialists, self-employment specialists, work experience specialists, and vocational adjustment trainers have the basic skills necessary to facilitate services, so the customer achieves required deliverables as defined in the VR Standards;
- requires each Standards' contractor who provides a service for customers to have a director who is credentialed to oversee staff and compliance;
- implements employment premiums to reward providers that maintain training and skills necessary to work with specific populations to increase successful outcomes, such as for customers who have a criminal background, who are Deaf, who have Autism Spectrum Disorder, and who have brain injury;
- has implemented Wage Services, which allows customers to be paid by a third party while participating in Work Experience services. Work Experience services allow youth and adult customers to participate in volunteer, internship, or paid temporary work settings. Work Experience services allows customers to explore career options, increase employability (soft and hard skills), gain experience in the field of study when a training program or degree has been obtained, or determine the individual's capacity to work when their abilities have changed due to newly acquired vocational barriers. Work Experience services can also be used for trial work evaluations as a means of providing information necessary to determine eligibility.

To improve services provided by VRD CRPs across the state, VRD:

- continually assesses the need to change or modify CRP services based on the emerging needs of customers and businesses;
- will continue to evaluate the rates paid to contracted providers to improve the retention rate, satisfaction, recruitment of providers and to ensure they are compensated at fair market value;
- will continue to form work groups with providers and VR staff to review the current documentation requirements to identify and implement a streamline processes to eliminate perceived burdens while still meeting state and federal guidelines;
- will continue to review the current curriculum taught in the credential courses, to ensure provider staff are trained on best practices, basic skills and VRD procedures, as well add new credential courses to ensure services are facilitate effectively to meet customer' needs and met the required deliverables as defined in the VR Standards for Providers;

- continues to operate an outcome-based payment system for supported employment and job placement services that require an employment plan for each customer; plans to implement and expand employment premiums to obtain providers with specialty skills and to reward providers that maintain training and skills necessary to work with specific populations, such as blindness/visual impairments and mental health to increase successful outcomes;
- continues to expand Work Experience services for youth and adults;
- continually explores opportunities to add innovative programs supportive of WIOA Pre-ETS requirements, customized employment, and other services to prepare and support customers in their long-term employment placement;
- continues to review the need for new services for youth and adult customers to assist in job readiness and in obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment;
- continues the use of transition educator providers. The transition educator service provider is an individual who is not currently a contracted provider; has a master's degree or a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation, counseling and guidance, psychology, education, or a related field; and is or has been an employee of a school system or a Texas education service center within the past fiscal year. These providers were added to better meet the needs of transition-age students and to provide services to customers in underserved areas of the state; and
- continues to identify strategies to increase extended service provider through cooperative agreements, as well as training providers and VR staff to use the customers naturally occurring work and social supports (including ongoing natural and paid supports) for extended services.

On July 1, 2021, the VR Standards for Providers (SFP) was updated to remove COVID-19–related procedures that required advance approval for delivery of certain in-person services. The SFP was updated to require providers to have policies and procedures that describe how they will provide in-person services to customers when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and federal, state (including the Texas Department of Health Services), and local governments have implemented health and safety protocols. Additionally, the implementation of remote, in-person, and combination services allows customers in underserved areas to receive services virtually and removes the necessity to travel for both providers and customers. The remote service delivery option ensures that customers have the ability to receive quality services and also enhances service ability in areas that lack providers.

The Local Provider Liaison (LPL) initiative focuses on quality assurance within VR and institutes activities for supporting the continuous improvement of SFP contractors. LPL activities include provider engagement and technical assistance to reduce audit findings and internal management issues. The LPL initiative promotes effective communication between VRD and providers and allows the provider to have a point of contact for questions and policy interpretation. This initiative also allows liaisons to collect demographic information to identify the areas the providers serve, special populations that they may work with, and other credentials to help customers make informed choices. This effort also allows VRD to identify areas of the state that are underserved.

F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Evidence of Collaboration, Contracts, and Agreements

To provide seamless service delivery to customers and ensure effective use of resources, TWC VRD maintains the following collaborations with community partners and other state agencies:

- VRD Program Specialists provide information and technical assistance to the appropriate Texas Health and Human Services (HHS) Medical and Social Service Divisions when changes to VR employment services occur.
- VRD works with the appropriate HHS Medical and Social Service Divisions to ensure that service definitions in the 1915(c) home-and community-based waivers accurately reflect Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Rehabilitation Services Administration regulations. This partnership allows services that result in competitive integrated employment to be delivered efficiently and timely through the payer of first resort.
- VRD offers free intensive training and technical assistance to HHS' Medical and Social Services Divisions' Behavioral Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Services Departments Special Projects Unit and community providers to become Benefits Subject Matter Resource staff.
- VRD partners with HHS' Medical and Social Services Divisions' Behavioral Health and IDD Services Departments Special Projects Unit to provide cross training on the VR Long-Term Supports and Services System.
- VRD uses its current partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to encourage Employment Service Providers (ESPs) to become employment networks (ENs) under the SSA Ticket to Work Program. VRD offers incentive payments to ESP-ENs that provide: supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and extended support to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure in order to advance employment or increase customer earnings.
- VRD partners with school districts that provide transition services to youth and considers all aspects of the cooperative agreements in place to ensure continuity and timeliness of services for those school districts that initiate supported employment discovery services before or after a student graduates.

VRD has representation in the following:

- The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities
- Texas Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council
- Mental Health Coordination and Substance Use Disorder Party Workgroup, which is a subcommittee of the Behavioral Health Advisory Committee
- Behavioral Health Advisory Committee
- Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services
- State Independent Living Council
- Texas Council on Consumer Direction
- The Promoting Independence Advisory Committee
- HHS Cross Agency Liaison Initiatives
- Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities

Contracts

VRD has vendor contracts with ESPs to provide specific employment services, which include supported employment services. VRD counselors may refer customers with all disabilities, including those who are blind and visually impaired, to ESPs with contracts for supported

employment services. The VRD SFP manual outlines the staff qualifications, service description, process and procedures and fee for Supported Employment.

G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

1. VR SERVICES; AND

The Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) continually seeks ways to increase the number of Texans with disabilities who successfully train for, obtain, retain, or advance in competitive integrated employment. The Business Relations Team was created to improve services to local businesses and help them achieve a diversified workforce by hiring qualified individuals with disabilities. Team members have successfully partnered to provide a coordinated array of outreach, consultation, and technical assistance services to Texas businesses.

The Business Relations Team uses the state labor exchange system, WorkInTexas.com, to report on its work with business partners in alignment with the other WIOA employer services. The Business Relations Team disseminates resources to Texas businesses through the TXHireAbility website, which provides information about the benefits of partnering with VRD.

The Business Relations Team is increasing coordination with other state and federal entities that administer employment training programs and is also working jointly with Local Workforce Development Boards' (Boards) Business Services Units. The result of this coordination is growth in the number of jointly held business symposia and job fairs in communities across Texas and more opportunities for outreach and awareness activities to inform employers about the services available through the workforce system, including those provided by VR. VRD partnerships with Boards, the US Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, Health and Human Services, the Veterans Administration, and employers help ensure that the business community and Texans with disabilities who are seeking competitive integrated employment have the greatest level of support, resources, and services available to help them succeed.

To acknowledge employers for their partnership and commitment to an inclusive workforce, TWC approved the creation of an employer recognition strategy, the We Hire Ability Employer Recognition Program (We Hire Ability), with the intention of encouraging the adoption of similar practices among other employers in the same industry or community. Like the Texas HireAbility campaign, We Hire Ability aims to raise awareness among employers and increase hiring of individuals with disabilities. This program is co-branded with TWC's existing We Hire Vets program to recognize employers for their efforts in hiring and retaining Texans of all abilities.

2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

The Pathways to Careers Initiative (PCI) is an initiative to expand pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to Texas students with disabilities. PCI will ensure that Texas is effectively preparing students with disabilities to achieve competitive integrated employment through participation in employability skills and work-readiness training, career exploration activities, work experience, and counseling on postsecondary education.

Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) was the first PCI statewide strategy and involves employability skills training and paid work experience for students with disabilities. It is offered in each local workforce development area (workforce area) during the summer months, when students are out of school. Boards have developed work experience opportunities with employers in their workforce areas in high-growth occupations, skilled trades and crafts, and other high-demand occupations. During summer 2021, more than 2,100 students and over 1,000 employers participated in SEAL.

VRD is also leveraging existing business partnerships to identify additional opportunities to better prepare students for the workplace and help them obtain jobs. VRD will continue to pursue additional partnerships with businesses that have an interest in pre-employment training for students to ensure that students entering the workforce are appropriately equipped with the skills to adapt to work in the 21st century. Examples of this activity include Project SEARCH and group skills training activities.

Project SEARCH

The Project SEARCH business-led pre-employment training program is a one-year school-to-work program that takes place entirely at the workplace. The program includes a combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through work site rotations. Project SEARCH serves students with various disabilities, including significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. Typically, these are students who are in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and in their last year of high school eligibility. The goal for these customers is competitive integrated employment within the business community or the business where the work site rotations occur.

Project SEARCH has expanded from one original program site, established in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in Ohio, to 643 sites internationally. Project SEARCH in Texas began in 2007 with Seton Healthcare Family in Austin. As of fall 2021, Texas has 29 Project SEARCH sites. Sites are led by a host business and include key partners, including VRD, independent school districts (ISDs), employment specialist providers (ESPs), and local authorities. Each Project SEARCH site typically has eight to 12 participants per year.

Due to the mitigation strategies necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic, most Project SEARCH activities could not be held on-site at the host businesses for the 2020–2021 school year. Teams worked virtually with host businesses or found alternate sites to meet in person to engage interns in real work experiences. The number of participating interns decreased slightly for that school year, to approximately 200. Sites are seeing a slight increase in intern participation for the 2021–2022 school year, and all but a few students are able to participate on-site at the host businesses.

Texas Project SEARCH Locations and Partners

#	Partner Name	Location
1	Epiroc, Garland	Garland ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Quest Employment, Metrocare Services
2	Medical Center of Lewisville, Lewisville	Lewisville ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, 29 Acres
3	Cintas, Fort Worth	Fort Worth ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, MHMR of Tarrant County
4	Ascension Seton Williamson, Round Rock	Hutto and Georgetown ISDs, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Bluebonnet MHMR
5	Baylor Scott & White Hospital, College Station	College Station ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living, MHMR of Brazos County

#	Partner Name	Location
6	Baylor Scott & White Hospital, Brenham	Brenham ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, The Whole Solution, MHMR of Brazos County
7	SanMar, Inc., Irving	Irving ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Metrocare Services
8	United Healthcare, Sugarland	Fort Bend ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, PCSI, Texana
9	Ascension Seton Hays, Kyle	Hays Consolidated ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Hill Country MHMR
10	Dell Seton Medical Center, Austin	Del Valle ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Goodwill of Central TX, Integral Care
11	The City of Lewisville, Lewisville	Lewisville ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, 29 Acres
12	Embassy Suites Dallas Frisco Conference Center, Frisco	Frisco ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, LifePath
13	Dow Chemical, Seadrift	Calhoun & Victoria ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Quest Employment
14	Baylor Scott & White Lakeway, Austin	Lake Travis ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Easter Seals Central Texas, Austin Integral Care
15	Christus Trinity Mother Frances Hospital, Tyler	Tyler ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Winning Edge Employment, Andrews Center
16	Ascension Seton Northwest, Austin	Leander ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Bluebonnet MHMR
17	Christus Santa Rosa Children's Hospital, San Antonio	San Antonio ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, PCSI, Alamo Local Authority
18	Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Plano, Plano	Plano ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, LifePath
19	Texas Children's Health Plan, Houston	Houston ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, SCI Inc., MHMRA
20	Dow Chemical, Freeport	Brazosport ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, SCI Inc., Gulfport

#	Partner Name	Location
		Center
21	The Hospitals of Providence Memorial Campus, El Paso	El Paso ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Nidia Escobar, Emergence MHMR
22	Texas A&M Hotel and Conference Center, College Station	Bryan ISD, Brazos Valley CIL, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, MHMR of Brazos County
23	Renaissance Dallas Richardson Hotel, Richardson	Richardson ISD, Quest Employment, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Metrocare
24	Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital, Richardson	Richardson ISD, Quest Employment, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Metrocare
25	The City of Garland, Garland	Garland ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Quest Employment, Dallas Metrocare Services
26	Houston Dow Chemical, Houston	Houston ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, SCI, Inc., MHMRA
27	Northwest Texas Healthcare System, Amarillo	Amarillo ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Quest Employment, Texas Panhandle Center, Texas Health and Human Services
28	The Hospitals of Providence East Campus, El Paso	Socorro ISD, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Empowering Hands, Emergence MHMR
29	Highland Springs Retirement Community, Dallas	Richardson ISD, Quest Employment, Texas Workforce Solutions–VRD, Metrocare

Group Skills Training

At times, groups of students with disabilities may be brought together to learn vocational skills. These activities are called group skills trainings (GSTs). The following are examples of GSTs that involve coordination with employers.

SWEAT Program

In collaboration with the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), VRD holds a five-week summer work program called SWEAT (Summer Work Experience in Austin, Texas), in which up to 15 students who are blind or visually impaired are trained in employability skills, independent living skills, and mobility training and gain four weeks of work experience with businesses in the Austin area. The program is designed to prepare students for success in the world of work and adult living through increased independence, competence, and self-confidence.

Work and College Opportunities (WACO) Program at Texas A&M University

VRD collaborates with the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living and the Texas A&M University Center on Disability & Development to hold the WACO summer work program. Participants receive development and instruction in professionalism, self-determination, teamwork, and other areas connected to employment and college experience while working 16–20 hours a week in the community and living on campus.

Working and Living in the Community (WALIC)

WALIC is a four-week residential work-based learning and employment skills program for 15 eligible VR customers who are visually impaired students 16 years of age or older and have additional disabilities. This program is designed to be shorter in duration with a higher level of support for students with disabilities who have not previously participated in a work-based learning experience. Students participate in approximately 16 hours a week of work-based learning activities with only moderate support from a work experience trainer. VRD coordinates with local employers to identify and develop jobsites for this program.

Additionally, students receive a stipend for the work experience. Concurrent with the work-based learning activity, TSBVI staff provides employability skills training and independent living skills training (including home management, money management, personal care, travel skills, food preparation, community opportunities for recreational and leisure activities, and social interaction skills with peers, coworkers, and staff) to prepare the customers for the jobsite. Students are expected to participate at a level consistent with their abilities, ranging from full independence to basic exposure to adult living and various levels of work readiness.

Mastering the Real World of Work

Mastering the Real World of Work combines a vocation-based residential training component (Phase I) followed by paid work experience in the customer's own community (Phase II). The paid work experience consists of 100 hours of part-time work at four hours a day, five days a week, at employer partner CVS stores. The purpose of the GST is to ensure that blind and visually impaired customers are properly equipped for working in the real world.

Job Opportunities for Blind Students (JOBS)

JOBS is a three-week residential summer work experience program for 16 students ages 14 to 22 who are blind or visually impaired. This community-based program is designed to engage students with disabilities in the pre-ETS categories outlined in WIOA.

<u>Easy Virtual Fair</u>

In 2020, VRD implemented a strategy to offer virtual opportunities for students to engage with employers through activities hosted on the Easy Virtual Fair (EVF) platform. Through this platform, VR counselors and other staff members were able to stay in contact with students and provide them opportunities to interact around career and college exploration, transition, and more traditional job fairs. The platform offers a virtual job fair format where individual entities can establish "booths" to share information and interact with customers. To date, VRD has hosted approximately 70 events, with interaction from approximately 5,000 individuals.

H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

Texas Health and Human Services Commission

VRD will continue to collaborate with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the state agency responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental

disabilities and administering the state Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.).

Collaboration occurs in the delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined to be eligible for home and community-based services under a Medicaid waiver, Medicaid state plan amendment, or other authority related to a state Medicaid program. VR counselors provide information to mutually served customers to assist them in understanding how to navigate the long-term support and services system. VRD continues to collaborate with HHSC's Office of Disability Services Coordination to recruit Supported Employment (SE) providers already established with HHSC to ensure a seamless transition from one program to another, when applicable.

Additionally, VRD works with HHSC Medicaid/CHIP to resolve individual and system issues involving mutually served customers, particularly those transferring from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to Title II Childhood Disability Beneficiaries to ensure continuation of Medicaid 1915(c) waiver services.

VRD coordinates with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to encourage Employment Services Providers (ESPs) to become employment networks (ENs) under SSA's Ticket to Work Program. VRD offers incentive payments to ESP-ENs that provide:

- supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and
- extended supports to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure in order to advance employment and/or increase customer earnings.

2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

VRD continues to collaborate with HHSC, the state agency responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities, and administers the state Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.).

Collaboration occurs in the delivery of VR services, including extended services, for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined to be eligible for home and community-based services under a Medicaid waiver, Medicaid state plan amendment, or other authorities related to a state Medicaid program. VR counselors provide information to mutually served customers to assist them in understanding how to navigate the long-term support and services system.

Additionally, VRD works with HHSC Medicaid/CHIP to resolve individual and system issues involving mutually served customers, particularly those transferring from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to Title II Childhood Disability Beneficiaries to ensure continuation of Medicaid 1915(c) waiver services.

SSA and HHSC have a data exchange agreement that allows HHSC to access SSA data. Through a third-party agreement (State Verification and Exchange System), VRD is able to obtain SSA data regarding cost reimbursement from HHSC.

VRD works in collaboration with HHSC on legislative reports. In December 2018, a joint HHSC and VRD report regarding occupational skills training (OST) programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) was submitted to the Texas legislature as required by Senate Bill 2027 (SB2027) 85th Legislature, Regular Session (2017). The SB2027 report addressed the current state and validity of OST opportunities in Texas for individuals with IDD and identified regions in the state where training programs should be improved or expanded, as well as strategies for placing program graduates with IDD into fulfilling jobs by means of existing, improved, or expanded programs. The report also provided information

about postsecondary and training programs offered in Texas for individuals with IDD and noted a lack of OST programs for this population. External stakeholder recommendations presented in the report recommended that VRD produce a report on possible funding sources for OST programs for individuals with IDD and identify specific occupations requiring a certificate that would be appropriate for individuals with IDD within in-demand industries.

As a result of the SB2027 report, the legislature passed SB2038, 86th Legislature, Regular Session (2019), which mandated VRD to submit a report to the legislature identifying potential funding sources for postsecondary certifications, occupational licenses, or other workforce credential programs for individuals with IDD, as well as identify specific occupations in high-demand industries in Texas for which some type of workforce credential is required and may be appropriate for individuals with IDD. The SB2038 report was submitted to the legislature in October 2020 and included information on potential funding sources and occupations pertaining to OST for individuals with IDD. The report also identified 15 postsecondary programs for students with IDD funded through the US Department of Education.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

Texas Education Code (TEC), §61.06641, authorized through the passage of SB1017, 86th Legislature, Regular Session (2019), requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to periodically review the policies and practices that increase access to higher education opportunities, distribute educational outreach marketing materials, and establish an advisory council on postsecondary education for individuals with IDD. VRD has a member serving on this advisory council.

The statute requires a report to be written that includes historic and current higher education data and recommendations for changes to support success and achievement for individuals with IDD in accessing higher education (TEC §61.06641(k)). The advisory council submitted its first report in November 2020. Future reports are to be submitted to the governor and members of the legislature by December 1 of each even-numbered year.

3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

Mental Health

Working with HHSC, VRD promotes mental health evidence-based practices and other evidence-informed models of service that will improve competitive integrated employment outcome strategies for customers.

Other examples of collaboration include:

- increasing coordination and developing new partnerships with other state and community organizations—mental health organizations, local authorities, and universities—that serve individuals with developmental or intellectual impairments and mental health disorders to develop resources, increase knowledge, and implement best practices;
- working with the HHSC Office of Mental Health to identify and implement best practices, engage potential community partners, and facilitate service coordination; and
- participating in the Mental Health First Aid training conducted by local mental health authorities, which teaches VR counselors and other professionals how to assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis.

Training is another area that emphasizes interagency cooperation. VRD program specialists provide the following training:

- Annual training on the VR programs to Home and Community-Based Services waiver providers, service coordinators and case managers, the Private Provider Association of Texas, Providers Alliance for Community Services of Texas members, community centers staff, including customer benefits officers, and the Statewide Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Consortium
- Training on VRD services and benefits and work incentives to HHSC Managed Care Organization service coordinators and management, and other service providers and Medicaid waiver case managers
- Training on VRD employment services, benefits, and work incentives to members of the seven-statewide mental health peer-operated support groups
- Training on benefits and work incentives every six months for VRD staff, ESPs, HHSC providers, and IDD and mental health staff
- Overview of benefits and work incentives to HHSC staff, providers, and other community stakeholders throughout the year
- Overview of VRD services and best practices for mutually served customers for HHSC service coordinators, case managers, private providers, and other staff members
- Overview of Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) for community partners
- Training to ESPs statewide on best practices in the provision of employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities
- Training on assistive technology for community partners

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

I. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) is committed to ensuring that customers receive services from qualified rehabilitation professionals as set forth in §101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by WIOA and 34 C.F.R. §361.18. VRD has established procedures to support the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD). The Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) provides input to VRD in addressing issues related to personnel development. The Policy, Procedures, and Personnel Development Committee of RCT meets quarterly to discuss the development and maintenance of policies and procedures in support of the CSPD standard.

VRD requires an employee who serves in a position functionally classified as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VR counselor), Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (transition VR counselor), or Unit Support Coordinator (USC) to meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) standard as required by the TWC Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (QVRC) program. The QVRC program specialists closely monitor counselor hiring and educational needs, as well as work in close coordination with management to evaluate salaries and benefits.

As of July 2, 2021, the Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) had 1,122 full-time employment (FTE) staff positions to provide direct services to 61,629 VR participants, broken down as follows:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs)
- Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (TVRCs)
- Unit Support Coordinators (USCs)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs)
- Rehabilitation Assistants (RAs)

As of October 8, 2021 VRD's average caseload size is 72.

The number of VR participants served has declined recently. As a result, staffing projections will be held constant for the next two years; however, staffing needs will be reassessed annually as VRD implements outreach and awareness strategies to engage with more individuals with disabilities, including students with disabilities. Additionally, VRD has initiated staff recruitment and retention initiatives. As the number of counselors stabilizes and newer counselors gain experience, VRD expects to increase the number of customers served. As the number of customers served increases, the number of support staff and in-house service providers is expected to remain constant for the next two years and will be assessed to ensure sufficient staff to meet the expected need. VRD anticipates that it will be able to identify additional capacity for service delivery efforts within existing staffing levels during the current biennium through current and future Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) activities and other quality improvement activities.

Table: Vocational Rehabilitation Division Attrition Rate as of July 1, 2020.

Job title	Average Workforce (average filled positions)	Total Separations	Volun	Invol	Retire	Other (transfer to outside agency)	Year-to-date (YTD) Rate	Vol YTD Rate
VRC	472.75	79	46	10	20	3	16.71%	9.73%
TVRC	148	17	10	2	3	2	11.49%	6.76%

Table notes:

- YTD Rate calculated by dividing Total Separations by Average Strength
- Vol YTD Rate calculated by dividing Volume by Average Strength
- Attrition Rate information provided by TWC Human Resources

Table: Vocational Rehabilitation Division PY '22 Vacant and Filled Positions

Job Title	Average Positions Vacant	Average Positions Filled
VR Counselor	52	481
Transition VR Counselor	17	141
Unit Support Coordinator	5	26
Vocational Rehabilitation	6	50

Job Title	Average Positions Vacant	Average Positions Filled
Teacher		
Rehabilitation Assistants	34	316

Outreach activities will continue to be conducted to broaden the population of individuals with disabilities being served by VRD. Outreach, education, and awareness efforts will be targeted to unserved populations such as transition students, veterans, and individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism), and psychological disorders such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.

II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

Column one of following table identifies the number of VRD staff needed to provide direct customer services currently.

Table: Vocational Rehabilitation Division Current Personnel Needs

Job Title	PY'21 Number of Positions Currently Needed as of 7/1/20
VR Counselor	519
Transition VR Counselor	162
Unit Support Coordinator	29
Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center VRC	7
Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher (Field)	33
Vocational Rehabilitation Teacher (CCRC)	32
Rehabilitation Assistants	350

Table notes:

- Total positions as of July 1, 2020, per Active Position Report.

III. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

VRD will maintain current number of personnel in all personnel categories. It is VRD's intent to fill all VRC and TVRC positions to meet the current need (519/162) and enable the agency to increase the number of customers served. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in data anomalies outside previous projection models for VRD to maintain present staffing levels. VRD will be prepared for increased demand for VR services as the economy improves and more people resume looking for work and career advancement opportunities.

B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

During the Fall 2021 to Spring 2022 school year, VRD worked with five Texas and one out-of-state university master's degree rehabilitation counseling programs and clinical rehabilitation

counseling programs. While there are other universities in Texas and out-of-state which offer a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, the listed universities are the ones most used by VRD. NOTE: The University of Texas at Austin no longer has a Rehabilitation Counseling Program.

- Stephen F. Austin University
- University of North Texas
- University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley
- Texas Tech University
- University of Texas at El Paso
- University of Alabama

II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

A total of 298 students enrolled in Fall 2021 to Spring 2022 from the universities listed in the below table with credentials of academic preparedness to meet national rehabilitation counselor certification requirements. Additionally, there may be periodic changes in the academic preparedness in meeting certification requirements due to changing laws, public regulations, and/or delivery of rehabilitation services as practiced in the United States. The different university rehabilitation counseling programs may also vary accordingly, which would affect academic certification requirements.

Table: Fall 2021 – Spring 2022 Students Enrolled and Previous-Year Graduates

Institution	**University Students Enrolled**	**University Graduates from the Previous Year**
Texas Tech University	95	11
University of North Texas	76	18
University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley	Not Available	Not Available
Stephen F. Austin University	4	5
University of Texas at El Paso	74	4
University of Alabama	49	5
TOTAL	298	43

III. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

A total of 43 students graduated in Fall 2021 to Spring 2022 from the universities listed in the table above (Section II).

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

VRD has developed productive, proactive working relationships with Texas universities that train rehabilitation professionals. Involvement with Texas universities results in student requests for practicum and internship placements within VRD. Internships have been offered since 1999 for students completing master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling, Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling or Rehabilitation. In PY'20, VRD hosted 16 internships. Evaluations of student interns come directly from certified, licensed, or Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (QVRC) internship supervisors and department advisors from the intern's university.

Job vacancy notices are routinely posted on WorkInTexas.com, TWC's statewide online job search website that also serves and the state labor exchange system. Hiring supervisors can also request a broader distribution of vacancy notices by having them posted to additional websites such as Indeed.com, Monster.com, and others.

Recruitment continues for bilingual Spanish- and English-speaking candidates to fill positions located in areas with high Spanish-speaking populations. Opportunities to promote employment to all community sectors are achieved by sharing job postings with universities.

VRD encourages the hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities and strives to ensure that staff represents ethnic diversity and thereby reflects the population of Texas and the customers we serve. Ethnic distribution of VRD employees and Texas residents is shown below.

Table: Ethnic Distribution of VRD Employees and Texas Residents

Ethnic Group	VRD Employees	Texas Residents
Caucasian	37.53%	50.13%
Hispanic	30.16%	39.26%
African American	27.73%	12.19%
Asian	1.24%	5.44%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.04%	0.96%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.10%	0.12%
More Than Two	2.60%	17.61%

SOURCES: Texas Workforce Commission Human Resources, U.S. Census Bureau 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Summary File, Texas Demographic Center, and Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Department of Motor Vehicles. Additionally, approximately 7.5 percent of VR employees have reported a disability, such as blindness/visual impairment, Deaf/hard of hearing, physical and mental.

For the purpose of calculating the agency turnover, losses are counted only when an individual terminates employment with the agency. Losses do not include vacancies created because of employee promotions, reclassifications, demotions, or transfers within the agency.

VRD has established several strategies for recruitment, preparation, and retention of qualified personnel. Plans reflect continued annual needs assessment, quarterly review of strategies and interventions for recruitment, and updated review of the QVRC program following each semester to ensure satisfactory progress.

Recruitment of Qualified Personnel

VRD has a recruitment plan that identifies in-state and out-of-state entities from which qualified personnel may be hired. VRD also has designated recruitment coordinators who work closely

with each of these organizations. For each identified organization, the coordinator makes contact to establish specific recruitment strategies for each program. The recruitment plan coordinator regularly reviews and updates the plan. Depending on location, size, and nature of the class, and need of the institution, VRD employs the following approaches to recruitment:

- Participates in advisory committees for partnering universities allowing access and contribution to program improvement processes and to students for on-site visits;
- Conducts classroom orientations and distributes recruitment information for graduating students;
- Collaborates with the administration of distance-learning programs to determine effective processes for recruiting distance-learning students;
- Sends job postings regularly to VR graduate programs of more than 90 U.S. universities;
- Coordinates with universities for graduate VR internships to recruit rehabilitation counselors; and
- Participates in job fairs and employment conferences to recruit individuals from minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities.

Preparation of Qualified Personnel

VRD has a system to recruit and hire individuals as VR counselors who have master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling. The QVRC database is maintained to monitor counselors who are required to meet CSPD qualifications. Monitoring also includes the number of counselors with master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling or closely related fields, as well as the number who are Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRCs) or Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs). As of July 1, 2020, there were 710 positions (including 56 vacancies) required to meet the CSPD standard. Of the 649 filled positions, 463 counselors met the standard and 186 had not yet met it.

Applicants who meet the CSPD standard are preferred for counselor positions. The hiring manager must obtain a transcript for any candidate for a counselor position who has a bachelor's degree or higher prior to making a salary offer. For counselor candidates with a master's degree or a current CRC or LPC certification, the manager must provide the transcript or license certificate to the CSPD coordinator for review. The CSPD coordinator will verify whether an applicant meets the educational requirements or CSPD standard. The verification must be completed before the hiring manager makes a salary offer.

If a candidate is hired who does not meet the CSPD standard, he or she must participate in the QVRC program and complete the required coursework within seven years after completing the initial training year.

Counselors are required to sign the QVRC Acknowledgment form within 30 days of hire. By signing this required form, the counselor agrees that to hold a counselor position, they must meet the CSPD standard at the time of employment or by completing the educational requirements within the established CSPD timeline. Counselors not achieving the standard within the prescribed time are not allowed to continue functioning in this capacity. VRD provides funding for master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling, if alternate funding sources are not available.

Growth and development for all levels of staff is essential. VRD staff attend external trainings provided by such agencies as the American Association of Diabetes Educators, the Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Assistive Technology Industry Association, the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation, and the

National Council of State Agencies for the Blind. Staff are encouraged to attend national, state, and local conferences related to VR, including the Association of People Supporting Employment First National Conference, Texas Association of Vocational Adjustment Coordinators, Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness training, Assistive Technology Industry Association International Conference, and the Capacity Building Institute regarding building capacity for postsecondary transition of students with disabilities. In so doing, they can receive training and network with other professionals.

Additionally, trainings are conducted within the regions by designated training staff, and within the field offices by senior counselors, unit program specialists, supervisors, managers, and others.

Staff members also participate in training modules, such as vocational rehabilitation job-specific training, developed by the TWC Training and Development department's VR counselors. Training needs and priorities are identified on an ongoing basis. Past training has been in the areas of diabetes, substance abuse, caseload management, employment assistance, worker's compensation, criminal background checks, mental health first aid, counseling and adjustment to blindness, career choice counseling, autism, and self-employment. During their first year of employment, counselors attend internal training conducted by TWC Training and Development to enhance skills and develop a basic understanding of policy and how to implement caseload management processes.

Retention of Qualified Personnel

The Texas legislature sets the state's classification schedule, which determines pay grades for counselors and other classified positions as well as the salary schedule for the pay range agencies must use for compensation. VRD supports a wide range of learning activities for all classifications of employees. Staff views professional growth and development activities as a benefit that enhances retention. All staff has professional development plans created in coordination with managers as part of the performance management process. Other retention strategies are as follows:

- Flexible work schedules allow for four- or four-and-a-half-day workweeks, as well as teleworking opportunities, when feasible;
- A career ladder for counselors ranging from VRC I–IV, with respective salary compensation;
- New Salary Guidelines for VR counselors and Rehabilitation Assistants (RA) which increases starting salaries and offers salary adjustments for education level advancements;
- A variety of training opportunities in leadership skills development;
- VRD will cover the cost of the CRC and LPC exams, as well as renewals, and in-state travel to achieve the examination;
- A recognition award program is in place to highlight staff achievement;
- Access to training to support credential maintenance is available at no cost to the employee; and
- An educational reimbursement program is in place for support staff working toward attainment of a bachelor's degree.

3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR - RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE

REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors

VRD is committed to ensuring its workforce is highly skilled, professionally trained, and duly prepared to serve Texans with disabilities with the highest quality service delivery. Toward this goal, VRD has a plan to achieve standards for counseling staff in compliance with §101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act as amended by WIOA and 34 C.F.R. §361.18.

There are no state-approved certifications or licensing requirements for VR counselors in Texas. Therefore, VRD has established standards for academic preparedness focused on the national requirements of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) for Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification. However, the national requirements are subject to change as our laws, public regulations or delivery of rehabilitation services evolve. As mentioned previously, the different university rehabilitation counseling programs may also affect certification requirements.

VRD ensures that staff is well-qualified to assist individuals with disabilities. There is emphasis of educational requirements at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels in fields related to rehabilitation. However, the degree field may include other degrees that prepare individuals to work with customers and employers. For example, bachelor's degrees might include not only VR counseling, but also social work, psychology, disability studies, human resources, special education, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with customers and employers. For individuals hired at the bachelor's level, there is a requirement for at least one year of paid or unpaid experience related to direct work with individuals with disabilities.

VRD recognizes master's or doctoral degrees in fields of specific study, such as VR counseling, clinical rehabilitation counseling, behavioral health, behavioral science, disability studies, human relations, human services, marriage and family therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, psychometrics, rehabilitation administration/services, social work, special education, vocational assessment/evaluation, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector in a disability field or rehabilitation-related fields.

A counselor meets the CSPD standard by holding a master's degree in VR counseling; master's degree in "counseling or counseling-related field" with specific coursework; master's, specialist, or doctoral degree in specific majors with specific coursework; current CRC certificate from CRCC; or current LPC licensure.

Therefore, a counselor with a master's degree in counseling or a counseling-related field must, at a minimum, complete a graduate course in the Theories and Techniques of Counseling and successfully complete six graduate courses with a primary focus in the following areas:

- one course on assessment;
- one course on occupational information or job placement;
- one course on case management and rehabilitation services;
- one course on medical aspects of disabilities;
- one course on psychosocial aspects of disabilities; and
- one course on multicultural issues.
- A counselor with a master's or doctoral degree in one of the listed specific fields of study must complete a graduate course on the Theories and Techniques of Counseling, and successfully complete six graduate courses each with a primary focus in the areas listed, plus one course on Foundations of Rehabilitation Counseling.

Although VRD has taken steps to hire rehabilitation counselors with master's degrees in VR counseling, several factors pose challenges to this undertaking. A significant barrier to hiring counselors with master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling is the expanse of Texas that must be served. VR affords rehabilitation assistants (RAs) who attain an undergraduate degree the opportunity for employment in VR as VR counselors. The years of knowledge and experience on a caseload coupled with their undergraduate degree have proven beneficial to VR.

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

NOTE: Please see Section 4(a) for additional detail on training.

VRD strongly encourages formal education and training of our staff who provide direct support to Texans with disabilties. The VRD training curriculum is planned to assist staff in understanding the current workforce and how to best serve our customers. Moreover, VRD provides specialized training for specialty caseloads such as blind and visual impairments, Deaf and hard of hearing, just to mention a few.

With todays pandemic environment, VRD is very creative in establishing training environments that benefit our staff, while having the safest environment available. For example, most of our training is virtual, but can be delivered through classroom, webinar, or teleconference.

Examples of Specialized Training:

Vocational Rehabilitation and Blindness training is a 32 hour training attended by all newly hired VR staff members, except for part-time employees. Participants develop an awareness of the nature of blindness and the impact it has on all aspects of a person's life.

Immersion Training is a four to six-week program. Application of the Texas Confidence Builder philosophy, using the least restrictive adaptation model, structured discovery, problem solving, and adult learning theory includes techniques to facilitate emotional adjustment to blindness. The Orientation and Mobility portion of Immersion Training allows for individualized training and opportunity for immediate feedback.

Many of the courses in the Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling degree provide opportunities to develop skills and learn about assistive technology, including screen readers, voice-activated software, special keyboards, braille devices, closed circuit televisions, portable note takers, etc., as part of the intensive Employment Assistance Training program. VR Teachers (VRTs) are provided with a three-year individual training plan that includes the following:

- Four weeks wearing a blindfold at the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center participating in classes with customers;
- Three weeks of training in teaching, process, procedures, and employment assistance training for VRTs;
- Extensive braille training—all VRTs must demonstrate competency annually by completing The Annual Braille Project and submitting it for review by the VRT Program Specialist; and
- Training transcripts, letters of recommendation from a certified VRT, and funding to help interested teachers become academy certified.

Many customers and staff members who are blind or visually impaired need alternative formats for printed communications. Staff in the Assistive Technology Unit prepare-documents in

braille, large print, or electronic format. Dedicated computers with braille translation software and braille embossers are available in each field office.

Additionally, VRD employs Assistive Technology Specialists to support staff using assistive programs with standard agency software to complete their job duties.

Also, the DeafBlind Unit serves customers who have a dual sensory loss affecting both hearing and vision. Specialists with knowledge related to both hearing loss and vision impairment consult with caseload-carrying staff, customers, and community resources to develop and implement plans and services. VRD also purchases state-certified interpreter services as needed.

VRD is committed to maintaining support for in-service and academic training that ensures all staff receives the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful and that provides developmental activities for new and emerging leaders. The focus of statewide training is typically programmatic to enhance direct service delivery to customers. All staff has access to training opportunities through the professional development plan created through the management chain's professional development process.

VRD managers receive training on a variety of management issues, including ethics, communication, leadership, monitoring for quality service delivery and compliance, and management information system tools.

VRD also partners with organizations such as the National Council on Rehabilitation Education to ensure the active dissemination of research development for the field of rehabilitation. Additionally, VR uses studies from the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues to assist in the development of practices for service delivery.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A. A SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

VRD is committed to ensuring that its diverse workforce is highly skilled, professionally trained, and thoroughly prepared to provide the highest quality service to Texans who are disabled. Additionally, VRD strongly supports specialized training and maintaining specialty caseloads in the areas of blindness and visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing, and transition, to name a few. Our training curriculum is designed to help staff gain a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

All staff members have access to internal and external training designed to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve success in their positions, provide developmental activities for new and emerging leaders, and enhance service delivery for customers. Trainings are delivered through classroom, webinar, and teleconference.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Blindness training is a 32 hour training attended by all newly hired VR staff members, except for part-time employees. Participants develop an awareness of the nature of blindness and the impact it has on all aspects of a person's life.

Introduction to Blindness training is a two-week program that introduces participants to the nonvisual blindfold training strategy. Under blindfold, staff members experience the key emotional factors and learn alternative techniques in the adjustment to blindness process, discovering that blindness does not preclude an individual from living an independent and successful life.

Immersion Training is a four- to six-week program. Application of the Texas Confidence Builder philosophy, using the least restrictive adaptation model, structured discovery, problem solving, and adult learning theory includes techniques to facilitate emotional adjustment to blindness. The Orientation and Mobility portion of Immersion Training allows for individualized training and opportunity for immediate feedback.

Eye Medical is a three-day training designed to provide staff members with a basic understanding of the anatomy of the eye, familiarize them with pathological conditions causing vision loss, and develop a referential body of knowledge related to diagnostics, treatment, training, and long-term vocational implications.

Individual training plans are developed for all new counselors. Training plans for new employees foster competencies in skills required for different job categories. TWC's Training and Development provides or coordinates more formal, extensive trainings for caseload carrying staff.

Many of the courses in the Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling degree provide opportunities for practical application on actual caseloads. Counselors and other staff learn about assistive technology, including screen readers, voice-activated software, special keyboards, braille devices, closed circuit televisions, portable note takers, etc., as part of the intensive Employment Assistance Training program. VR Teachers (VRTs) are provided with a three-year individual training plan that includes the following:

- Four weeks wearing a blindfold at the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center participating in classes with customers;
- Three weeks of training in teaching, process, procedures, and employment assistance training for VRTs;
- Extensive braille training—all VRTs must demonstrate competency annually by completing The Annual Braille Project and submitting it for review by the VRT Program Specialist; and
- Training transcripts, letters of recommendation from a certified VRT, and funding to help interested teachers become academy certified.

All staff members participate with their supervisors in planning annual goals and identifying training needs and goals. Combined with input received from VR managers and administrators, this process assesses training needs and determines annual training calendar offerings.

VRD meets adaptive communication needs. For example, with the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Language Line, staff members can establish communication with customers in numerous languages, including those commonly found in Texas.

Many customers and staff members who are blind or visually impaired need alternative formats for printed communications. Staff in the Assistive Technology Unit prepare-documents in braille, large print, or electronic format. Dedicated computers with braille translation software and braille embossers are available in each field office. Staff members use these to produce documents, such as letters to customers or meeting agendas.

VRD employs Assistive Technology Specialists to support staff using assistive programs with standard agency software to complete their job duties. The specialists assess staff skill levels, recommend and implement training approaches, and coordinate service delivery statewide.

The DeafBlind Unit serves customers who have a dual sensory loss affecting both hearing and vision. Specialists with knowledge related to both hearing loss and vision impairment consult with caseload-carrying staff, customers, and community resources to develop and implement plans and services. VRD also purchases state-certified interpreter services as needed.

VRD works closely with the education system in transitioning students with disabilities from high school to postsecondary training or employment. Transition VR counselors participate in training covering the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process as well as the Individualized Education Program (IEP). When conducting seminars or workshops for the ARD and IEP process, trainers may also include parents and professionals from:

- TEA's Special Education Division
- Regional education service centers and local education agencies (LEAs)
- Disability Rights Texas
- Partners Resource Network, Inc.
- Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Texas School for the Deaf

Additionally, VRD staff members participate in cross-trainings with other entities involved in education for students with vision loss or visual impairment, such as the Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and sponsors and participates in workshops and seminars to help education staff members develop expertise in working with these students.

VRD is committed to maintaining support for in-service and academic training that ensures all staff receives the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful and that provides developmental activities for new and emerging leaders. While there are several positions within VRD that support field operations, the focus of statewide training is typically programmatic to enhance direct service delivery to customers. All staff has access to training opportunities through the professional development plan created through the management chain's professional development process. Training content for field staff is typically developed within the system of statewide training product modules disseminated through field management staff. Content learning includes topics that directly relate to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes necessary to perform jobs as expected by management and as detailed in job descriptions. Content training strategies include the following:

- Continued focus on the foundations of the VR process for counselors and RAs, including accurate eligibility determination, inclusion of customers in planning for service delivery, thorough assessment and planning practices, models for VR counseling, informed customer choice, service to culturally diverse populations, purchasing practices, supported employment, customized employment, and other strategies for quality employment assistance, service delivery, and effective case note documentation;
- Training in working with employers and customers to increase knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, the Olmstead decision, available independence initiatives, and WIOA to enhance employment options and employment knowledge;
- Training in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, appropriate options and alternatives for effective transition services and Social Security work incentive programs, including programs under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999;
- Training in assessing appropriate rehabilitation technology interventions;
- Extending opportunities to take advantage of training available from external sources for ongoing dissemination of timely trends related to disability and treatment modalities within the field of rehabilitation;

- Coordinating with the Texas Administrators of Continuing Education and other entities as appropriate to develop localized training in targeted disability areas; and
- Implementation of training for new counselors that focuses on critical thinking and sound decision making.

B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.

VRD will initiate outreach and increase staff knowledge and skills in effective rehabilitation strategies for serving such customers by:

- researching and implementing best practices;
- building staff capacity and expertise to serve individuals who are blind and have additional disabilities (e.g., through the implementation of the Mental Health First Aid training, a full-day course that should be taken by all staff members who have direct contact with customers); and
- increasing coordination and developing new partnerships with other state and community organizations, including mental health organizations, HHSC's Office of Mental Health Coordination, and the Helen Keller National Center for DeafBlind youth and adults.

VRD managers receive training on a variety of management issues, including ethics, communication, leadership, monitoring for quality service delivery and compliance, and management information system tools.

VRD has also developed partnerships with organizations such as the National Council on Rehabilitation Education to ensure the active dissemination of research development for the field of rehabilitation. Additionally, VRD uses studies from the Institute on Rehabilitation Issues to assist in the development of practices for service delivery.

New Counselors

All new counselors are trained using a sequence of learning events. The sequence includes an assigned coach who uses a published quick start guide, which includes a learning plan for on-the-job training and required and optional courses. The learning plan guides the new counselor's learning activities during the initial probationary period. Based on the learning plan, training is provided throughout the initial year through a series of required courses, peer training, and coaching sessions that focus on learning to guide each customer to successful achievement of his or her employment and/or independent living goals. Training covers VR policies and procedures as well as values-based decision making, informed customer choice, employment assistance, and successful closures. Additionally, new counselors learn effective strategies for caseload management, working with Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) providers, assessing employment trends, matching employer needs to qualified consumers, and building successful partnerships with customers, businesses, schools, and other community resources. Following completion of the probationary period, the counselor and supervisor create a professional development plan, which addresses the required educational standards of their position. The professional development plan is updated annually regarding training activities and progress toward meeting educational requirements.

New RAs

All new RAs are trained using a sequence of learning activities. The sequence includes an assigned coach and a quick start guide, which includes a learning plan for on-the-job training and required and optional courses. Training is provided throughout the initial year through

attendance at a required course on RA fundamentals, other courses as assigned by the RA's supervisor, peer training, and coaching sessions. The fundamentals course focuses on the roles of the RA in facilitating successful employment outcomes for customers. The required course addresses both internal and external customer service, purchasing, disability etiquette, and an overview of values-based decision making and the RA's role in the VR process. Following completion of the initial training period, the RA and supervisor develop a professional development plan that identifies additional training and development activities to support the RA's successful performance.

New Vocational Rehabilitation Managers/Supervisors

New VR managers/supervisors also participate in a sequence of learning activities to develop their skills and competencies. This sequence includes a regional orientation followed by a series of self-directed activities guided by a comprehensive orientation outline. These activities provide training for new managers in VR program management, effective coaching, and values-based decision making. Following completion of the initial learning activities, the new manager receives professional development training in management courses, which may be through the Governor's Center for Management Development and other available resources. A regional director guides the new manager through this process. VR managers comply with TWC's performance planning and review policy for evaluating the performance of VR staff within the division. This system requires that supervisory personnel formally evaluate an employee's performance in the essential functions of the employee's position as per TWC Human Resources policies.

This system promotes clear understanding between the supervisor and the employee of the priorities and objectives for the upcoming period. In reviewing performance against expectations, emphasis is placed on results achieved through service delivery, identification of reasons for variance from expected results, and establishment of appropriate development plans that serve to deliver skill-enhancing, practical learning opportunities.

RCT has the opportunity to review and comment on the policies, procedures, and programmatic direction of the VRD. RCT representatives are invited to fully participate in development and review of policies and procedures. VR directors meet quarterly with RCT to present updates and share input regarding knowledge, skills, and abilities of VR staff and overall VR program outcomes.

In summary, a comprehensive and overarching training design is in place to meet the learning needs of all VR staff. While these activities are provided in a myriad of venues and through multiple modalities, all opportunities for training are specifically directed toward skill enhancement and credential building to form the most qualified staff possible to deliver services to customers in Texas. Although all staff members do not have direct customer contact, all staff members have a direct impact on the success of the VR program by providing vocational services and an increased opportunity for independence.

5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

One way VRD meets adaptive communication needs is by using the LEP Language Line. This allows staff to communicate with customers in numerous languages, including those commonly found in Texas.

Many customers and staff members who are blind or visually impaired need alternative formats for printed communications. Staff in the Assistive Technology Unit prepare-documents in braille, large print, or electronic format. Dedicated computers with braille translation software and braille embossers are available in each field office. Staff uses these to produce documents, such as letters to customers or meeting agendas.

VRD employs Assistive Technology specialists to support staff using assistive programs with standard agency software to complete their job duties. Specialists assess staff skill levels, recommend and implement training approaches, and coordinate service delivery statewide.

The DeafBlind Unit serves customers who are who have a dual sensory loss affecting both hearing and vision. Specialists fluent in sign language consult with caseload carrying staff, customers, and community resources to develop and implement plans and services. VRD also purchases state-certified interpreter services as needed.

Additionally, VR staff participates in cross-trainings with other entities involved in education for students with visual loss, such as the Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and sponsors and participates in workshops and seminars to help education staff members develop expertise in working with these students.

ReHabWorks (RHW) is the electronic case management system used by VRD. RHW contains information specific to each CRP vendor. VR staff has access to and shares provider information regarding qualifications, services provided, location, experience in working with target populations, foreign languages, and other communication skills (for example, Braille).

VRD continues to provide effective modes of communication for staff, applicants, eligible individuals with disabilities, and its community partners and stakeholders based on individualized needs. Alternative formats include, but are not limited to, American Sign Language interpreters, Spanish interpreters, and AT&T Language Line interpreters for languages such as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Chinese dialects, etc. Also available are captioning, braille through the Assistive Technology Unit, large print, reader services, and electronic formatting and screen readers. VRD also recruits bilingual staff for caseloads with high concentrations of customers who speak languages other than English.

Some unit management decisions lead to the development of specialty caseloads in which a concentration of customers' needs services requiring additional counselor skills. For example, counselors and RAs who are hired to serve caseloads with a concentration of deaf and hard-of-hearing customers are preferred to have manual communication skills at the time of hire. These counselors and RAs receive ongoing professional development specific to this target population. The professional development plan created for these individuals includes specific skills maintenance or enhancement activities that may be accessed through external training providers, in addition to traditional training opportunities within VRD.

6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

VRD is committed to ensuring that its diverse workforce is highly skilled, professionally trained, and thoroughly prepared to provide the highest quality service to Texans who are blind or visually impaired and/or have other disabilities. Our training curriculum is designed to help staff gain a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities, and all procedures and activities related to personnel development described are responsive to WIOA and the amendments made to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. VRD develops partnerships with high schools, education service centers, and TEA to assist with professional development for personnel who work with students with disabilities.

VRD has specialty transition VR counselors and general VR counselors who act as liaisons for high schools and partner with the educational system to serve transition-age students seeking assistance to access adult vocational services. Partnering with ISDs allows counselors to use office space on campus to ensure that student customers have access to resources available through the workforce investment system, community, businesses, and other partners necessary to build a network of support. The increase in the number of students with autism, physical and neurodevelopment disabilities, and psychiatric or dual diagnoses reinforces the

need to continue best practices components of IDEA. Staff works closely with TEA, centers for independent living, communities, and businesses to achieve collaboration, effective programming, and customer satisfaction. As a result, these efforts improve the effectiveness of VR services for transition customers. Such collaborations take on many different forms in training VRD and educational staff, as well as in impacting families. VRD staff will continue to collaborate with ISDs in the provision of Pre-ETS as specified in WIOA. Additionally, counselors are often invited to education service centers to participate in educator training and to present training, particularly for more effective transition planning for students. VRD staff works with schools in creating job fairs that allow students to meet with employers and gather information about the labor market. Family nights are hosted in some areas to invite interested members of the public to VRD offices to share resource information, discuss service delivery issues, and give input regarding best practices that would better support students and their families.

In some areas, community partners such as churches, Workforce Solutions Offices, and community centers assist in providing training to school personnel on understanding cultural diversity in Texas. Training objectives that include sensitivity to cultural issues are integrated in the provision of the principles of ethics in service delivery. Given the cultural diversity within the expanse of Texas, this is an issue often addressed in external conferences with presentations to ensure that staff is sensitive to and aware of the manner in which the VR process is applied.

VRD continues to enhance partnerships with TEA, high schools, community colleges, stakeholders, and businesses to leverage relations that better prepare students to transition to postsecondary education and the workforce.

J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

Per §101 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (RA73), the 2020 CSNA described the VR service needs of Texas residents with disabilities. This CSNA summary report covers the first triennial period since the reorganization of the VR program was completed on October 1, 2017. Based on a routine review of certain Texas state agencies conducted by the Texas Sunset Commission, the 84th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 208 to reorganize the administering agencies of the VR program.

Senate Bill 208 required:

- the VR program to move to TWC by September 1, 2016;
- blind services and general services to be combined into one DSU by October 1, 2017; and
- VR staff to integrate into the Workforce Solutions Offices (American Job Centers) across Texas.

Throughout the DSU combination and reorganization, TWC aimed to eliminate duplicative management structures, realign staff positions, and increase VR counselor positions to meet customer demand.

Methodology

The 2020 CSNA used a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative evidence of VR service patterns with qualitative insights from customers, staff, and other stakeholders, especially providers.

The five principal information sources for the 2020 CSNA are the following:

1. **One local (Austin) and fourstatewide virtual town hall meetings** using the ZOOM webinar platform (523 attendees). An online SurveyMonkey town hall questionnaire allowed people who were unable to attend to provide input (108 respondents).
2. **An internet-based VR needs assessment survey** of customers, staff, and providers contracted with the Public Policy Research Institute (PPRI) at Texas A&M University (1,283 respondents). This survey focused on satisfaction with systems, processes, and specific VR services.
3. **13 key informant interviews**, including one VR manager and one counselor from each of the six integrated service areas, in addition to one supervisor from the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center (CCRC)
4. **Customer satisfaction surveys** conducted for VR by Westat
5. **Data from ReHabWorks** (the automated case management system used by the Texas VR program)

Identified Vocational Rehabilitation Service Needs

As part of its focus, the 2020 CSNA studied trends that were first identified in the 2017 and previous CSNA cycles. Goals previously established by the VR program, in coordination with the RCT, remain relevant. The Texas VR program will continue to assess gathered data to consider opportunities and solutions as the newly reorganized VRD matures.

Per the 2020 CSNA, the state's three overarching categories of VR service needs are:

1. **Provider Network:** recovering and maintaining a robust network of providers to ensure access to equitable and diverse services;
2. **Process Improvement:** streamlining procedures and approval processes to remove any unnecessary administrative processes for staff, providers, and customers; and
3. **Staffing and Expertise:** recovering and maintaining sufficient staff and expertise to effectively serve job seekers with disabilities.

Summary of Themes and Needs

A common and prominent CSNA theme that emerged in town hall meetings and online surveys was the need to reduce wait time for receiving services by streamlining paperwork and internal procedures. All CSNA information sources also emphasized the need for VR offices to consistently offer accurate and up-to-date information and concise explanations of VR services and policies. Customers in particular complained about communication and service interruptions due to prolonged vacancies or high counselor turnover.

When comparing the 2020 and 2017 CSNAs, one notices a considerable increase in feedback about the need for informed customer choice and a perceived lack of service provider options. At the town halls, providers stated that new policies put into place during the program reorganization resulted in additional paperwork processes, especially for outcome-based services such as supported employment. They also noted the need for rate revisions to bring contracted prices into closer alignment with standard market values. Six town hall attendees identified as providers who had left the VR network for these reasons. Current providers asked for expanded opportunities for constructive engagement with VR management to provide

feedback and discuss policy changes. Respondents to the town hall question regarding customer choice frequently commented on the limited number of VR provider options rather than no options. Likewise, eight of the 13 key informants (VR managers and counselors) mentioned deficits of specialty service providers outside of large metro areas.

The present reality of a declining service provider network helps to explain perception gaps between staff and VR program participants. In other words, staff may be following procedures as specified, but due to current provider network circumstances, customers still may feel that they have not been offered a satisfactory choice in services. Participants also highlighted the need for expanded labor market knowledgeability by VR staff, together with employer education and awareness, to cultivate a greater diversity of employment options after exiting the VR program.

Most Significant Disabilities

To be considered as having a significant disability, a VR customer must have serious limitations in one or more functional areas and require multiple VR services over an extended period. Having a most significant disability means that the VR customer must have serious limitations in three or more functional areas (for example, mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) and require multiple VR services over an extended period. Additionally, if an individual is an SSI or SSDI recipient, then he or she is presumed eligible and considered to have at least one significant disability.

As shown in Table 1, Employment Rate for FFY'17–'19 by Severity of Disability, individuals with significant and most significant disabilities have less success in achieving employment with VR services. Formulating strategies aimed at mitigating the impact of disability significance will prove helpful for the next triennium.

Table 1. Employment Rate for FFY'17–'19 by Severity of Disability
Source: I|3, ReHabWorks Closure Aggregates

Disability Significance	Closures	Successful	Employment Rate
No Significant Disability	6,001	5,202	86.69%
Significant Disability	44,233	26,537	60.0%
Most Significant Disability	18,729	9,638	51.46%

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

When data collection for the 2020 CSNA began in January 2020, there were about 3,153,000 Texans with disabilities, representing approximately 12 percent of the state's population. Of that number, 50 percent were male, 50 percent were female, 32 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 23 percent identified as belonging to a minority racial group. The approximately 219,000 VR participants[1] served during FFY'17–'19 generally matched these demographics; 31 percent were Hispanic and/or Latino, and 27 percent belonged to a minority racial group. However, only 45 percent of VR participants were female, which reflects the lower levels of participation by females in the Texas labor force. In FFY'19, about 60 percent of VR participants achieved a desired employment outcome, otherwise known as a successful VR case closure.

[1] Rounded sum of annual FFY participant counts (76,338 in FFY'17, 72,494 in FFY'18, and 70,146 in FFY'19)

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Underserved Populations

Based on data in the 2020 CSNA, likely underserved populations and unmet needs include the following:

- Individuals who are age 55 years or older and unemployed at the time of application to the VR program
- Individuals who need supported employment to find their first jobs
- Individuals who are pursuing career advancement
- Individuals who live outside of major metropolitan areas and have neurodevelopmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or an intellectual developmental disorder (IDD) or who have psychosocial disabilities such as depressive mood or personality disorders and need access to specially trained staff, providers, and employers
- Individuals who are stroke survivors or who have traumatic brain injuries and need new service providers after an open enrollment period failed to attract specialized vendors
- Students who live in rural or disadvantaged school districts and need preemployment and other transition services
- Veterans who have disabilities, need information about TWC services, and may not be aware of the Texas VR program
- Individuals with blindness or visual impairments (BVI) who need expanded access to providers of BVI and independent living services to support vocational goals
- Individuals who receive public benefits and need easily accessible information about how employment may impact those benefits

Meeting the Needs of Underserved Populations

Because individuals with the most significant disabilities have around one-third less success in employment, more strategic attention dedicated to this population should deliver specific strategies to improve employment rates.

During FFY'17–'19, the number of VR participants declined by 8 percent, from 76,338 to 70,146, whereas the program's employment rate declined by 6 percentage points, from 66 percent to 60 percent. On a year-to-year basis, the sharpest decrease occurred in FFY'18 and was accompanied by an approximately 20 percent decrease in VR service expenditures for that fiscal year. The beginning of FFY'18 coincided with the completion of the reorganization of the VR program into one DSU on October 1, 2017. According to feedback from the town halls and VR needs survey, a shrinking provider network coupled with increased counselor vacancies has impacted the consistency of customer engagement and continuity of service delivery.

Table 2: Racial and Ethnic Distribution

Source: Texas American Community Survey Table S1810 (2018, 5-Year Estimates), ReHabWorks Tables (aggregate counts for FFY'19), TWC HR data as of August 31, 2019

Population	Hispanic Ethnicity	Racial Minorities
TWC-VRD Staff	30%	31%
VR Participants	31%	27%
Texas Disability Population	32%	23%

VRD encourages the hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities and strives to ensure equal opportunity employment so that its staff can represent the ethnic diversity of its customer base. There were no needs mentioned in the town halls or key informant interviews that were specifically associated with race or ethnicity.

D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

The VR program aims to increase VR counselors' knowledge of work incentives and the effect of earnings on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). This will improve the quality of VR's provision of counseling on decisions that impact employment.

Respondents to the 2020 PPRI VR needs survey overwhelmingly identified a concern about the loss of government benefits as a chief challenge to successful VR outcomes: 78 percent said it was sometimes or often a challenge, which was the highest proportion for any of the items on the survey. Moreover, 74 percent of respondents identified a lack of accessible information on government benefits and work incentives as sometimes or often a challenge. VR customers who receive SSI or SSDI benefits during their case are about 20 percent less likely to achieve successful employment outcomes than those who do not receive benefits.

During FFY'17–'19, the employment rate for customers receiving SSI or SSDI declined at a higher rate (9 percent decrease) than for customers not receiving these benefits (5 percent decrease). Moreover, the proportion of successful closures made up of cases with customers receiving government benefits has gradually declined, from around 23 percent in FFY'17 to 19 percent in FFY'19.

Compared to the 2017 CSNA, the proportion of staff and VR participants in the 2020 PPRI VR needs survey who indicated they were "very knowledgeable" about the relationship between employment, government benefits, and disability-related services remained constant at 29 percent of staff and 13 percent of participants. Conversely, the proportion of survey respondents who indicated they were "not knowledgeable" about the relationship between employment, government benefits, and disability-related services increased from 15 percent in 2017 to 29 percent in 2020. This overall increase could reflect the higher representation of VR participants in the 2020 survey.

Work incentive and benefits counseling ranked among the lowest rated of all VR services regarding customer satisfaction, with only 57 percent of VR participants indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed that this type of service met their expectations for quality and timeliness. However, this still represents a significant increase in satisfaction, compared to 43 percent for participants in 2017.

VRD has worked to increase collaboration and coordination with Boards, employers, and other stakeholders to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after-school opportunities such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer and year-round work experience programs.

TWC has data agreements with other federal and state agencies, including the VA and the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS). These agreements help forge the way for collaboration and coordination of services and resources.

The Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program is offered in each of the 28 local workforce development areas. VRD contracts with each Board to contract out employability skills training, work site identification, placement, and monitoring and to pay student wages and associated costs for SEAL participants. Local VRD staff works in partnership with each Board to identify students who might benefit from the program, to conduct outreach and recruitment activities,

to identify work sites, and to provide any additional services needed for students to complete the program.

VRD is also an active partner in Project SEARCH, a full-year school-to-work program that offers classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through work site rotations. Although Project SEARCH is a business-led program, referring and preparing students with disabilities involves partnering with independent school districts (ISDs), education service centers, and local Workforce Solutions Offices as well as VRD. As of the end of FFY'19, Texas had 29 Project SEARCH sites. Sites are led by a host business, and key partners include VRD, ISDs, CRPs, and local authorities. Each Project SEARCH site typically has eight to 12 participants per year. Approximately 225 students participated in Project SEARCH for the 2018–2019 school year. Project SEARCH sites were active not only in the largest metropolitan areas but also in other cities and towns, including El Paso, Lubbock, College Station, Brenham, Tyler, and Amarillo.

The results of an I|3 evaluation of Project SEARCH outcomes from FFY'15–'18 illustrate the impact of the program. The success rate for Project SEARCH participants was 89.6 percent, compared to 53.5 percent for nonparticipants. Compared to customers aged 18–24 at exit who did not receive the service, Project SEARCH participants were about 68 percent more likely to achieve successful employment outcomes and about 32 percent more likely to retain employment in the second and fourth quarters following exit from the VR program. These differences are statistically significant at the 95 percent level of confidence.

There were 299 Project SEARCH participants identified and 299 standard VR participants sampled. Standard VR participants were sampled from the same management units and counties where their counterparts received Project SEARCH services. All participants in the study were between the ages of 18 and 24 at exit, had an intellectual or learning impairment, and did not have an impairment resolved prior to program exit.

Additionally, VRD has implemented Group Skills Trainings (GSTs) to teach vocational and self-advocacy skills in coordination with employers. For instance, the SWEAT program (Summer Work Experience in Austin, Texas)is a five-week summer work program conducted by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) in which up to 15 students who are blind or visually impaired are trained in employability skills, independent living skills, and mobility training. VRD also provides training opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing customers at the Texas School for the Deaf. Additionally, VRD collaborates with the Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living and Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development to hold the WACO (Work and College Opportunities) at Texas A&M summer work program. Participants receive development and instruction in professionalism, self-determination, and teamwork. They typically experience and learn about college opportunities and work in the community 16 to 20 hours a week while living on campus.

VRD aims to leverage existing business partnerships to identify additional opportunities to better prepare students for the workplace and help them obtain jobs. In addition to the State office team, each of VRD's six regions has a Business Relations Team consisting of two Business Relations Coordinators, two Employment Assistance Specialists who specialize in BVI (except for the East Texas region, which only has one), and other staff at the management unit level identified as part of the Outreach and Service Coordination regional teams. Together, these staff members work with local employers to learn about their open positions as well as to help employers understand and see the value in hiring individuals with disabilities. With many of these partnerships, special hiring and/or training programs have been developed with the intent of helping ensure that VR customers have not only the skills for the open positions but also access to positions within the companies. Nevertheless, these efforts have not yet been evaluated for effectiveness.

Meanwhile, the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (IL-OIB) program has been retained by TWC within the VR program. As a result, referral processes and policies have been developed to expand the network of providers for individuals who need independent living services.

Other collaboration with local education agencies (LEAs), higher education, and Boards aims to expand customer access to postsecondary opportunities that provide training and employment in meaningful higher-paying jobs.[2] VRD will continue to focus on developing and enhancing partnerships and broad collaboration, not only because they are emphasized in WIOA, but also because they promise to help cultivate a more responsive and effective service delivery system that will benefit customers.

The full CSNA report was published in June 2021. The VR service needs identified by the report are guiding VRD in programmatic improvements and enhancements for meaningful employment outcomes for customers as well as strategies to better leverage relationships with employers and collaboration with partners.

[2] VRD currently has contracts with 15 colleges and universities for 39 different programs, activities, and camps.

E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

The VR program aims to expand and improve vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and to improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities.

VR participants 24 years or younger have the lowest employment rate of any age cohort. During FFY'17–'19, the average employment rate for youth was 51 percent, while the corresponding rate for customers with student status (a subset of youth) was 46 percent. The decrease in the employment rate for both youth and students mirrored that of the VR average (6 percentage points). After an initial decline of around 10 percent in FFY'18, the absolute number of employment outcomes (successful closures) for students and youth increased by about 9 percent in FFY'19 relative to FFY'18.

During FFY'17–'19, the number of VR participants with youth status (age 14–24) remained stable.[3] At the same time, the number of Pre-ETS customers steadily increased over the period, from around 18,400 in FFY'17 to approximately 29,800 in FFY'19. This includes both potentially VR eligible Pre-ETS customers (prior to VR program eligibility determination) and VR eligible Pre-ETS customers receiving authorized and other VR services.

Mentions about Pre-ETS service needs figured prominently in town hall meetings and key informant interviews. Table 3 depicts Pre-ETS need and progress categories ranked by the number of mentions in each category.

Table 3. Pre-ETS Specific Need and Progress Mentions

Source: I|3 Content Analysis of the 2020 Town Halls and Key Informant Interviews

Category	Need Mentions	Progress Mentions	Total Mentions
Collaboration/Communication	18	9	27
Readiness and Work-Based Learning	14	10	24

Category	Need Mentions	Progress Mentions	Total Mentions
Transportation/Remote Delivery	11	3	14
Labor Market and Career Guidance	9	2	11
Marketing and Community Outreach	6	1	7

[3] In FFY'17 there were 29,465 VR participants with youth status, compared to 29,448 in FFY'19. Due to the decline in adult VR participants (age 25 and over), the proportion of youth among all VR participants increased from 39 percent in FFY'17 to 42 percent in FFY'19.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

As part of its focus, the 2020 CSNA studied trends that were first identified in the 2017 and previous CSNA cycles. Goals previously established by the VR program, in coordination with the RCT, remain relevant specifically pertaining to CRPs.

Additional initiatives in follow-up to the 2020 CSNA include:

- **Ongoing Dialogue:** In collaboration with the RCT member representing CRPs, VRD is conducting quarterly virtual meetings with providers to receive feedback on opportunities and challenges they experience when working with VRD, with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of services for VR customers.
- **Enhanced Communication and Support:** VRD has initiated the Standards for Providers Local Provider Liaison initiative to enhance continuous improvement of Standards for Provider contractors. This initiative is currently for Employment Services providers and focuses on building active relationships between VR staff and providers, promoting effective communication between VR staff and providers, providing technical assistance and training to providers and VR staff, and monitoring provider performance.
- **Rate Review:** VRD has initiated a rate review project to ensure that rates are current and competitive for services listed in the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual and the Standards for Providers Manual. Services under rate review include, but are not limited to, supportive residential services for persons in recovery, employment services, and rates for consultants. Rate methodologies will be updated as needed, and VRD will take action to update rates.
- **Business Transformation Project—Purchase of Goods and Services for VR Customers:** TWC has initiated a multi-division business transformation project aimed at improving the availability of qualified providers to deliver goods and services that meet VR customer needs. The project strives to improve efforts to attract, recruit, and retain quality providers, simplify and streamline processes, enhance communication, and ensure that rates paid to providers are sufficient. VRD has engaged with providers to ensure that their perspectives and views on current issues are reflected in the project.

3. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

LEAs maintain fiscal responsibility for transition services that are also considered special education or related services and that are necessary for ensuring a free, appropriate public education to children with disabilities within Texas, including those outlined in the IEP (34 CFR §361.22(c)).

Additionally, House Bill 617, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013), requires that each ISD have an individual identified as the transition and employment designee (TED). The TED is responsible for providing information and resources about effective transition planning and services. VRD has counselors throughout the state assigned to high schools to help students with disabilities prepare for entry into the workplace. Nothing related to VRD's responsibilities and requirements under WIOA should be construed as a reduction in LEAs' responsibility under IDEA to provide and pay for special education and related services as a part of a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities (WIOA §101(c)).

VRD has specialty transition VR counselors and VR counselors who act as liaisons for high schools and partner with the educational system to serve transition-age students seeking assistance to access adult vocational services. Partnering with ISDs allows counselors to use office space on campus, helping to ensure that student customers have access to resources available through the workforce investment system, community, businesses, and other partners necessary to build a network of support. The increase in the number of students with autism, physical and neurodevelopment disabilities, and psychiatric or dual diagnoses reinforces the need to continue best practices components of IDEA.

Staff works closely with the Texas Education Agency (TEA), centers for independent living, communities, and businesses to achieve collaboration, effective programming, and customer satisfaction. As a result, these efforts improve the effectiveness of VR services for transition customers. Such collaborations take on many different forms in training VRD and educational staff, as well as in impacting families. VRD staff will continue to collaborate with ISDs in the provision of Pre-ETS as specified in WIOA. Additionally, counselors are often invited to education service centers to participate in educator training and to present training, particularly for more effective transition planning for students. VR staff works with schools in creating job fairs that allow students to meet with employers and gather information about the labor market. Family nights are hosted in some areas to invite interested members of the public to VRD offices to share resource information, discuss service delivery issues, and give input regarding best practices that would better support students and their families.

In some areas, community partners such as churches, Workforce Solutions Offices, and community centers assist in providing training to school personnel on understanding cultural diversity in Texas. Training objectives that include sensitivity to cultural issues are integrated into the provision of the principles of ethics in service delivery. Given the cultural diversity within the expanse of Texas, this is an issue often addressed in external conferences with presentations to ensure that staff is sensitive to and aware of the manner in which the VR process is applied.

The following strategies will expand and improve VR services for students and youth with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities:

- providing supported employment services to youth with the most significant disabilities and enhanced coordination to ensure that extended support is in place for customers to achieve and maintain employment outcomes;
- evaluating, revising, and developing policy, procedures, and staffing strategies to improve consistency and increase effectiveness in the provision of transition services;
- expanding and increasing partnerships with schools to facilitate the coordination and provision of Pre-ETS to students with disabilities;
- continuing Project SEARCH to assist students and youth with developmental disabilities to successfully transition to competitive integrated employment;

- developing and delivering a transition training module on best practices pertaining to provision of transition services, guidance and career exploration, postsecondary options, job readiness, and encouragement of customer self-advocacy;
- collaborating with TEA, education service centers, LEAs, and postsecondary education institutions to improve access and transition for students moving from secondary to postsecondary education and training;
- developing additional work experience options such as part-time, summer, and volunteer work experiences and other work-based learning opportunities; and
- enhancing existing statewide Pre-ETS initiatives that leverage partnerships with Boards, secondary and postsecondary education institutions, and employers.

K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

The 2018 *Disability Status Report* (DSR) published by the Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute estimates the percentage of noninstitutionalized working-age (ages 21 to 64) Texans with disabilities. The 2018 DSR uses data from the 2018 *American Community Survey* (ACS).

Per the DRS, in Calendar Year 2018 (CY'18), the prevalence of disability in Texas for working-age individuals was 9.7 percent. Working-age individuals with disabilities numbered about 1,569,300 out of a total working-age population of 16,194,400. The highest prevalence rate was for ambulatory disability, with 4.6 percent of working-age Texas residents reporting this type of impairment. The lowest prevalence rate was for self-care disability, with 1.8 percent of working-age Texas residents reporting this type of impairment. About 7.2 percent of working-age individuals with disabilities were not working but seeking jobs, whereas 15.6 percent of working-age individuals without disabilities were not working but seeking jobs. The employment rate for working-age individuals with disabilities was 40.8 percent compared to 78.8 percent for working-age individuals without disabilities.

Based on the information above, DRS estimates that somewhere between a greatest lower bound of 112,990 (the 7.2 percent of working-age individuals with disabilities who were not working but seeking jobs) and a least upper bound of 753,265 (including the 40.8 percent of working-age individuals with disabilities who were employed but may need supports to retain employment) individuals with disabilities may consider applying for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services in Texas if they are aware of the opportunity. However, assuming that only about 50 percent of working-age individuals with disabilities who are already employed would apply for the VR program (which aligns with VR customer demographics for CY'18), the maximum number of individuals that could be expected to apply for services is most likely closer to 320,000. This is a moderately liberal estimate because not all disabilities qualify for VR services and the ACS tends to overestimate disability prevalence due to self-reporting.

Of the estimated 320,000 Texans who could benefit from VR services, 66,000 individuals (20.6 percent) were participants in the VR program during CY'20. This means that outreach efforts have the potential to recruit 254,000 more participants. A total of 65.6 percent of Texas households have broadband internet, which means that 166,000 of these potential participants could be recruited by online initiatives like Start My VR.

The potential for additional online outreach means that approximately 75,000 to 90,000 VR-eligible customers (the number of customers that the VR program has historically served per year) is a reasonable estimate for meeting actual service needs.

The following table shows the actual number of applicants and eligibility determinations for and projections for FFY'22–'23. In view of historical service trends and estimated service needs

per the ACS, VR anticipates that the number of individuals who apply for VR services will remain stable in FFY'22–'23. It takes three to nine months for most applicants to become participants. Additionally, many participants stay active in the VR program for 20 to 70 months. VR anticipates that the total number of eligible customers served and expenditures will continue to decrease slightly in 2022 because of decreased numbers of applicants during prior years. The total number of eligible customers served is not expected to start increasing again until FFY'23.

Table 1: Actual and Projected Applications for VR Services FFY'18–'23

Year	Applicants	Percent Change from Prior Year	Eligibility Determinations	Percent Change from Prior Year
2018	30,241	-15.28%	25,508	-17.04%
2019	29,477	-2.53%	25,188	-1.25%
2020	23,828	-19.16%	20,769	-17.54%
2021	27,199	14.15%	22,200	6.89%
2022	**27,265**	**0.24%**	**22,151**	**-0.22%**
2023	**27,125**	**-0.51%**	**22,318**	**0.75%**

2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

A. THE VR PROGRAM;

The following table shows the actual number of eligible VR customers served by Title I funds from FFY'18–'21 and projections for FFY'22–'23. For this purpose, "customers served" is defined as customers receiving purchased services. This table does not include customers who received a service with a supported employment service category code during a given federal fiscal year (that is, Title VI).

Table 2a: Actual and Projected Number of Eligible VR Customers Served by Title I Funds FFY'18–23

Year	Program	Number Served	Percent Change from Prior Year
2018	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	80,528	-5.53%
2019	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	77,705	-3.51%
2020	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	70,577	-9.17%
2021	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	70,493	-0.12%
2022	**Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I**	**71,808**	**1.87%**
2023	**Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I**	**75,026**	**4.48%**

B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

The following table shows the actual number of eligible VR customers served with Title VI funds from FFY'18–'21 and projections for FFY'22–'23. For this purpose, "customers served" is defined as customers receiving purchased services. This table only includes customers who received a service with a supported employment service category code during a given federal fiscal year.

Table 2b: Actual and Projected Number of Eligible VR Customers Served by Title VI Funds FFY'18–23

Year	Program	Number Served	Percent Change from Prior Year
2018	Supported Employment - Title VI	2,861	-17.83%
2019	Supported Employment - Title VI	2,676	-6.47%
2020	Supported Employment - Title VI	2,314	-13.53%
2021	Supported Employment - Title VI	1,654	-28.52%
2022	**Supported Employment - Title VI**	**1,040**	**-37.13%**
2023	**Supported Employment - Title VI**	**702**	**-32.49%**

C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

Texas is not under an order of selection.

3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

Texas is not under an order of selection.

4. THE COST OF SERVICES FOR THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES. IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION, IDENTIFY THE COST OF SERVICES FOR EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY.

VR anticipates average and total expenditures on services to continue to increase steadily in FFY'22 and FFY'23 for Title I funding. While total Title VI funding is expected to continue to decrease, average expenditures are expected to rise due to the anticipated decrease in Title VI numbers served. For this purpose, "customers served" is defined as customers with an individualized plan for employment (IPE) and with purchased service during the program year to more accurately represent average and total cost.

Table 3: Estimated and Projected Caseloads and Costs FFY'18–23

Year	Program	Number Served	Average Cost	Total Cost
2018	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	71,202	$1,496.73	$106,570,276.90
2019	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	69,301	$1,516.15	$105,071,038.69

Year	Program	Number Served	Average Cost	Total Cost
2020	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	64,936	$1,480.62	$96,145,844.11
2021	Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I	64,897	$1,527.19	$99,110,082.70
2022	**Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I**	**66,675**	**$1,524.33**	**$101,634,463.95**
2023	**Vocational Rehabilitation - Title I**	**69,582**	**$1,473.10**	**$102,500,414.19**
2018	Supported Employment - Title VI	2,823	$2,574.98	$7,269,161.98
2019	Supported Employment - Title VI	2,651	$2,711.74	$7,188,821.18
2020	Supported Employment - Title VI	2,303	$2,359.95	$5,434,967.82
2021	Supported Employment - Title VI	1,654	$2,740.68	$4,533,090.97*
2022	**Supported Employment - Title VI**	**1,067**	**$3,459.26**	**$3,691,610.93**
2023	**Supported Employment - Title VI**	**745**	**$4,567.89**	**$3,404,926.70**

If current trends continue, VR believes there are funds available to serve all individuals currently eligible for VR services and individuals in plan status. VR anticipates having the necessary funds to cover the cost of expected eligibility determinations and planned services. Factors that could change the VR estimates include:

- changes in federal and state appropriations; and
- changes in state statutes.

If more information becomes available about the impacts of these changes on VR programs, projections will be updated.

L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS

TWC-VRD and RCT collaborated to establish goals and priorities to advance the continued provision of high-quality VR services to eligible customers. With the input and data expertise of the TWC Division Information Innovation & Insight (I|3), both VRD and RCT jointly developed and agreed to the state goals and priorities outlined in section 2.

2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

TWC VRD identified six primary goals and priorities to carry out the VR and supported employment programs. The primary goals also include strategies to improve the design and delivery of supported employment services. For more information specific to provision of supported employment services, refer to section (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds. These goals were developed for PY's 2022-2023 and will be tracked accordingly.

Goal Area One:Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support.

VRD must recruit and retain a robust network of providers, including providers of supported employment services, to ensure that customers have access to the full array of services they need no matter where they reside in the state. VRD is working to improve provider onboarding by decreasing the time from contract initiation to direct service delivery to customers. Additionally, VRD is committed to providing timely feedback to providers for both contractual and programmatic questions. VRD has initiated several strategies to ensure that customers have access to and receive quality goods and services to assist with achieving a successful employment outcome.

Goal Area Two: Streamline VR policy, process, and procedure and improve workflow processes and tools to facilitate timely service delivery.

VRD's priority is to help more Texans with disabilities achieve better employment outcomes through an efficient and easily accessible service delivery system that maximizes the use of available resources. To achieve this priority, VRD will focus on streamlining procedures and approval processes to remove unnecessary administrative tasks for staff, providers, and customers. VRD is also redesigning the current supported employment service delivery model, including policies, procedures, and forms.

Goal Area Three: Recruit and retain VR staff.

VRD is committed to creating team capacity to serve Texans with disabilities by recruiting, retaining, and engaging VR staff. A career with VRD must offer meaningful work that helps change lives for the better. VRD will continue to provide career growth, advancement, and opportunities for staff to specialize in areas of interest. VRD is committed to making team engagement a priority. VRD will work diligently to provide the necessary training and resources for continuous improvement.

Goal Area Four: Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize customer choice.

VRD needs simple, accessible information to help customers make informed decisions about how to explore their local labor market, how employment may affect their benefits, and the availability and ratings of service providers.

Goal Area Five: Improve VR staff knowledge and system capacity to enhance service delivery to customers.

VRD is committed to increasing opportunities for staff to specialize in areas of interest, such as neurodevelopmental disorders, blindness and visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing, brain injury, transition students, veterans, behavioral health, and others. VRD will also continue to enhance and expand training in labor market information, work incentives and benefits, serving individuals with multiple disabilities, and how to work with employers. Providing tools, such as desk aids, and increasing staff capacity through process improvement and innovative service delivery approaches will also assist counselors to serve customers effectively and efficiently.

Goal Area Six: Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working with VR collaboratively, and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers.

VRD values its partnerships with employers and will continue to build system capacity to promote and support hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities across industries. Additionally, VRD will collaborate with its Texas workforce system partners to participate in joint strategies that address employers' workforce needs.

3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;

Data from the FFY'20 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) were used to establish VRD goals and priorities. Refer to the Statewide Assessment section for a more detailed discussion of 2020 CSNA findings pertaining to the identified Goal Areas, an evaluation of prior CSP Goal Areas, and the priorities associated with each.

B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND

VRD is currently reporting on five of the six combined performance and accountability measures. The measures are:

- Measurable Skill Gains
- Credential Attainment
- 2nd Quarter After Exit Median Earnings
- 2nd Quarter After Exit Employment Rate
- 4th Quarter After Exit Employment Rate

VRD is piloting the Effectiveness in Serving Employers measure.

C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.

Information obtained from the following sources was used to establish VRD's goals and priorities:

- WIOA Joint Rule for Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions Final Rule published August 19, 2016;
- RCT Annual Report;
- FFY 2020 CSNA
- Texas Workforce Investment Council plan;
- State and Legislative Budget Board measures;
- Reports to RCT on the DSU's progress in implementing strategies and priorities in the VR state plan, etc.; and

- Input from customers and advocacy organizations, such as Disability Rights Texas.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

The State of Texas is not under a selection order.

B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

The State of Texas is not under a selection order.

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

The State of Texas is not under a selection order.

D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

The State of Texas is not under a selection order.

E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The State of Texas is not under a selection order.

2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT

The State of Texas is not under a selection order.

N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) provides supported employment (SE) services for customers with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities. Funds received under Title VI, Part B §622 (also known as the supported employment program) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, are used to serve these individuals.

Texas' provision of supported employment services is integral to the state's overall plan to provide services that result in competitive integrated employment outcomes for VRD customers.

Out of the six main goals identified by VRD, the following three goals incorporate priorities and strategies for the provision of supported employment services.

IMPROVE PROVIDER RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND SUPPORT

VRD is focused on recruiting and retaining a robust network of providers, including qualified supported employment providers, to meet customer needs. Strategies to improve provider recruitment, retention, and support include reducing vendor requirements;, ensuring that payment rates are competitive and equitable;, strengthening provider recruiting efforts;, enhancing provider- related training, guidance, and support;, and ensuring that the list of providers is useful, current, and accurate. Multiple projects are underway within these strategy

areas, with initial strategic focus being placed on reducing vendor requirements and ensuring that payment rates are competitive and equitable.

STREAMLINE VR POLICY, PROCESS, AND PROCEDURE AND IMPROVEMENT WORKFLOW PROCESSES AND TOOLS TO FACILITATE TIMELY SERVICE DELIVERY

VRD collaborated with supported employment providers, VR staff, and external partners to redesign the VRD service delivery model for Supported Employment. Work groups met during a series of work sessions and provided input on the current benchmark system, policy, forms, payment rates, and training for both staff and providers. VRD is in the process of updating the service delivery model for supported employment by decreasing the paperwork burden, streamlining the benchmark system, and changing benchmark payments. Additionally, VRD will establish ongoing, comprehensive training for both VR staff and providers to ensure that customers receive quality supported employment services that lead to successful employment outcomes.

IMPROVE VR STAFF KNOWLEDGE AND SYSTEM CAPACITY TO ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY TO CUSTOMERS

VRD provides training, tools, and resources to assist VR staff and providers with the implementing of Supported Employment, including extended services to ensure long term employment for the customer. Additional training and resources will be provided to VR staff, including transition VR counselors and other VR counselors, to strengthen and increase expertise and specialization in serving customers who meet the definition of youth with disabilities and customers who have specific disabilities that meet the criteria of most significant.

In addition to these goals, priorities for funds received under Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended are to increase the number of customers receiving supported employment services who achieve employment outcomes and to the number of supported employment services providers statewide.

Funding

WIOA §110 funding is available statewide to VR counselors to serve Texans in most significant disabilities. These funds are used to secure competitive, integrated employment positions for VR customers. At case closure, or at the conclusion of any time-limited post-employment services, the services paid for with §110 funds are concluded.

When no other extended service providers are identified, extended services and support involving on- or off-site assistance or monitoring may be provided by VRD using WIOA §110 funds. These funds are to be used for customers who meet the definition of youth with a disability for up to four years or until the individual turns 25 years of age.

For individuals 25 years of age and older, VR assists with coordinating extended services. Extended services and support may be funded and facilitated by sources other than VRD and may include the employer, natural supports, and paid or funded supports. Both natural supports and paid supports, including long-term supports and services provided by other state and federal programs, may be used to facilitate extended services.

VRD's supported employment services may be authorized for up to 24 months unless there is justification and management approval to provide services for a longer period.

Potential funding sources for extended services may include the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC) programs such as:

- The 1915(c) state Home and Community-based Services (HCS) Medicaid waivers;

- Employment services provided through general revenue funds
- 1915(k) Community First Choice; and
- Title XX community services.

2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING:

A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND

A customer's extended services are identified and documented in the customer's Individualized Plan for Employment. As customers progress through the supported employment process, VRD may use naturally occurring work supports as extended services. As appropriate, paid support is administered through other state agencies or community resources not funded by VRD. When extended services are not available for youth with disabilities, VRD provides extended supports, such as job skills training, for up to four years or until the individual turns 25 years of age. VRD continually evaluates the customer's need for extended services and seeks other resources to provide the necessary extended services.

B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES.

Potential funding sources include the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program and the HHSC programs. Collaboration with community organizations and other state agencies, to develop, and implement cooperative agreements and partnerships, is essential to achieving successful employment outcomes for customers with the most significant disabilities.

Additionally, VRD works with HHS Medicaid/CHIP to resolve individual and system issues involving mutually served customers, particularly those transferring from Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to Title II Childhood Disability Beneficiaries to ensure continuation of Medicaid 1915(c) waiver services.

VRD coordinates with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to encourage Employment Service Providers (ESPs) to become employment networks (ENs) under SSA's Ticket to Work Program. VRD offers incentive payments to ESP-ENs that provide:

- supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and
- extended supports to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure in order to advance employment or increase customer earnings.

O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

To expand and improve services to all individuals with disabilities, VRD will:

- work to transform the customer experience by reducing the complexity of both processes and forms,
- maximize the use of technology whenever possible;
- work to expand the provider base, thus allowing easier customer access to VR services;
- build and sustain partnerships with employers, community organizations, partner agencies, and referral sources;

- increase coordination with mental health organizations, local school districts, postsecondary education institutions, and HHSC's Medical and Social Services Division-IDD and Behavioral Health Services Special Project Unit;
- build staff capacity and expertise by using internal and external subject matter experts to provide training to counselors working in specialized areas including autism, blind or visually impaired, epilepsy, mental health, spinal cord injury, and brain injury;
- continue to refine the VRD quality assurance process, and quality improvement program, to evaluate and monitor performance; and
- increase VRD use of labor market and career information and data available for identifying target occupations and placement and/or advancement opportunities for program participants.

2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS

A broad range of assistive technology (AT) services and devices may be provided at each stage of the rehabilitation process. AT services and tools are parts of a technology-based approach used to maintain, increase, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities as part of the rehabilitation process. It is a primary goal of VRD to expand the knowledge, access, and use of AT for all customers, staff, employers, and community partners. Examples of VRD strategies include:

- consultation on and assistance with vehicle modifications, workplace modifications, and residential modifications;
- research regarding new and emerging technologies; and
- exploring ways in which AT may be more efficiently applied as a part of VR services to students with disabilities and VRD services to employers.

AT from the University of Texas' Texas Technology Access Program (TTAP) is a viable resource for customers. This program has updated equipment, and VRD will enhance its partnership with the University of Texas' TTAP.

VRD will continue to work cooperatively with TTAP, the implementing entity designated by the state governor under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 §4 (29 USC 3003), to coordinate activities, including the referral of individuals with disabilities. Currently VRD refers customers to TTAP demonstration centers located throughout the state to ensure that customers have an informed choice of AT.

VRD participates in annual joint presentations with TTAP at the Ability Expo in Houston, the Ability Expo in Dallas/Fort Worth, and TWC's statewide conference, which provides opportunities for customers to learn about new adaptive equipment and AT that may help them maintain competitive integrated employment.

VRD continues to maintain a state office Assistive Technology team, staffed with two Program Specialists for Assistive and Rehabilitation Technology (PSARTs). The PSARTs maintain a selection of current commonly used AT for demonstrations, staff trainings, displays, and conferences. These items are periodically refreshed to ensure that they are current. Additionally, the PSARTs are available to staff cases with counselors and demonstrate use of equipment through videos or Microsoft Teams.

A state office mailbox is available so that field staff may send questions and obtain consistent responses from the PSARTs. Frequently asked questions and answers will be used to create an FAQ tool and made available to all staff.

The AT needs of VR customers are assessed on an individual basis. When AT needs are identified, counselors consult with the state office PSARTs to determine the available AT options that may meet the customers' needs to reduce impediments to employment and training. Additionally, VRD contracts with private vendors to provide AT evaluations. Through these evaluations, customers and counselors are presented with AT options that may best meet the customers' needs.

The AT team is expanding staff capacity in AT by training regional teams to become subject matter experts in AT. Additionally, each field unit has an assistive technology specialist (ATS) to help counselors determine the AT needs of their customers. By having more AT subject matter experts, VRD will ensure that appropriate equipment is loaned to customers and/or purchased.

VRD implemented a new vehicle modification policy in March 2021. Using a Rapid Process Improvement approach, the project team collaborated and conducted interviews with customers, stakeholders from community organizations, vendors, and staff members from across the agency. The team recommended and implemented policy revisions that include removing the current emphasis on public transportation or relocation, streamlining and simplifying the vehicle modification process by reducing and combining required forms, reducing the number of approvals, establishing a state level budget for vehicle modifications to minimize budget disruptions at the unit level, and centralizing the process with the team of ATSs across the state. The project team also developed a centralized tracking process to track the status of each vehicle modification.

Furthermore, VRD has maintained an Assistive Technology Unit (ATU) laboratory in the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center under the Office of Blind Services and Support. The ATU lab is staffed by three AT unit evaluators and an administrative assistant. ATU staff members deliver direct customer evaluation services to blind and visually impaired customers. The ATU lab is stocked with the latest AT products including AT equipment, software, and devices. In addition to maintaining the lab, the ATU staff tests AT, trains customers on various AT products and programs for BVI contract service providers, and works with product providers to test new products for accessibility and ease of use for the customers. The ATU lab offers in-person services and services delivered remotely through the use of teleconference and video platforms.

3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

In the past three years, VRD has developed several strategies to enhance its visibility in the communities it serves, as well as through statewide branding and new program efforts.

Key to the success of these outreach efforts is VRD's continued close partnership with the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, the state's 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), the installment of a six-member team of Regional Community Outreach and Awareness Specialists, in addition to outreaching to important stakeholder groups, such as the medical, health care, social service, employer groups, and local chamber and mayoral committees on disabilities.

Using an identifiable brand and logo, VRD has introduced a new self-referral system, called Start My VR, to attract a broader audience and communicate how individuals may qualify for VR services. A new employer-recognition program, named We Hire Ability, engages employers that employ a staff composed of 10 percent or more of individuals with disabilities. These employers

may be influential and inspire their industry peers to follow their lead in using disability hiring as a workforce retention and engagement strategy.

As part of an integrated workforce network, VRD is positioning its services to be referred wherever appropriate in the intake process. This includes promoting services in the state job exchange system, WorkInTexas.com, throughout an individual's orientation process, and a two-way referral system for VR and workforce staff at local workforce centers.

Collaboration between VR business services staff and Board business service units also ensures that employers understand their critical role in increasing hiring of people with disabilities while providing a resource to answer questions and help refer qualified individuals with disabilities.

VRD employs several strategies to identify underserved populations, including minorities, and individuals with significant, neurodevelopmental disorders (such as autism), psychological disorders (such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia), and veterans with disabilities.

Outreach to Individuals with Disabilities Who Are Minorities

VRD engages in numerous programs and activities designed to inform and make available VR and Supported Employment services to minorities and to those who have the most significant disabilities. Examples of these activities include:

- required training in language services for individuals who are limited English proficient (LEP) for all VRD staff (this training provides guidance on best practices and specific resources for effectively communicating with our unique population of LEP customers; it also includes web-based instruction and desk references for quick access to information);
- ongoing outreach initiatives with colleges and universities that have historically served African American students;
- collaboration with the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of East Texas to make services available to Native Americans with disabilities;
- customer access to the Language Line as a resource for those who are not fluent in English;
- VRD staff attendance at community job fairs held for the Hispanic population and meeting with groups, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Casa de Amigos, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and Catholic Charities
- outreach activities with African American groups such as the local Sickle Cell Anemia Association, Minority Business Alliance, African American Family Conference, and NAACP;
- collaboration with the American G.I. Forum, which targets the needs of Hispanic veterans and has assigned bilingual counselors who have completed the Social Security work incentive training to work with veterans with significant disabilities receiving SSDI benefits and wanting to work;
- counselor participation in training to learn to speak other languages and to learn sign language;
- specialized caseloads for certain disabilities to help develop the expertise needed to most benefit the customers served;
- active recruitment of Spanish-speaking VR counselors;

- development of relationships with local referral sources that serve individuals who are minorities who have the most significant disabilities; and
- engagement with the faith-based community to educate and inform minority and other allied congregations about VRD services.

Outreach to Serve Individuals with Disabilities Who Have Been Unserved or Underserved by Vocational Rehabilitation

Texas veterans with disabilities are an underserved VR customer group. To better serve this population, VRD will increase VR services to veterans with disabilities and improve coordination with other federal and state entities providing veterans' services by:

- evaluating policies, procedures, and rules specific to veterans to provide seamless and efficient access to services for veterans with disabilities;
- ensuring that staff is aware of the existing MOU between VRD and the US Department of Veterans Affairs, which details the referral process between the two entities and coordination of services on behalf of eligible veterans;
- enhancing coordination with other entities that serve veterans with disabilities in order to help veterans more easily navigate available programs and services;
- expanding the Veterans Think Tank, which consists of internal and external subject matter experts who share knowledge, resources, and strategies to more efficiently and effectively coordinate services and case management activities; and
- increasing collaboration with veterans' stakeholder organizations and service providers to include the following:
    - TWC's Texas Veterans Leadership Program
    - Texas Veterans Commission
    - HHS
    - US Department of Veterans Affairs

4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)

A Pre-ETS mailbox was developed in 2014 so that field staff may ask questions and obtain consistent responses from the state transition program specialists leading up to implementation of Pre-ETS.

The following strategies will expand and improve VR services for students and youth with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities by:

- providing Supported Employment services to youth with the most significant disabilities, and enhanced coordination to ensure that extended support is in place for customers to achieve and maintain employment outcomes;
- evaluating, revising, and developing policy, procedures, and staffing strategies to improve consistency and increase effectiveness in the provision of transition services;

- expanding and increasing partnerships with schools to facilitate the coordination and provision of Pre-ETS to students with disabilities;
- continuing Project SEARCH to assist students and youth with developmental disabilities to successfully transition to competitive, integrated employment;
- delivering a transition training module on best practices pertaining to provision of transition services, guidance and career exploration, postsecondary options, job readiness, and encouragement of customer self-advocacy;
- collaborating with TEA, education service centers, LEAs, and postsecondary education institutions to improve access and transition for students moving from secondary to postsecondary education and training;
- developing additional work experience options such as part-time, summer, and volunteer work experiences and other work-based learning opportunities; and
- enhancing existing statewide Pre-ETS initiatives that leverage partnerships with Boards, secondary and postsecondary education institutions, and employers; and
- continuing to develop new Pre-ETS services and strategies based on identified needs.

The Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program was the first Pathways to Careers initiative, which began in summer 2017. In the time since its inception, the SEAL program has occurred every summer, except for 2020, when it was canceled due to COVID-19. The numbers served each year have steadily increased with a total of approximately 2,500 students served in 2019. The year 2021 was a recovery year for the SEAL program, as partners, families, students, employers, and communities returned to pre-pandemic activities, while also adjusting plans due to the continued prevalence of the pandemic. VRD had 2,147 students who received work readiness training and were placed in paid work experience during summer 2021.

VRD has recently implemented a service called Embedded Pre-ETS. Through a mutual partnership, providers may become embedded in schools to provide services that build on and enhance what students are already receiving in school. Through this service, students will get a more in-depth understanding of work-related concepts and will have greater opportunities to practice these concepts in a protected environment.

5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

In July 2021, VRD submitted TWC's Establishment Authority Internal Control Procedures to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for review and approval. RSA approved the internal control procedures on September 30, 2021. These procedures provide a process for determining whether the use of establishment authority is warranted. Based on the process conducted as a part of the agency's internal control procedures, VRD has determined that exercising establishment authority provisions is not warranted at this time.

6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

VRD established a framework of quality assurance and quality improvement. This framework addresses the concept of continuous quality assurance and quality improvement using mission and strategic planning, leadership, communication, customer satisfaction results, data analysis, monitoring, and performance evaluation. This involves strategies to improve performance with respect to WIOA §116 performance accountability measures and includes the following actions:

- VRD, in cooperation with the TWC Division of Information Innovation & Insight (I|3) will collect, monitor, and evaluate data for the WIOA core measures, and develop strategies

to address gaps in performance that are identified through routine reports, quarterly performance reports through budget and performance reviews, and the quality assurance program.

- In 2020, VRD published the Data Integrity and Data Validation Policies and Procedures and established a data integrity team made up of state and regional VR program representatives and staff from the TWC Division of Information Innovation & Insight. These actions were specifically targeted toward improving performance and accountability for WIOA performance measures. In 2020 and 2021, VRD saw significant improvements in data collection and reporting on measurable skill gains. VRD also developed staff training and desk aids and tools to improve source document collection to substantiate reported outcomes. Data integrity case reviews began in early 2021 to ensure that reporting is accurate and source documents are being collected and to establish a continuous improvement cycle for data integrity.
- VRD will assess and identify staff training needs and opportunities to build competency and increase capacity to assist program participants with identification of an employment goal and development of the Individualized Plan for Employment.
- VRD will implement training courses and develop new community partnerships to focus on postsecondary education to increase employment in high-skill, high-wage occupations by increasing the number of customers receiving postsecondary education and training.
- VRD will replicate initiatives such as Project SEARCH to provide training and certificates as well as on-the-job skills gains and/or credentials for employment.
- VRD will continue to use the Business Relations Team, which is composed of Business Relations Coordinators (BRCs) who work with regional and field management and staff to provide a variety of services to employers.
- VRD will continue to enhance its system to assess and monitor effectiveness in serving employers. The VR BRCs will coordinate more closely with Boards, and work in partnership and as team members in the Business Services Units.

7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

As a division of TWC, VRD participates in the planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system conducted by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), which serves as the state workforce investment board. These activities include:

- participating in the development and implementation of the state-mandated strategic plan for the Texas workforce system;
- participating in TWIC meetings and serving on the TWIC Apprenticeship and Training Advisory Committee; and
- reporting quarterly and annually as requested by TWIC on the division's activities to implement goals and objectives in the Texas workforce system strategic plan.

VRD works closely with other TWC departments to provide information, partner on community initiatives, and enhance customer referral processes.

Ongoing collaborative efforts between VRD and each of the 28 Boards have resulted in projects, initiatives, and processes such as joint community outreach and awareness events, summer youth initiatives, employer symposia and job fairs, customer referrals, coordination of services, and cross-training for staff.

Student HireAbility Navigator (SHN) positions have been in place since 2018 in all 28 Boards, with the first student hired in March 2018. Since that time, the SHNs have helped support the work of the VR program by building infrastructure in their communities. The primary modes for creating this support network are fostering meaningful relationships with community partners (including schools and employers), providing training and guidance, and sharing information about the services that the VR programprovides. In 2021, a mentor position was added to the SHN policy as a quality assurance measure to use highly rated SHNs to provide mentoring to those who are new or struggling to build these connections.

VRD reviewed multiple Workforce Development Letters, Technical Assistance Bulletins, Adult Education and Literacy Letters, and program guides to ensure that workforce partners receive policy guidance that is clear, concise, and timely. This enables workforce partners to provide workforce services and training to customers in accordance with state and federal rules, regulations, and program requirements. Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some Boards identified service delivery methods that allowed for virtual service delivery and training. Boards were encouraged to share their best practices with their peers for possible replication.

In February 2020, TWC held a Career Navigators Conference Day with support from TRAIN PD. This meeting, designed specifically for career navigators, included the following session topics: AEL Integration with Vocational Rehabilitation, Employer Engagement, Serving Internationally Trained Professionals, and Services for Reentry.

Additionally, an internal work group of TWC staff members is developing a plan for a more integrated workforce system in Texas that effectively and efficiently serves all customers, including those with disabilities.

8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

Goal Area One:Improve provider recruitment, retention, and support

VRD must recruit and retain a robust network of providers, including providers of supported employment services, to ensure that customers have access to the full array of services they need no matter where they reside in the state. VRD is working to improve provider onboarding by decreasing the time from contract initiation to direct service delivery to customers. Additionally, VRD is committed to providing timely feedback to providers for both contractual and programmatic questions. VRD has initiated several strategies to ensure that customers have access to and receive quality goods and services to assist with achieving a successful employment outcome.

Strategies:

- Streamline vendor requirements, processes, procedures, and documentation.
- Ensure that payment rates are competitive and equitable.
- Ensure that a process is established for regular rate review and updates.
- Strengthen provider recruiting efforts.
- Enhance provider support and training.
- Ensure that internal systems for provider identification by a VR counselor are useful, current, and accurate.

Success will be measured by:

- an increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of active VR service providers and total number of available providers:
    - statewide;
    - by integrated service area (VR region); and
    - by RSA service type category.

Goal Area Two: Streamline VR policy, process, and procedure and improve workflow processes and tools to facilitate timely service delivery

VRD's priority is to help more Texans with disabilities achieve better employment outcomes through an efficient and easily accessible service delivery system that maximizes the use of available resources. To achieve this priority, VRD will focus on streamlining procedures and approval processes to remove unnecessary administrative tasks for staff, providers, and customers. VRD is also redesigning the current supported employment service delivery model, including policies, procedures, and forms.

Strategies:

- Streamline or redesign policy, procedure, forms, and approval processes to improve ease of navigation and application for VR staff.
- Facilitate coordination of services with providers and improve responsiveness to customers.
- Improve workflow processes and business systems to improve timeliness, efficiency, and consistency of VR service provision.

Success will be measured by:

- a decrease (accounting for seasonality) in median time from initial contact to participant status in the VR program; and
- an increase (accounting for seasonality) in the percentage of those determined eligible who move into an individualized plan for employment (IPE).

Goal Area Three: Recruit and retain VR staff

VRD is committed to creating team capacity to serve Texans with disabilities by recruiting, retaining, and engaging VR staff. A career with VRD must offer meaningful work that helps change lives for the better. VRD will continue to provide career growth, advancement, and opportunities for staff to specialize in areas of interest. VRD is committed to making team engagement a priority. VRD will work diligently to provide the necessary training and resources for continuous improvement.

Strategies:

- Identify and implement strategies to improve staff recruitment and retention, including options for remote work, opportunities for professional development, staff recognition, and other activities that promote a positive, engaging work environment.
- Redesign training and resources for new counselors and new rehabilitation assistants.
- Establish management development training, specific to VR program management, for new, current, and aspiring VR managers.

Success will be measured by:

- a decrease in annual (SFY) turnover rate; and

- an annual (SFY) increase in the proportion of Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (QVRCs).

Goal Area Four: Improve and develop additional user-friendly resources to maximize customer choice

VRD needs simple, accessible information to help customers make informed decisions about how to explore their local labor market, how employment may affect their benefits, and the availability and ratings of service providers.

Strategies:

- Provide training and resources for VR staff on labor market information and tools.
- Develop and enhance tools to aid VR staff and customers in the identification of available providers.
- Update training, tools, and policies related to work incentive programs and benefits counseling and provide user-friendly resources and/or fact sheets to help customers make decisions.

Success will be measured by:

- an increase in the proportion of SSI or SSDI customers who receive benefits counseling or counseling on work incentives; and
- an increase in the percentage of customers indicating they agree (that is, respond "yes") that they have input in choosing service providers in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat).

Goal Area Five: Improve VR staff knowledge and system capacity to enhance service delivery to customers

VRD is committed to increasing opportunities for staff to specialize in areas of interest, such as neurodevelopmental disorders, blindness and visual impairments, deaf and hard of hearing, brain injury, transition students, veterans, behavioral health, and others. VRD will also continue to enhance and expand training in labor market information, work incentives and benefits, serving individuals with multiple disabilities, and how to work with employers. Providing tools, such as desk aids, and increasing staff capacity through process improvement and innovative service delivery approaches will also assist counselors to serve customers effectively and efficiently.

Strategies:

- Provide additional training and resources for VR staff to strengthen and increase expertise and specialization in serving customers with specific disabilities and those with multiple disabilities.
- Develop, pilot, and replicate innovative approaches to implementing the VR process, including standardized workflow and new methods for deploying staff and resources that maximize staff capacity and expertise.
- Enhance and increase training for transition VR counselors and other VR counselors with school assignments regarding services to students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services.
- Review transition VR counselor and VR counselor capacity and structure and adjust as necessary to strengthen capacity to serve students with disabilities.

- Provide training, tools, and resources to assist staff with implementing process improvements, including standardized workflow.
- Enhance options for remote service delivery.

Success will be measured by:

- an increase in the percentage of customers indicating that they agree (that is, responding "yes") that VR staff provides the guidance the customer needs in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey (Westat);
- an increase in the percentage of customer's indicating they agree (that is, responding "yes") that the counselor maintains communication regarding the process of their case in the quarterly customer satisfaction survey; and
- an increase (accounting for seasonality) in VR engagement rate (that is, arranged, provided, or purchased VR, Pre-ETS, or CCRC services; counseling and guidance; started or amended plan; employment (90-day clock); successful closure; or enrollment in education and/or training).

Goal Area Six: Increase and enhance partnerships with employers to 1) better understand employer needs when hiring people with disabilities and working collaboratively with VR, and 2) build awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities to increase employment opportunities for VR customers

VRD values its partnerships with employers and will continue to build system capacity to promote and support hiring, retention, and advancement of individuals with disabilities across industries. Additionally, VRD will collaborate with its Texas workforce system partners to participate in joint strategies that address employers' workforce needs.

Strategies:

- Continue to expand efforts to raise awareness among employers of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and the services available through VRD to support them.
- Implement and expand employer partnerships that increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults with disabilities.
- Participate in TWC's initiative to Close the Middle Skills Gap, ensuring that VR customers are included in strategies and activities to increase awareness of and access to training in the employment opportunities and occupations in demand by Texas employers.

Success will be measured by:

- an increase in the number of employers participating in disability awareness and inclusion activities, including through the Texas HireAbility and We Hire Ability campaigns; and
- an increase in the number of employers participating in training and work-based learning opportunities for students and adults.

System of Quality Assurance

VRD's system for monitoring and performance management includes having a robust system of case review requirements. State statute requires that VRD review 10 percent of all cases each year. Statistically valid sampling methodology is used to determine the unit specific goals based on customers served. Consideration also is given to actual cases that meet the risk criteria and other trends observed during case reviews and data analysis. The quarterly unit case review

plan has specific focus area goals to be performed at the unit level. An important goal is to review a minimum of 10 percent of all cases, with a focus on cases that present a higher risk due to case cost, case length, lack of engagement, or failure to render timely services within federally mandated parameters. Review information and detailed data analysis is used to develop, enhance, or modify current training, policy, and/or coaching needs at all levels. As previously mentioned, data integrity case reviews were added in 2021 to ensure that reporting is accurate and source documents are being collected and to establish a continuous improvement cycle for data integrity.

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

For VRD, a portion of federal funds allocated were used for Innovation and Expansion (I&E) activities, including, but not limited to, the following strategic initiatives consistent with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act.

Solutions to Support Customer Access and Remote Service Delivery

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the VR service delivery expanded to include virtual options. VRD has continued to enhance virtual service delivery options and intends to maintain virtual options to provide a greater opportunity to work with customers, providers, employers, and stakeholders.

To enhance engagement with customers, VRD is prepared to pilot a texting solution called SARA an automated attendant system that enables ongoing communication between counselors and customers and documents that communication in the customer's case file. It is intended to allow VR counselors to more readily and efficiently engage with customers and to help facilitate the provision of information, such as appointment reminders, training activities, and job opportunities, without requiring additional time to document their efforts.

VRD is also developing and implementing a virtual case file system to be integrated into ReHabWorks (RHW), which will enable VR providers and customers to electronically submit documents, allow for electronic storage of that information, and link those documents, as required, to the customer's VR case in RHW.

State Rehabilitation Council Support

The Rehabilitation Council of Texas (RCT) partners with VRD to fulfill the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act for the delivery of quality, customer-responsive VR services. Its stated mission is to partner with TWC to advocate for Texans with disabilities in the VR process.

RCT is a valued and active partner in the development of VR goals, priorities, and policies. Funds are allocated by TWC for the operation of RCT to meet its mandate and obligations. RCT reviews, analyzes, and advises TWC on:

- performance related to eligibility;
- the extent, scope, and effectiveness of VR services; and
- functions performed by TWC.

RCT also reviews findings from quarterly customer satisfaction surveys and assists with the VRD state plan and the comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.

Updated Service Delivery Methods and Initiatives

On March 30, 2020, in the wake of the pandemic in Texas, VRD implemented the first of several rounds of exceptions to its business processes and procedures in the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Manual (VRSM) and Standards for Providers (SFP) manual. The goal of these exceptions was to streamline and automate processes for both staff and providers in order to enable continuity of services, both remote and in-person, to VRD customers. In the subsequent months, VRD observed improved efficiencies using these temporary exceptions. As a result, on September 1, 2020, VRD incorporated many of the exceptions into its standard operations in the VRSM and SFP.

In March 2020, guidance was issued to inform staff about options providers may use to meet the continuity of care needs of customers through alternative means of telehealth and telerehabilitation. Telerehabilitation is the delivery of rehabilitation services over telecommunication networks and the internet and is an option for numerous services listed in the SFP manual. Telehealth options are available for the following services:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder Supports
- Applied Behavior Analysis
- Psychological Services
- Medical Services

The Business Transformation Project was commissioned in March 2021 to address the lack of qualified providers to meet customer needs. The project team identified strategies and suggested tactics to pursue based on an extensive root cause analysis. The project team identified five strategies and associated teams to address the root causes, which include reducing vendor requirements; ensuring that payment rates are competitive and equitable; strengthening provider recruiting efforts; enhancing provider related training, guidance, and support; and ensuring the provider list in the electronic case management system is useful and accurate. Multiple projects are underway within these strategy areas.

In October 2019, the employment supports for brain injury policy was implemented to improve services for individuals with brain injuries. The new policy integrated therapeutic services and employment services geared to address the continuum of needs demonstrated in the community of individuals with brain injury. Additionally, a community of practice was developed with counselors who maintain a brain injury specialty caseload. Brain injury specialty counselors are selected based on:

- experience in VR caseload management;
- interest in developing a caseload with a primary brain injury focus;
- willingness to gain knowledge in brain injury disabilities, treatment, and resources;
- skills in communicating with partners external to VRD;
- knowledge of brain injury services;
- skills in working as a team members with partners external to VRD;
- ability to organize and manage work systems that allow for extended time in out-of-office meetings; and
- passion for working with individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Brain injury specialty counselors are trained to work collaboratively with Community Rating System staff to facilitate referrals to and from the CRS program.

VRD provides Supported Employment (SE) services to youth and other individuals with the most significant disabilities who require long-term supports to achieve and maintain competitive integrated employment. VRD initiated a project in October 2020 to review and improve procedures for SE. A work group of SE providers and VR staff provided input on the SE benchmark system, policy, forms, rates, and training for staff and providers. The work group identified both constraints in the current SE benchmark system and ideas for improvement. VRD has worked to streamline the SE process and forms and to improve training for staff members and providers to ensure that there are quality employment outcomes for customers who receive SE.

The Substance Use Disorders policy was updated in March 2021 to remove the sobriety clause. The sobriety clause required customers to maintain and document a minimum of 30 days of sobriety prior to eligibility determination for VR services. Additionally, if a customer in services failed to maintain sobriety, the customer had to maintain sobriety for 30 days prior to resuming services. The updated policy changed the eligibility requirements to be more inclusive, to help customers reach their potential for recovery and success in line with their employment goal, and to align with best practices for the population. Customers will still be expected to recognize their disability and understand the need for services, participate in treatment and the VR program, and make progress in completing their treatment and achieving goals established in their employment plan.

Additionally, VRD maintains a Vocational Diagnostic Unit (VDU) staffed by four psychology associates to ensure that customers who are blind or have visual impairments (BVI) have access to comprehensive assessments that are normed against the blind population and may yield the most accurate results. VDU evaluators teleworked when COVID-19 restrictions prevented in-person services. To address the limitations of comprehensive psychological and vocational evaluation delivered remotely during the pandemic, VDU developed the Vocational Diagnostic Unit Career Assessment (VDUCA). Unlike the Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation System that VDU used in the past, The VDUCA may be administered remotely to blind and visually impaired customers. Popular with counselors and customers alike, the VDUCA provides BVI customers with an opportunity to discuss career interests with a psychology associate. VDU continues to work on test batteries that may be adapted to accommodate the unique needs of BVI customers.

P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

Goal Area 1: Target Populations

Priorities:

- Improve customer employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities to include individuals who are blind or significantly visually impaired, individuals who are from minority backgrounds, individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities), individuals with mental health disorders, and veterans with disabilities.
- Increase counselors' knowledge of work incentives and the effect of earnings on Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income to improve counselors' provision of vocational counseling on decisions im pacting employment.

- Provide a customer service delivery system that makes information available to customers on their options for services, providers, careers, and other areas, to (1) enable informed customer choice and (2) deliver quality and timely services.

Measures: Provide VR services that support quality employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities by meeting or exceeding performance goals.

Name of Measure:	Goal	PY'20 Performance	Percent of Goal
Number of Customers Who Achieved Employment Outcomes – VR	11,369	10,253	90.18%
Percent of Customers Who Achieve Employment Outcomes – VR	55.8%	47.88%	85.8%

Measure: An increase in the number of participants served with neurodevelopmental disabilities, psychological disabilities, and participants who are veterans.

Populations PARTICIPANTS[1] SERVED	PY'19[2]	PY'20[3]
with neurodevelopmental disability[4]	26,587	25,044
with psychological disability[5]	18,398	16,627
veterans	1,645	1,517

The table above compares the PY'19 and PY'20 performance for service to customers with neurodevelopmental disability or psychological disability, or customers who are veterans.

In PY'20, VRD served 25,044 customers with a neurodevelopmental disability, a decrease of 1,543 from PY'19.

In PY'20 VRD served 16,627 customers with a psychological disability, a decrease of 1,771 customers from PY'19.

In PY'20 VRD served 1,517 veteran customers, a decrease of 128 from PY'19.

Measure: An increase in the number of successful employment outcomes for target populations.

Populations SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES	PY'19	PY'20
with neurodevelopmental disability	3,177	2,660
with psychological disability	2,278	1,855
veterans	282	295

The table above compares PY'19 and PY'20 VRD successful employment outcomes for target populations with neurodevelopment disability or psychological disability or customers who are veterans.

In PY'20, VRD saw successful employment outcomes for 2,660 customers with neurodevelopmental disability, a decrease of 517 from PY'19.

In PY'20, VRD saw successful employment outcomes for 1,855 customers with psychological disability, a decrease of 423 from PY'19.

In PY'20, VRD saw successful employment outcomes for 295 customers who are veterans, an increase of 13 from PY'19.

Goal 1 Strategies Contributing to the Success of Goals:

- Strengthening and expanding collaboration, outreach, and education with various partners to efficiently and effectively use existing resources.
- Assessing business processes, policy, training, and organizational capacity in an ongoing basis to make consistent improvements in employment outcomes.
- Increasing employer knowledge and awareness regarding the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities.
- Increasing customer knowledge and awareness of VRD services and benefits offered to individuals with disabilities, and other state and federal assistance programs.
- Promoting the use of the Language Line as a resource for those who are not fluent in English.
- Actively recruiting VR counselors who are Spanish speakers to better serve the Spanish-speaking population.
- Strengthening and developing relationships with local referral sources that serve individuals who are minorities who have the most significant disabilities.
- Providing eye exams to Hispanic individuals in South Texas who lack other medical resources.

Goal Area 2: Services to Students (Ages 14–22) and Youth (Ages 14–24) with Disabilities

Priorities

- Expand and improve VR services, including Pre-ETS for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities.
- Provide supported employment services to youth and other individuals with the most significant disabilities who require extended support to achieve and maintain a successful competitive integrated employment outcome.

Measure: An increase in successful outcomes for students with disabilities and youth.

Populations SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES	PY'19	PY'20
Youth only	1,414	885
Student & Youth	3,100	2,722

The above table compares the successful employment outcomes in PY 2019 and PY 2020 for student and/or youth populations in VRD services.

In PY'20, VRD saw successful employment outcomes for 885 youth-only (not a student, because a customer can be a youth without being a student) customers, a decrease of 529 from PY'19.

In PY'20, VRD saw successful employment outcomes for 2,722 students and youth-only customers, a decrease of 378 from PY'19.

Goal 2 Strategies Contributing to Success of Goals:

VRD developed a formalized method of reviewing proposed ideas and initiatives for Pre-ETS. This method includes the establishment of a core group of staff members who review proposed ideas for Pre-ETS biweekly. Additionally, a Pre-ETS mailbox was developed so field staff can ask questions and obtain consistent responses from the state transition program specialists leading up to implementation of Pre-ETS. The following strategies were implemented to expand and improve VR services for students and youth with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities:

- Provide supported employment services for youth with the most significant disabilities, and enhanced coordination to ensure extended supports are in place for customers to achieve and maintain employment outcomes.
- Evaluate, revise, and develop policy, procedures, and staffing strategies to improve consistency and increase effectiveness in the provision of transition services.
- Develop a transition training module, which will provide guidance and best practices pertaining to provision of transition services.
- Expand and increase partnerships with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational institutions and organizations to facilitate the identification of best practices, leveraged resources, and improved coordination.
- Continue the Pathways to Careers Initiative (PCI)which expands Pre-ETS to students with disabilities. PCI includes eight strategies: Summer Earn and Learn, Charting the Course: Planning for Life after High School, Explore STEM! Pre-ETS Tools for Students, Pre-ETS Elective Curriculum, Capacity Building, Advise Texas, and Student HIREability Navigators. Through PCI, students with disabilities will be better prepared to achieve competitive-integrated employment through participation in employability skills and work readiness training, career exploration activities, work experience, and postsecondary education.
- Non-PCI Pre-ETS strategies were expanded to include Year-Round Paid Work Experience, Group Skills Trainings, and Explore Apprenticeship.

Goal Area 3: Partnerships

Priorities:

Enhance collaboration and coordination with Workforce Development Boards (Boards), employers, and other stakeholders to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after-school opportunities, such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer and year-round work experience programs.

Measure: An increase in services provided to businesses to support hiring, retention, and advancement strategies of the businesses.

In PY'20, there were 80 VRD services provided to 459 different employers. In previous PY's, VRD was unable to track the number of services provided due to the lack of access to a tracking system. The VR Business Team is now using the state labor exchange system, WorkInTexas.com,

which allows the VRD to show the specific VR services provided. Additional collaboration with Boards have strengthened VRD's ability to outreach and engage with employers and industry organizations

Measure: An increase in work-based learning experiences.

In PY 2020, 3,026 customers participated in work-based learning opportunities across the state. The number of participants did decrease from the previous PY since many opportunities were not offered due to COVID. Some of the work-based learning programs included Summer Earn and Learn, Project SEARCH, WINCO, Walgreens Distribution Center and REDI, WACO Project, and year-round paid work experience.

Measure: An increase in the number of partnerships for special initiatives and ongoing coordination of services to businesses.

In PY'20, there were 52 partnerships for special initiatives with businesses, compared to 45 in PY'18.

Goal 3 Strategies Contributing to Success of Goals:

VRD implemented the following strategies to strengthen partnerships with Boards and enhance strategies to develop and maintain employer relationships that result in competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences:

- Continuing to collaborate on special initiatives and activities for youth, veterans, and other individuals with disabilities;
- Developing and implementing summer work experience programs with Boards;
- Increased participation in Board committees;
- Increased coordination with Board Business Service Units and other business intermediaries such as local chambers of commerce;
- Providing information to VR partners pertaining to various disabilities, assistive technology, and suggestions for reasonable accommodations;
- Developing and implementing agency-wide business relationships strategies with a regional focus that creates a unified, comprehensive approach to serving businesses;
- Providing dual customer service to staff to instruct on how to best contact and meet the needs of our business partners; and
- Aligning counseling critical thinking processes with employment opportunities and data to engage customers in defining their optimal vocational opportunities.

Goal for VRD

In addition to the goals listed above, priorities for funds received under the Rehabilitation Act §603 are to increase the number of customers receiving supported employment services who achieve employment outcomes and the number of supported employment service providers statewide, and to maintain the number of customers receiving supported employment services within their home communities.

Goal: Provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require extended supports to achieve and maintain an employment outcome.

Measure: 50 percent or greater of VRD customers exiting the VR program after receiving supported employment services will achieve an employment outcome.

PY'20	Goal	Above/Below Target
67.28%	50%	(+) 17.28%

In VRD, 67.28 percent of customers achieved employment outcomes after receiving supported employment services, exceeding the target by 17.28 percent.

[1] Customers active with an IPE or closed after IPE

[2] Program Year 2019

[3] Program Year 2020

[4] Neurodevelopmental Disability: Based on primary, secondary, or tertiary disability cause code of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (code 07), Autism (code 08), Cognitively Impaired (previously Mental Retardation) (code 25), or Specific Learning Disabilities (code 34).

[5] Psychological: Based on primary, secondary, or tertiary disability cause code of: Alcohol Abuse or Dependence (code 02), Anxiety Disorders (code 04), Depressive and other Mood Disorders (code 15), Drug Abuse or Dependence (other than alcohol) (code 18), Eating Disorders (code 19), Mental Illness (code 24), Personality Disorders (code 29), or Schizophrenia and other Psychotic Disorders (code 33).

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Goal Area 1: Target Populations

Priorities:

- Improve customer employment outcomes for individuals with the most significant disabilities to include individuals who are blind or significantly visually impaired, individuals who are from minority backgrounds, individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities), individuals with mental health disorders, and veterans with disabilities.
- Increase counselors' knowledge of work incentives and the effect of earnings on Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income to improve counselors' provision of vocational counseling on decisions impacting employment.
- Provide a customer service delivery system that makes information available to customers on their options for services, providers, careers, and other areas, to (1) enable informed customer choice and (2) deliver quality and timely services.

Goal 1: Factors That Impeded Achievement of the VRD Goals and Priorities:

- Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, VRD, like many VR programs across the country, experienced a significant decrease in the number of customers served and in successful employment outcomes. Availability of some services was limited for a time, due to implementation of COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Specifically, approximately 52% of customers with active cases surveyed in SFY 2020 following the outbreak of the pandemic reported interruptions in VR service delivery due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Westat customer satisfaction survey). As the pandemic persisted throughout 2020 and 2021, so too did the impact on the VR program and its participants. While numbers served began to recover in 2021, VRD continues to work toward full recovery through implementation of a variety of strategies, including continued implementation of robust virtual service delivery options to accompany accompany the return to in-person service delivery

- Additional research is needed to better identify factors that may be impeding achievement of goals and priorities for individuals with psychological disabilities.
- There are numerous federal and state programs available to assist veterans, some focusing specifically on veterans with disabilities. Veterans may be accessing these services prior to applying for VR services or may not be aware that VR is also available to assist them with achieving their employment goals. An increase in training by state office staff for counselors with specialty caseloads, such as counselors with psychological and veteran caseloads, may be needed to enhance outreach efforts and improve coordination with federal, state, and community programs.
- A decrease in the number of applicants may be attributed in part to a low unemployment rate and a tight labor market, which means fewer people exiting the program.
- An increase in counselor vacancies affected consistency of customer engagement, which impacted achievement of successful outcomes.

Goal Area 2: Services to Students (Ages 14–22) and Youth (Ages 14–24) with Disabilities

Priorities

- Expand and improve VR services, including Pre-ETS for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities.
- Provide supported employment services to youth and other individuals with the most significant disabilities who require extended support to achieve and maintain a successful competitive integrated employment outcome.

Goal 2: Factors That Impeded Achievement of the VRD General Goals and Priorities for Youth and Students:

- Significant staff effort has been focused on engaging students earlier to provide more Pre-ETS services, which are described in the WIOA regulations as services provided early in a student's career exploration continuum and well before a student will achieve his or her employment goal. As a result, in the initial years of implementing WIOA, the number of successful closures will decrease while the length of time students is served by VR is anticipated to increase.
- For youth with disabilities, WIOA increases the length of time and depth of services being provided in supported employment. This results in cases being open longer and, therefore, fewer cases being closed successfully in the initial years of WIOA implementation.
- The VRD increased the number of counselors focused solely on serving students. Additionally, VR established a State Office Transition and Preemployment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) team, composed of a program manager, project manager, and five program specialists whose focus is on policy development, training, guidance to field staff on Pre-ETS and transition, and program development and coordination with other agencies.

Goal Area 3: Partnerships

Priorities:

Enhance collaboration and coordination with Boards, employers, and other stakeholders to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences,

which may include in-school or after-school opportunities, such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer and year-round work experience programs.

Goal 3 Partnerships: Factors That Impeded Achievement of the VRD General Goals and Priorities for Youth and Students:

None identified

2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

In addition to the goals listed above, priorities for funds received under the Rehabilitation Act §603 are to increase the number of customers receiving supported employment services who achieve employment outcomes and the number of supported employment service providers statewide, and to maintain the number of customers receiving supported employment services within their home communities.

Goal for VRD

Provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who require extended supports to achieve and maintain an employment outcome.

Measure: 50 percent or greater of VRD customers exiting the VR program after receiving supported employment services will achieve an employment outcome.

PY'20	Goal	Above/Below Target
67.28%	50%	(+) 17.28%

In VRD, 67.28 percent of customers achieved employment outcomes after receiving supported employment services, exceeding the target by 17.28 percent.

The following strategies contributed to the achievement of the goal:

- Continued development and implementation of improved benchmark system for the provision of specific supported employment services statewide.
- Developed and implemented complimentary services for specific populations, such as individuals who are deaf and those with autism
- Developed a supported employment technical assistance training model for staff members to improve their ability to determine when supported employment services are needed.
- Developed tools to help staff members monitor and provide guidance to supported employment contract providers.
- Continued to require credentialing for Supported Employment providers to educate and train best practices and improve service delivery.
- In late 2018, a workgroup was formed with ESPs, field staff, and the state office to review the forms and SE policies. The workgroup recommended changes to the forms to reduce the time spent completing forms and that instead could be better used to provide supports for SE customers.
- State office staff is working to develop training to educate ESPs on best practices and how to work with customers who are visually impaired or blind. The training will result

in additional payments for assisting our visually impaired and blind customers similar to the payments for assisting our customers with autism or who are deaf.

The 2020 CSNA found that this goal was exceeded annually FFY 17-19, and again in PY20 so VRD decided to retire this goal. The CSNA did note a decrease in providers (including SE providers), and the need for process improvement (reduce the complexity/paperwork involved in the SE process for providers) so new goals were developed to incorporate this information.

During the town hall meetings and surveys conducted for the CSNA, VRD received feedback from key stakeholders which identified new areas of process improvement that were needed to improve performance. As a result of the 2020 CSNA, new goals were developed that were more pertinent to VR program performance and more broadly targeted current concerns. The previous goal areas of target populations, services to students and youth with disabilities, and partnerships will be retired because they were either, (a) always exceeded, or (b) looking at too narrow an aspect of broader process issues that are more directly targeted by the new goals; however, the new goals do incorporate themes from each of these retired goal areas.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

- Additional research is needed to better identify factors that may be impeding achievement of goals and priorities for individuals with psychological disabilities.
- A decrease in the number of applicants may be attributed in part to a low unemployment rate and a tight labor market, which means fewer people exiting the program.
- An increase in counselor vacancies affected consistency of customer engagement, which impacted achievement of successful outcomes.

3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

ROW	PERFORMANCE CATEGORY	FFY2018*	PY19	PY20	PY21	PY22	PY23
1	Number of total applicants	30,241	25,277	25,250	26,192**	27,460***	28,257***
2	Number of total eligible individuals	25,297	22,664	20,513	20,375**	20,851***	21,586***
3	Agency implementing order of selection (Y/N)	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
4	Number of individuals on order of selection waiting list at year-end	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
5	Percent of eligible individual with an IPE who	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

ROW	PERFORMANCE CATEGORY	FFY2018*	PY19	PY20	PY21	PY22	PY23
	received no services						
6	Number of individuals in plan receiving services**	74,025	70,230	65,835	63,503***	63,809****	66,219****

*FFY 2018 (FFY'18) the final RSA-113 report has been submitted. RSA has discontinued the RSA-113 report; therefore, there will not be an FFY' 19 iteration.

**Defined as a the number of customers with an IPE during a given PY, including cases that closed during the PY.

***It is not clear to VRD whether the decrease in numbers for PY20 will become normative or if they are atypical. Additionally, VRD cannot know what to expect after July 1, 2021. Consequently, the projected PY21 totals reflect lower totals accordingly.

**** VRD cannot reasonably anticipate whether the decrease in numbers experienced in PY19 and carrying into PY20 will have a similar impact on future PY data. Additionally, there are no solid precedents from which we can model given that we do not know what the continuing impact of COVID-19 may be nor do we know how quickly the job market will stabilize.

WIOA Section 116 Indicators - PY 20 Performance, Texas VR Program:

Percent Employed Q2 After Exit	56.14%
Percent Employed Q4 After Exit (as of Q2 PY20)*	54.59%*
Median Quarterly Earnings Q2 After Exit	$5,960
Credential Attainment Rate	42.98%
Measurable Skills Gain (MSG)	41.83%

*Employed Q4 After Exit: As of 7/22/2022, Q4 post-exit wage records available for exiters through Q2 PY20 only (7/1/2020 – 12/31/2020).

4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

For VRD, a portion of federal funds allocated were used for Innovation and Expansion (I&E) activities, including but not limited to, the following strategic initiatives consistent with the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act.

Solutions to Support Customer Access and Remote Service Delivery

VRD established a small State Office unit of temporary staff to serve as intake specialists and to process calls for individuals interested in VR services. This group is known as the Rapid Engagement Team (RET). They monitor the email mailbox for customers providing information electronically for follow-up and receive calls through a hotline number. These options for engaging with VR are posted on the agency website and in VR outreach materials.

VRD introduced an online self-referral option for customers to begin the process of inquiring for VR services called Start My VR. This option was configured using the Service Now ticketing system that offers a convenient way for prospective VR customers to inquire about services and be connected to a VRD staff member. VR outreach materials were updated to incorporate this platform as another option for customers to access services.

VRD utilized the Easy Virtual Fair (EVF) platform to significantly expand virtual outreach efforts to current and new customers. Event types include Transition and Pre-employment Services; Job/Career Fairs; Community-wide and training events. Technology devices with accessibility features were made available for attendees to participate in events conducted by VRD.

Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

1. THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

The Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) is committed to providing quality services to customers with the most significant disabilities, including youth between ages 14–24 with the most significant disabilities. VRD uses supported employment (SE) and supported self-employment services (SSE), which are outcome-based services.

VRD-supported employment (SE) offers competitive integrated employment in the community for customers with the most significant disabilities who need individualized assistance finding the most appropriate job match and require extended services, also known as long-term support within the work, community, and home environment, to maintain employment after VRD closes the VR case. Customers who benefit from VRD SE are those for whom traditional VR approaches have not been effective. Although customers in SE have the ability to compete in the open job market, they often require ongoing supports and assistance to learn how to interact with potential employers and perform job tasks and responsibilities. They also must require extended services (long-term support) not funded by VR to maintain long-term competitive integrated employment once VRD closes their case. Common resources that provide extended services for customers include nonprofits, as well as other county, state, and federal programs, as well as family and friends. Customers receiving VRD SE often have no or very limited work history in competitive integrated employment, have been excluded from community services through institutionalization, or have only participated in segregated work programs, such as enclaves, day habilitation programs funded by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).

VRD SE services offer the best possible match between customer skills, interests, abilities, support needs, and an employer's unmet needs. VRD uses the "place, then train" concept, a two-part process to describe SE. The first step is to place customers with the most significant disabilities into a competitive integrated job based on their preferences, interests, assets, and abilities, as identified during a community-based assessment and a SE planning meeting. The second step is to provide training and support to the customer directly related to the job and then coordinate and train the designated extended service providers, or natural supports, to ensure a smooth transition with no interruption in service delivery prior to VRD case closure.

Furthermore, 68 percent of VR participants surveyed from April to June 2020 reported satisfaction with the quality of services from VR service providers. VRD works in partnership with public and private nonprofit organizations, employers, and other appropriate resources for extended supports (long-term supports) to meet a customer's individual needs that are necessary for the customer to maintain long-term competitive integrated employment obtained through SE. In PY'19, 23,961 participants with most significant disabilities received VRD services, of whom 1,684 received VRD SE services. During PY'19, 871 participants who had received SE services exited the VR program, of whom 630 (72.33 %) exited with a successful

employment outcome. In PY'20, 22,613 participants with most significant disabilities received VRD services, of whom 995 received VRD SE services. During PY'20, 767 participants who had recieved SE services exited the VR program, of whom 516 (67.28%) exited successfully with an employment outcome.

To achieve a smooth transition from VR SE services to HHSC SE services (extended long-term supports and services), TWC collaborates with HHSC on each agency's responsibilities and timelines for the provision of services. VR counselors are encouraged to invite HHSC providers and staff to plan meetings and maintain contact with the service coordinator, case manager, or other long-term support and services staff throughout the process. Additionally, VRD participated with HHSC in crafting the 1915(c) Medicaid home- and community-based waivers employment services definitions to ensure that the transition from VR to HHSC SE is as seamless as possible, without interruption in service delivery. With appropriate customer releases, HHSC shares the customer's individual-directed plan and plan of care with VRD, and VRD provides HHSC with the Individualized Plan for Employment. VRD will provide SE services for a period not to exceed 24 months. Extended services will be provided to youth with the most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed four years or when they reach 25 years of age; the extended services are provided by the designated state unit with the funds reserved under 34 C.F.R. §363.22 and §363.4(a)(2).

VR counselors work with Employment Service Providers (ESPs) SE specialists, HHSC providers, or service coordinators/case managers, and customers' natural support networks to develop short- and long-term support strategies based on individual needs. This ensures the appropriate amount of support is available and provided so that employment can be maintained. Extended services, known in Texas as long-term support and services, can be publicly funded, "natural" or "in-kind," or paid by the customer through SSI, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or another Social Security Administration Title II work incentive program. Examples of extended services include, but are not limited to, consulting with a customer's job supervisor regarding areas of concern or training needs; creating supports and strategies to improve work performance through job coaching; providing assistance with medication management or hygiene; and identifying and training on transportation options. All HHSC waivers include employment services, and TWC and HHSC have a partnership focusing on training community providers and 1915(c) local authorities in employment services.

2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

SE cases remain open for a 90-day period after being identified as "stable," with stable defined as the customer:

- performing in a competitive, integrated job to the employer's satisfaction;
- satisfied with the job placement;
- having the necessary modifications and accommodations at the worksite;
- having reliable transportation to and from work; and
- having extended services in place and support needs met and working without intervention from SE or SSE providers.

Additionally, during the 90-day period between "Job Stability" and "Service Closure" for supported employment, ESPs do not provide services to customers.

In supported SE, "stability" is defined as:

- the business is in operation with all supports necessary to run the business for at least eight weeks; and

- the customer is working without support from the VRD-funded ESP.

The customer's business must operate for an additional 90-day period with no support from the SSE provider ESP to reach case closure.

If VRD SE or SSE providers provide direct services to customers between stability and closure of the service, another "stability" period must be achieved before final outcomes are achieved for service closure. Once customers successfully maintain stability with extended services from by non-VRD resources only, the VRD SE or SSE case is closed.

A customer's extended services are documented, including the identified extended service provider, for both SE and SSE services in the customer's Individualized Plan for Employment.

Collaboration with community organizations and other state and federal agencies to identify, develop, and implement cooperative agreements and partnerships is essential to achieving successful employment outcomes for customers, particularly those with the most significant disabilities.

VRD identifies and makes arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements with other state agencies and other appropriate entities, to assist in the provision of SE and SSE services. With respect to the provision of extended services, VRD makes arrangements with other public or nonprofit agencies or organizations within the state, employers, natural supports, and other entities.

VRD purchases extended services for youth with the most significant disability that achieve a Supported Employment placement for 90 days through Job Skills Training. These services are continually evaluated to identify any VRD non-funded extended services resources to support the customer long term or to determine if the customer support needs have leveled off due the customer's gained independence.

Funding through WIOA Title VI and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 §110, as amended, is available statewide to all VR counselors to serve Texans with the most significant disabilities. At case closure, or at the end of any time-limited post-employment services, the services paid for by Title VI, Part B and/or §110 funds are terminated.

Additional potential funding sources include the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work Program, HHSC programs (Mental Health, IDD, Medicaid including waivers), and Centers for Independent Living (CILs).

Additionally, HHSC is the operating authority for:

- the majority of 1915(c) state Home and Community-based Services (HCS) Medicaid waivers;
- 1915(k) Community First Choice;
- Title XX social services; and
- employment services provided through state general revenue funds.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Division

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Texas Workforce Commission

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Cheryl Fuller

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Vocational Rehabilitation Division Director

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

FOOTNOTES

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Cheryl Fuller
Title of Signatory	Vocational Rehabilitation Division Director
Date Signed	06/17/2022

ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or	

The State Plan must include	Include
designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	Yes
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section	

The State Plan must include	Include
102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	
4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the	

The State Plan must include	Include
Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act	
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:	Yes
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of	

The State Plan must include	Include
individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	57.8%	57.8%	58.2%	58.2%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	54.4%	54.5%	54.9%	55.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5500	$5500	$5600	$5600
Credential Attainment Rate	44.0%	44.0%	45.0%	45.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	43.0%	43.0%	44.0%	44.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (SCSEP)

A. ECONOMIC PROJECTIONS AND IMPACT

1. DISCUSS LONG-TERM PROJECTIONS FOR JOBS IN INDUSTRIES AND OCCUPATIONS IN THE STATE THAT MAY PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OLDER WORKERS. (20 CFR 641.302(D)) (MAY ALTERNATIVELY BE DISCUSSED IN THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS SECTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN.)

Employment Opportunities for Older Workers

Employment opportunities for older workers (individuals 55 years of age and older) in Texas are closely tied to the long-term projections for jobs in industries and occupations previously discussed in the Plan's section on economic, workforce, and workforce development activities. According to the 2021 Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) report "Mature Workers in Texas: A Demographic Study," the industry that employed the greatest percentage of mature labor force participants is Construction (8 percent), followed by Elementary and Secondary Schools (7.6 percent) and General Medical, Surgical, and Specialty Hospitals (3.3 percent). Other key industries employing mature workers include Restaurants and Other Food Services; Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools; Offices of Real Estate Agents and Brokers; and Truck Transportation. Although the construction industry was shown to employ the greatest percentage of the mature labor force in 2021, there is not a long-term focus on that industry for employing older workers, as the physical demands are not suitable for an aging workforce. Based on a 10-year projection by Texas Labor Market Information, participant placement efforts will be focused on the Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance, Transportation and Warehousing, and Administrative and Support Services industries, as they have shown increased employment in at least one Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). Administrative and support services, a target industry that offers older workers a pathway to employment, includes growth opportunities suitable for mature workers who choose to remain in the workforce.

Texas SCSEP training activities provide older workers with opportunities to learn the technological skills required for administrative roles that they are often lacking. These skills allow mature workers a chance for long-term employment in industries that will continue to grow. The percentage of workers over age 55 is projected to continue increasing, which will account for a greater percentage of the workforce in the future. Projections show that the size of the younger workforce will remain the same as the workforce continues to age, thereby creating challenges for employers. It is important for employers to understand the implications of the impending retirement of the Baby Boomer generation, as well as the benefits of hiring and retaining mature labor force participants.

2. DISCUSS HOW THE LONG-TERM JOB PROJECTIONS DISCUSSED IN THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS SECTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN RELATE TO THE TYPES OF UNSUBSIDIZED JOBS FOR WHICH SCSEP PARTICIPANTS WILL BE TRAINED AND THE TYPES OF SKILL TRAINING TO BE PROVIDED. (20 CFR 641.302(D))

Driven by rapid population growth and an aging baby-boomer population, long-term projections for Texas include increased demand for service-sector jobs, primarily in the fields of Leisure and Hospitality, Education, and Health Services. These three industries, in addition to Trade, Transportation, and Utilities, account for more than 55 percent of the jobs in Texas.

Training programs for SCSEP participants in Texas include Microsoft Office, accounting, cash management, general office and clerical, customer service, time management, custodial, and safety. Training assignments are tailored to particular employment opportunities, providing SCSEP participants the necessary skills for unsubsidized positions as customer service representatives, general office clerks, accounting clerks, personal care attendants, medical assistants, home health aides, and custodians, all of which are positions within high-demand industries.

3. DISCUSS CURRENT AND PROJECTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE STATE (SUCH AS BY PROVIDING INFORMATION AVAILABLE UNDER §15 OF THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT (29 U.S.C. 491-2) BY OCCUPATION), AND THE TYPES OF SKILLS POSSESSED BY ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS. (20 CFR 641.325(C))

Current and projected employment opportunities for industries in Texas include, but are not limited to, Health Care and Social Assistance, Management, Accommodation and Food Services, Construction, and Administrative and Waste Services.

Within these industries, the need for customer service representatives and general office clerks has increased in the last five years, and this growth trend is expected to continue. Training programs aligned with these occupations ensure SCSEP participants in Texas have the necessary skill sets for available positions.

According to data compiled by TWIC, mature labor force participants composed 10.1 percent of the Texas workforce in 2019. The proportion of the Texas population age 55 and older is projected to continue to increase and account for a greater percent of the workforce. Moreover, employers across Texas agree that their baby-boomer workers (born 1946 to 1964) are remaining in the workforce. The trend reflects workers' decisions to postpone retirement because of fulfilling careers, longer lives, changing retirement plans and resources, or shrinking retiree health benefits. This trend has the potential to affect the workforce and the overall economy in numerous ways.

Education is a key aspect of a competitive workforce and the type of job opportunities that workers may pursue. Approximately 83.7 percent of the population over age 25 in Texas (24,394,788 individuals) had at least a high school diploma in 2020, and roughly 29.9 percent (8,714,506 individuals) had at least a bachelor's degree.

https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/TX/EDU635217#EDU635217

2. According to the Urban Institute, in 2020, the average monthly unemployment rate for older workers reached 7.5 percent, the highest annual rate on record. During the COVID-19 pandemic, older adults have constituted a disproportionate share of labor-force dropouts. The financial lifeline of Social Security does not provide the stability it promises, and those needing to collect Social Security early find their monthly benefits permanently reduced. Compounding the challenges of COVID-19, many employers are also reluctant to hire older workers, resulting in older workers generally taking twice as long as their younger counterparts to become reemployed. Increased services are needed to counsel older workers and provide more training as the pandemic continues to accelerate ongoing occupational shifts.

B. SERVICE DELIVERY AND COORDINATION

1. A DESCRIPTION OF ACTIONS TO COORDINATE SCSEP WITH OTHER PROGRAMS. THIS MAY ALTERNATIVELY BE DISCUSSED IN THE STATE STRATEGIES SECTION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN, BUT REGARDLESS OF PLACEMENT IN DOCUMENT, MUST INCLUDE:

A. PLANNED ACTIONS TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES OF SCSEP GRANTEES WITH WIOA TITLE I PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PLANS FOR USING THE WIOA ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM AND ITS PARTNERS TO SERVE INDIVIDUALS AGED 55 AND OLDER. (20 CFR 641.302(G), 641.325(E))

<u>Coordination with Other Programs, Initiatives, and Entities</u>

Grantees will pursue both state- and local-level strategies to strengthen partnerships and working relationships in each of the categories below. TWC will:

- seek Boards' cooperation in generating Older Worker Reports from WorkInTexas.com to facilitate participant recruitment by grantees' field coordinators;
- encourage grantees and Boards to refine memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to specify roles and responsibilities for:
    - outreach to employers;

- workforce services to seniors;
- case management services for coenrolled participants; and
- other joint efforts as appropriate;
- encourage Boards to:
    - coenroll seniors seeking full-time work under WIOA and/or other workforce programs, as appropriate;
    - provide for the location of participant assistants at Workforce Solutions Offices when feasible, and train participant assistants as job developers to assist older job seekers; and
    - propose sessions on older worker issues and best practices at TWC's Annual Workforce Forum.

Grantees and Boards will:

- provide information on and referrals to the services available at Workforce Solutions Offices;
- negotiate community service assignments for senior participants at Workforce Solutions Offices, when feasible; and
- negotiate for colocation of grantee staff at Workforce Solutions Offices when funding and office space is available.

Grantees will:

- list participant openings and staff openings in WorkInTexas.com;
- assist job-ready participants in registering online in WorkInTexas.com;
- promote job seeker workshops and job clubs at Workforce Solutions Offices and prepare Individual Employment Plans (IEPs) for participants; and
- provide updates to Boards on SCSEP activities and successes in the local workforce development area (workforce area).

Boards will:

- provide core workforce services to SCSEP participants and other older job seekers; and
- provide current and future labor market information on industries, occupations, and required skill sets to older job seekers.

B. PLANNED ACTIONS TO COORDINATE ACTIVITIES OF SCSEP GRANTEES WITH THE ACTIVITIES BEING CARRIED OUT IN THE STATE UNDER THE OTHER TITLES OF THE OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA). (20 CFR 641.302(H))

<u>Activities Carried Out under Other Titles of the Older Americans Act</u>

Grantees will employ the following strategies to promote an ongoing dialogue and coordination with other providers serving seniors:

- Share information and resources relevant to senior health, support services, and older job seekers at Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee meetings
- Explore opportunities for improving the quality of training and access to training for community-based direct service workers caring for individuals with disabilities

- Attend the Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) quarterly training meeting when feasible
- Contact regional specialists to schedule interpreters and other communication access services if assistance is needed for training and employment services with the deaf and hard of hearing

C. PLANNED ACTIONS TO COORDINATE SCSEP WITH OTHER PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ENTITIES AND PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES TO OLDER AMERICANS, SUCH AS COMMUNITY AND FAITH- BASED ORGANIZATIONS, TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS, AND PROGRAMS FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR DISABILITIES. (20 CFR 641.302(I))

Public and Private Entities and Programs Serving Older Americans

TWC will share items of interest with grantees on the employment of individuals with disabilities and accessible technology. Grantees will:

- use 2-1-1 Texas Referral and Information Network (TIRN) and other directories of service and support organizations to identify entities and programs in the community that refer and support seniors;
- coordinate with local service providers, AAAs, and community stakeholders to assess needs and develop solutions for local transportation services;
- participate in meetings, as appropriate, with senior service providers, both public and private; and
- communicate and coordinate with members of the local disability community on activities, resources, and services for seniors with disabilities in the workforce area.

Grantees will:

- continue to use computer, adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency, continuing education, and other targeted training courses at community colleges, taking advantage of course discounts for individuals 55 to 64 years of age and free classes for individuals 65 years of age and older;
- work with Boards to encourage community colleges to create short-term education and training programs that are relevant for local targeted industries and high-priority occupations;
- encourage community colleges to develop education and training programs relevant for older individuals' learning styles and pace; and
- continue two-way referrals to local VR programs.

D. PLANNED ACTIONS TO COORDINATE SCSEP WITH OTHER LABOR MARKET AND JOB TRAINING INITIATIVES. (20 CFR 641.302(J))

SCSEP grantees in Texas routinely use Workforce Solution Offices, market publications, and analytics software to keep informed of current market trends and conditions. Such information ensures training programs for SCSEP participants are relevant to available opportunities. Additionally, SCSEP field coordinators network with for-profit employers at job fairs and other employment-related events.

SCSEP grantees in Texas also network with local industry leaders to identify job training and job placement opportunities for older job seekers throughout Texas.

E. ACTIONS TO ENSURE THAT SCSEP IS AN ACTIVE PARTNER IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM AND THE STEPS THE STATE WILL TAKE TO ENCOURAGE AND IMPROVE COORDINATION WITH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM. (20 CFR 641.335)

Improve and Expand Grantee Communications

To encourage communication between SCSEP providers in Texas, TWC will continue to facilitate quarterly grantee conference calls to gather information and share best practices. Grantee field staff will connect with their counterparts in the same workforce area and coordinate efforts that strengthen partnerships with Boards and other local entities.

Other Education and Training Providers

SCSEP providers have promoted the American Association for Community Colleges' "50 Plus Initiative" through the Center for Workforce Inclusion (CWI) SCSEP subgrantee network. The initiative is designed to help low- income, older job seekers with workforce training and in making career changes to high- demand fields through programs offered at community colleges. TWC seeks to enhance these efforts by:

- sharing information with grantees on literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), and high school equivalency resources developed by TWC's Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Department; and
- attending relevant meetings and conferences, when possible, to identify training and vocational rehabilitation (VR) resources for seniors.

Center for Workforce Inclusion (CWI) subgrantee MET has connected with the Workforce Solutions Offices in the 28 Texas workforce regions in its service territory to participate in the WIOA MOU process and determine IFA cost sharing.

F. EFFORTS TO WORK WITH LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICES IN RURAL LOCATIONS.

Rural Local Economic Development Offices

The governor has designated TWC as the administrator of the state's portion of SCSEP in rural communities. Along with providing oversight and technical assistance, TWC manages statewide planning and coordination of the state's grant application and performance reporting. TWC also supports SCSEP outreach efforts, including those engaging local economic development offices. In Texas, rural development is led by the governor's Rural Development Initiative, which assists rural communities and small businesses in creating and retaining jobs through business development and community strategic planning. The following organizations are also committed to promoting rural development initiatives in Texas:

- Texas Rural Foundation, a nonprofit corporation established to raise money from public, private, corporate, and other sources to finance health, community development, and economic development programs in rural Texas
- Association of Rural Communities in Texas (ARCIT), a resource that promotes the policy of best practices in the delivery of public services to enhance the quality of life for all rural Texans.

2. THE STATE'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING EMPLOYERS TO DEVELOP AND PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PLACEMENT OF SCSEP PARTICIPANTS IN UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT. (20 CFR 641.302(E)) (MAY ALTERNATIVELY BE DISCUSSED IN THE STATE STRATEGIES SECTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN.)

Employer Outreach: SCSEP Staffing

SCSEP grantees in Texas network with employers and business and community organizations through local project directors. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) fosters job matching and senior-friendly work environments for its members through employment specialists at 10 project offices located across Texas. AARP manages internal systems to ensure

staff has adequate administrative time to devote to participant and community development. SER National appoints a national workforce development coordinator and regional coordinators to encourage employment of older workers. The Institute of Indian Development locate staff in Workforce Solutions Offices and are actively involved in partner agency meetings.

Employers as Customers

Grantees commit to assisting both job seekers and employers by helping to vet aptitude and fit of individuals for job responsibilities. As part of this process, grantees identify the following qualities possessed by many older job seekers that employers seek:

- Commitment to doing quality work
- Strong customer service orientation
- Getting along with other employees
- Dependability in times of crisis
- Ability to pass a drug test
- Consistent, reliable performance

Once employers' needs are defined, staff is better able to promote the skills and competence of participants as trained workers who will add value to the business.

Grantees will:

- pursue partnerships with employers that:
    - are developing job openings requiring the same or similar skill requirements possessed by older participants;
    - have successfully employed participants;
    - are listed on AARP's National Employer Team, which is committed to hiring seniors;
    - are seeking older participants, based on the local wisdom of Boards, business organizations, and others in the community; or
    - are identified in online labor market information as major employers in local industries with the greatest employment potential for participants;
- publicize the success stories of former participants and their employers, thereby attracting other employers to consider hiring older job seekers; and
- attend chamber of commerce and Board meetings and other economic development organizations to:
    - expand employer networks;
    - learn about job opportunities from employers; and
    - contact employers to determine the skills and qualities needed to be successful in these jobs.

3. THE STATE'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR SERVING MINORITY OLDER INDIVIDUALS UNDER SCSEP. (20 CFR 641.302 (C))

In Texas, service to minority older workers at the local levels is based on a long-term strategy. Grantees will:

- monitor and share statewide and grantee-specific minority enrollment data and factors/barriers impacting minority recruitment;
- use Texas grantees' conference calls to share statewide and grantee-specific factors impacting minority recruitment, share best practices, and brainstorm solutions to address recruitment/enrollment challenges;
- ensure that field staff members are aware of the increasing proportion of Hispanic and Asian seniors in Texas;
- analyze enrollment targets and geographic areas where performance is strong and where improvement is needed;
- identify factors contributing to minority enrollment strengths and factors impeding minority enrollments;
- share best practices for minority recruitment and provide technical assistance to grantee's Texas field staff;
- target outreach to specific underserved minority groups in counties where they are a larger proportion of the SCSEP-eligible population in the grantee's service area; and
- where Hispanic enrollments are low, ensure that recruitment materials are in Spanish and consider hiring bilingual, Spanish-speaking participant staff.

4. A LIST OF COMMUNITY SERVICES THAT ARE NEEDED AND THE PLACES WHERE THESE SERVICES ARE MOST NEEDED. SPECIFICALLY, THE PLAN MUST ADDRESS THE NEEDS AND LOCATION OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS MOST IN NEED OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND THE GROUPS WORKING TO MEET THEIR NEEDS. (20 CFR 641.330)

Of the 28 Boards in Texas, 16 include at least one county experiencing persistent levels of unemployment. This demographic contributes to the reliance upon support services by most-in-need SCSEP participants residing in these areas.

Persistent unemployment and support services needs are most heavily concentrated among the neighboring Board areas along the Texas-Louisiana border and the Gulf Coast, and in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. The eastern portion of the state fares better in terms of poverty levels, averaging 15.7 percent among the North East, East, Deep East, South East, and Gulf Coast Board areas, while the Coastal Bend, Cameron, Middle Rio Grande, and Lower Rio Grande Board areas experience a much higher poverty rate of 24.6 percent. Middle Rio Grande is especially hard hit, with 44 percent of its area affected by persistent unemployment and a poverty rate of 22 percent. Pockets of persistent unemployment and poverty exist through the state, including Presidio and Hudspeth counties in West Texas, with poverty levels of 19.2 percent and 28 percent, respectively. Mitchell County, located in the South Plains region of the state, experiences poverty levels of 19.5 percent, while Hall and Floyd counties in the Panhandle average poverty levels of 24.5 percent and 17.3 percent, respectively. Jones County, an outlier in the West Central Board area, has a poverty rate of 20.4 percent.

Texas develops statewide data on priority community needs from data collected by two state agencies:

- Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC)—needs requested by callers to the state's 2-1-1 TIRN system for each of the 25 Area Information Centers; and
- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)—priority needs identified by 35 Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) entities as part of their annual plans.

The table below summarizes the needs most commonly requested to the 2-1-1 TIRN system, including assistance with paying utility bills and rent; food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), food pantries, and organizations operating food voucher systems; and Medicaid assistance. Priority needs will vary with the workforce area. The Concho Valley workforce area, for example, had many requests for low-cost or free dental care, homeless shelters, and community clinics. For the Cameron County and Lower Rio Grande Valley workforce areas, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applications and Medicare savings were frequently requested.

Priority Needs Based on Requests Received by 2-1-1 TIRN Area Information Centers (AICs)

Type of Need	**No. of AICs Listing as Priority 1-5 Need**	**No. of AICs Listing as Priority 6-10 Need**
Rent Payment Assistance	25	0
Electric Service Payment Assistance	25	0
Food Pantries/Food Vouchers	23	3
COVID-19 Diagnostic Tests	17	8
COVID-19 Immunization Clinic	15	10
Water Service Payment Assistance	9	15
Housing Authorities	2	17
Area Agencies on Aging	3	9
Food Stamps	3	11
Medicaid	2	0
Vaccine Information	1	18
Tax Preparation	1	0
Low Income/Subsidized Private Rental Housing	0	13
Gas Service Payment Assistance	1	13
Child Care Expense Assistance	0	1
Homeless Shelters	0	2

CSBG priorities are listed in the following table. These include housing, employment assistance, health care, utility bill assistance, adult education and training, transportation, and food assistance. Housing authorities, Workforce Solutions Offices, public and nonprofit clinics, high

school equivalency and job training programs, food pantries and food voucher programs, and organizations providing assistance with paying utility bills and providing low- or no-cost transportation are all good candidates for needed community services. Each entity has additional priority needs that vary from area to area.

Priority Needs Identified by Community Services Block Grant Entities

Community Priotiry Need	**2021 Survey Rank**
Lack of Safe and Affordable Housing	1
Trouble Meeting Basic Needs	2
Lack of Support for Employment and Education	3
Lack of Living Wage Jobs	4
Lack of Affordable Health Care	5
Lack of Affordable Child Care	6
Lack of Resources Related to Health and Wellness	7
Lack of Food	8
Lack of Transportation	9
Lack of Employment	10
Lack of Community Revitalization	11
Need for Energy Efficient Homes	12
Need for Education on Budgeting	13
Lack of Partnerships and Coordination	14
Lack of Knowledge about Resources	15

AAAs' priority needs for seniors, listed below, include transportation, home–delivered meals, legal assistance, congregate meals, coordination of care, information referral, and in–home respite care for caregivers. Additional host agencies could be recruited from public and nonprofit entities that are providing these services or are seeking human resources to provide these services.

TWC will share with each grantee the needs identified by the 2-1-1 TIRN entities, CSBGs, and AAAs in the grantee's service area. Grantees will also continue to gather input from local government officials and informal networks with colleagues in local organizations and agencies.

Priority Needs of Seniors Identified by Area Agencies on Aging

Type of Need	**2019 Texas CSBG Survey Ranking**
Transportation	1
Computer Classes	2

Medical and Dental	3
Equipment for Work	4
Food	5
Basic Literacy Classes	6
Clothing	7
English as a Second Language	8
GED Classes	9
Vision Care	10

Identifying Organizations and Entities Addressing Priority Needs

Community resource guides in hard copy and online, including the 2-1-1 TIRN website, are a starting point for grantees to identify agencies and organizations that address priority needs. One promising online resource, Texas Connector, is a statewide online database developed by the OneStar Foundation. The database includes 2-1-1 TIRN resources and GuideStar, USA, Inc., information on nonprofit organizations in Texas. Texas Connector is unique because its mapping tool allows users to:

- outline an area on an online map—a neighborhood, a county, or cluster of counties;
- map all the entities and organizations providing services in the outlined area;
- access basic demographic information about the area;
- map where specific resources such as food banks or health clinics are located; and
- print a report with the selected information.

Texas Connector locates support resources and identifies potential host agencies that address the community's priority needs and may assist with recruiting participants.

5. THE STATE'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY TO IMPROVE SCSEP SERVICES, INCLUDING PLANNED LONG-TERM CHANGES TO THE DESIGN OF THE PROGRAM WITHIN THE STATE, AND PLANNED CHANGES IN THE USE OF SCSEP GRANTEES AND PROGRAM OPERATORS TO BETTER ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM. THIS MAY INCLUDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT AS APPROPRIATE. (20 CFR 641.302(K))

The goal of SCSEP in Texas is to serve eligible participants through training opportunities that both improve or build skill levels for available jobs in the community. The long-term goal is to ensure that the job matching is appropriate for both the employer and older worker so that the relationship will be retained and benefit the employer, the older worker, and the state's economy. Partnerships for integrating services are crucial to these strategies. The SCSEP service provider's success is measured by its attainment of negotiated goals for serving the older worker population, increases in services within the network of nonprofits and public agencies within communities, and cultivation of skilled workers for employers. TWC reviews performance results and offers assistance and training in areas needing improvement.

The state is committed to serving all eligible participants, including minorities. SCSEP will strive to improve outreach efforts and services for this population. Recommendations include the following:

- Help SCSEP participants attain the skills to better fill employment needs

- Work with and expand nonprofit agencies' efforts to provide meaningful community service
- Texas grantees will collaborate with each other to:
    - problem solve and evaluate alternative solutions to issues;
    - share best practices and performance progress;
    - plan and coordinate collaborative activities; and
    - explore areas for collaboration likely to improve or enhance SCSEP services in the state;
- Work with businesses and nonprofit agencies to develop training assignments in which today's skills are learned on-the-job, resulting in unsubsidized employment
- Assist the business community in attracting, employing, and retaining older workers
- Continue to actively partner with Boards
- Expand referrals to HHSC
- Place emphasis on creative partnerships with groups that advocate and provide services to veterans and individuals with disabilities
- Expand relationships with chambers of commerce

6. THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN THE LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE FOR SCSEP PARTICIPANTS' ENTRY INTO UNSUBSIDIZED EMPLOYMENT, AND TO ACHIEVE, AT A MINIMUM, THE LEVELS SPECIFIED IN OAA SECTION 513(A)(2)(E)(II). (20 CFR 641.302(F))

The state's strategy for continuous improvement in the level of SCSEP participants' placements into unsubsidized employment focuses on developing and maintaining host agency and employer partnerships, identifying local workforce needs, and aligning participant skill sets with available opportunities.

The technical and occupational skills of many SCSEP participants often lag behind today's employment requirements. Qualities offered by the older worker, such as work ethic and reliability, are valued by employers, but the need for technical skills is also a concern. Training and retraining of SCSEP participants is designed to help their employability.

SCSEP service providers seek to gather input from the business community, community leaders, host agency supervisors, the participants themselves, and local government officials about the job skill needs within their organizations and community. This effort includes networking at chamber of commerce events and other business organizations' functions. The information gathered enables development of meaningful training opportunities for older workers and suitable matches for unsubsidized work.

Recommendations include the following:

- Place SCSEP "graduates" in industries and occupations with high growth or substantial employment need
- Research labor market information and consult with Boards and their contractors, economic development agencies, chambers of commerce, and local business partners to identify targeted industries and high-growth occupations appropriate for seniors, local employers that are hiring, and skills and qualities needed to be successful in these jobs

- Strengthen initial assessments of participant skills, knowledge, interests, aptitudes, and qualities, and define career objectives that are relevant for the participant's interests and abilities and local business needs
- Assess the participant's barriers and skills gaps to create IEPs with timelines for OJE, specialized training, and support services
- Ensure host agency assignments provide skills training that is relevant for participant career objectives and employer needs
- Develop effective relationships with participants and monitor their training progress so grantees can gauge when participants are ready to start looking for employment and intervene or revise IEPs
- Promote a motivated attitude through counseling and monitoring participants
- Coordinate with Workforce Solutions Offices to provide effective job search preparation and support
- Require participants to register with a Workforce Solutions Office and with WorkInTexas.com
- Follow up frequently with participants in on-the-job experience arrangements to ensure that participants have the skills, confidence, and qualities to be successful in the job
- Intervene early, as needed, to resolve any obstacles to successful employment
- Respect participants' right of refusal of a job when they feel unprepared or unsuited for the job

<u>Grantees will implement the following strategies:</u>

- Continue to remind participants and host agencies during initial orientations and throughout participants' SCSEP tenure that SCSEP is a temporary training program, not an employment program.
- Encourage participants to take advantage of online advice to older job seekers, such as AARP.org and Monster.com.

Additionally, TWC provides online resources developed by its Labor Market Information Department:

- Texas Career Check (www.TexasCareerCheck.com)

<u>Specialized Training Plans</u>

- Pursue low- or no-cost computer training for participants before they report to their community service assignments or early in their assignments. Free or low-cost training is often available at libraries, Workforce Solutions Offices, school districts' community education programs, Goodwill, and community colleges. AARP uses Northstar Digital Literacy to conduct assessments and provide skills and knowledge training for a variety of occupations, software training that applies to most industries, and testing and certification for skills learned.
- Pursue agreements with local employers for on-the-job experience.
- Pursue specialized training opportunities in which a job opening is not required by employers. Participants attend training for potential placement.

- Pursue certificate training opportunities for high-growth occupations and industries. For example, teacher assistant classroom training followed by six-week internships leading to a certificate and employment offer from a local school district.
- Identify relevant curricula for short-term training that is free or low-cost, and encourage local training providers, such as community colleges, to offer training in these areas.
- Pursue or provide transferable workplace skills training. For example, SER National provides 30 hours of training for participants who are close to being job ready but who need a little more self-assurance and motivation. Community colleges and Workforce Solutions Offices will be encouraged to offer more transferable workplace skills courses.

C. LOCATION AND POPULATION SERVED, INCLUDING EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION

1. A DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCALITIES AND POPULATIONS FOR WHICH PROJECTS OF THE TYPE AUTHORIZED BY TITLE V ARE MOST NEEDED. (20 CFR 641.325 (D))

Rural Areas

An estimated 19.4 percent of the state's SCSEP-eligible population reside in rural areas. SCSEP's definition of *rural* is based on Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes, defined at the census tract level. Four workforce areas (Northeast Texas, West Central Texas, Deep East Texas, and Golden Crescent) are mostly rural. One workforce area, Middle Rio Grande, is 100 percent rural.

Seventy-seven counties, or almost one-third of the state's counties, have 75 percent or more rural populations. Fifty-eight counties have 100 percent rural populations. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the populations in three one-county workforce areas (Tarrant County, Greater Dallas, and Capital Area) are 100 percent urban.

Strategies to Address Rural Service Delivery Challenges

The sheer size of Texas—268,581 square miles—makes rural areas a particularly significant challenge to service providers. The state's widest east-west expanse is 801 miles, and the maximum north-south distance is 773 miles. The extent of the state's rural areas is also underscored by the fact that 95.7 percent of the state's land area is rural.

Grantees' greatest obstacles to providing SCSEP services in rural areas and assisting participants in finding unsubsidized jobs are all related to shortages of resources, services, and jobs, particularly in more isolated areas.

Urban/Rural Distribution of SCSEP-Eligible Population in Workforce Areas

Workforce Area	Urban	Rural	Total	% Rural
Alamo	70,351	6,298	76,649	8.2%
Borderplex	43,661	1,148	44,809	2.6%
Brazos Valley	5,799	3,056	8,855	34.5%
Cameron County	25,060	1,190	26,250	4.5%
Capital Area	20,219	0	20,219	0.0%
Central Texas	9,573	2,647	12,220	21.7%
Coastal Bend	21,157	13,930	35,087	39.7%
Concho Valley	4,731	1,914	6,645	28.8%

Workforce Area	Urban	Rural	Total	% Rural
Dallas	65,354	0	65,354	0.0%
Deep East Texas	4,622	14,201	18,823	75.4%
East Texas	19,836	15,186	35,022	43.4%
Golden Crescent	3,869	4,106	7,975	51.5%
Gulf Coast	150,465	11,288	161,753	7.0%
Heart of Texas	10,315	3,508	13,823	25.4%
Lower Rio Grande	43,225	0	43,225	0.0%
Middle Rio Grande	0	12,534	12,534	100.0%
North Central	29,620	13,614	43,234	31.5%
North East Texas	4,343	9,038	13,381	67.5%
North Texas	4,855	2,835	7,690	36.9%
Panhandle	7,688	6,842	14,530	47.1%
Permian Basin	8,559	7,274	15,833	45.9%
Rural Capital Area	13,559	4,312	17,871	24.1%
South Plains	9,179	5,770	14,949	38.6%
South Texas	11,254	5,915	17,169	34.5%
Southeast Texas	15,241	0	15,241	0.0%
Tarrant	42,573	0	42,573	0.0%
Texoma	5,075	2,431	7,506	32.4%
West Central Texas	5,160	8,622	13,782	62.6%

Lack of Adequate Transportation

Lack of adequate transportation significantly hinders SCSEP service delivery in rural areas. In its annual plans, AAAs identified transportation as the number–one priority need for seniors. The minimal transportation available in small towns is on-demand assistance geared toward individuals with disabilities and transporting individuals to medical appointments. Although most SCSEP participants drive their own cars, for those who do not have cars or are no longer able to drive, the lack of transportation poses a significant barrier to SCSEP participation and to finding and retaining unsubsidized employment.

To address rural transportation needs, grantees will:

- seek to place participants and rotate participants in community service assignments as close as possible to their residences;
- seek host agency assignments that have transportation resources (faith–based organizations providing community services may be able to serve as host agencies and provide transportation);

- contact school districts and child care networks/facilities to determine in which rural areas the school bus is a feasible transportation alternative for SCSEP participants;
- become more knowledgeable about state and local transportation planning processes and how to quantify and accurately characterize transportation needs of older individuals, including older job seekers and older workers; and
- work with Boards to identify any existing collaborations with rural community transportation providers and planners to address local transportation needs.

Limited Access to Computers

A second resource in short supply that hinders rural SCSEP services is access to computers and the internet. Low-income older job seekers often have limited or no computer skills. These skills are not only required by employers but important for participants to access the internet, register in WorkInTexas.com and other online job search databases, and develop internet search skills. Digital literacy training for older workers became an even higher priority during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdown measures required grantees to provide training through digital platforms. AARP Foundation uses the Northstar program for participants to learn important digital literacy skills. Grantees' field staff members, including participant staff, need access to computers for data collection and communications in a state with such extensive rural areas. Improving access to computers in rural areas will increase the amount of computer and online training available for participants. To address rural technology needs, grantees are using the the Federal Communications Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program. This initiative ensures that households can afford the broadband they need for work, school, health care, and more by providing monthly discounts on internet service and a onetime discount per household to purchase a laptop, desktop, or tablet.

Limited Host Agencies

Many rural areas have few nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies to serve as host agencies for participants. Limited rural transportation options compound the challenges of identifying a sufficient number of host agencies and organizations with diverse skills training opportunities. More host agencies are needed that can provide general office skills training, computer skills training, and job-specific skills training.

To increase the number of rural host agencies and the diversity of skills training opportunities for participants, grantees will:

- contact chambers of commerce and faith-based and community-based organizations to identify more potential host agencies;
- use Texas Connector to identify nonprofit organizations and agencies addressing priority community needs that might serve as host agencies; and
- work with local agencies and seek community partners to address local transportation solutions to increase the mobility of participants and their access to host agencies.

Lack of Specialized Skills Training

Rural communities often lack opportunities for skills training to supplement participants' OJE service assignments. Increasing access to laptops, desktop computers, and iPads coupled with online training is a top priority for most SCSEP grantees in rural areas of Texas.

SER National has used several contractors to provide participants with specialized skills training and certificates of completion on a variety of topics and skill areas, including financial literacy in English and Spanish, entrepreneurship, food service, clerical skills, customer service, vocational English, intensive job search, assessing career options, and job-readiness training.

Additionally, a SER National contractor has provided rural participants with mobile computer training.

To expand opportunities for participants' specialized training, grantees will:

- explore all formats and technologies for low-cost additional training in the most important skills areas identified by local employers;
- work with local community colleges and Workforce Solutions Offices to expand low- or no-cost skills training tailored to local employers' skill needs when appropriate; and
- seek opportunities with local employers to access low- or no-cost, short-term skills training that is appropriate for seniors and the local job market.

When an employer does not have an immediate job opening, participants can attend specialized training for high-growth occupations so that when the opportunity arises, participants will have the requisite skills. For example, AARP Foundation SCSEP has trained participants in electronic health records and currently pilots a dual-occupation certification program with MedCerts for participant placement as a Certified Medical Administrative Assistant and Pharmacy Technician. AARP Foundation's Edinburg office has established a specialized skills training partnership with Holiday Inn Express that includes customer hospitality and front desk clerk exposure. The goal is to identify and employ participants at the Edinburg and McAllen, Texas, Holiday Express Inn locations. The AARP Foundation's San Antonio office has developed partnerships with The Alamo, Lackland Air Force Base, Medina Janitorial Services, and Senior Helpers.

Lack of Basic Skills Training

An additional resource that is lacking in most rural areas is basic skills training. Many rural seniors have less than a ninth-grade education and need to improve their language and mathematics skills.

In May 2013, the governor signed Senate Bill (SB) 307, 83rd Texas Legislature, Regular Session (2013), which transferred responsibility for adult education from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to TWC. A competitive procurement process was used to select AEL providers in 2014. TWC shares links to online directories of AEL providers and relevant internet links with grantees. To develop more opportunities for basic skills training, grantees will:

- contact AEL providers to identify existing basic skills training opportunities in their workforce areas; and
- use software and online sources to access basic skills training.

Lack of Jobs

The lack of jobs in rural areas makes it more difficult for grantees to help participants, even those who are "job ready," obtain unsubsidized jobs.

To expand rural participants' job opportunities, grantees will:

- explore the feasibility of self-employment with participants and consult with Workforce Solutions Offices, the Small Business Administration, Senior Core of Retired Executives, and other organizations about the most promising types of microenterprise businesses in the workforce area, assessment of an individual's suitability for self-employment, available local and online resources—including mentoring support—and other feasibility considerations; and
- share results, challenges, ideas, and opportunities during grantee conference calls.

Special Populations

Focusing on Special Populations

Grantees work with local agencies to target recruitment activities in underserved areas and in areas of higher concentrations of minorities and most-in-need populations. Targeted recruitment efforts are based on census data, local and state demographic data, and Texas population and aging statistics.

Grantees monitor enrollment levels of most-in-need populations at least quarterly. Field staff members are trained to profile and manage their territories, so they are able to track and plan for exits, plan for adequate recruitment activity to fill vacancies quickly, and seek to ensure that special populations are adequately served.

Recruitment Methods for Special Population Groups

- Grantees often need to go beyond traditional recruitment methods to connect with and enroll individuals from special population groups. General outreach strategies for special populations include:
    - networking with and providing recruitment brochures to community- and faith-based organizations that serve and advocate for these special population groups; and
    - visiting locations and displaying recruitment brochures and flyers where priority populations may congregate, such as laundries, senior centers, nutrition centers, health clinics, and other health care providers.

In addition to general outreach methods for special populations, grantees use the following recruitment methods to reach specific populations:

- Veterans and qualified spouses
    - Networking with local veteran representatives at Workforce Solutions Offices, county judges, senior centers, AAAs, and HHSC
    - Contacting and making presentations to local veterans' organizations, veteran medical clinics, and other veteran-related organizations in the community
- Individuals with disabilities
    - Networking with TWC, HHSC, SSA, and AAAs
    - Contacting disability navigators or former disability navigators at Workforce Solutions Offices to identify local disability advocates and relevant community organizations serving or supporting individuals with disabilities
    - Contacting TWC VR Centers for Independent Living (located in 27 Texas cities)
- Individuals who are age-eligible but not receiving benefits under SSA Title II—Contacting SSA, HHSC, and Workforce Solutions Offices to identify these individuals
- Individuals in areas with persistent unemployment and limited employment prospects—Conducting outreach in counties classified as having persistent unemployment: Willacy, Hidalgo, Starr, Maverick, Zavala, and Presidio, along the Rio Grande; Jasper, Newton, and Sabine in southeast Texas; Matagorda on the Gulf Coast; and Morris in northeast Texas.
- Individuals who are English- language learners (ELLs)
    - Advertising through local media, including Spanish-language newspapers and radio stations

    - Networking with local churches, Hispanic/Latino chambers of commerce, restaurants and other businesses that cater to the Hispanic/Latino community, and other Hispanic/Latino or ethnic community organizations
    - Hiring staff members who speak Spanish or Asian languages to conduct outreach directly
    - Translating recruitment materials into Spanish or Asian languages
- Individuals with low literacy skills—Networking with adult literacy providers, community leaders, churches, and other community organizations
- Individuals who live in rural areas—Using word of mouth through community leaders and community networks, including current and former participants and host agencies
- Individuals with low employment prospects
    - Contacting Workforce Solutions Offices, veterans' organizations, and other community organizations
    - Visiting community centers
    - Networking with safety net organizations such as food banks
- Individuals who used WIA or WIOA services but failed to find jobs—Contacting Workforce Solutions Offices to identify and reach out to these individuals
- Individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness—Networking with local homeless shelters, homeless coalitions, housing authorities, food banks, churches, and Workforce Solutions Offices
- Individuals with incomes at or below poverty
    - Networking with SSA, HHSC, Workforce Solutions Offices, and AAAs
    - Contacting churches, food banks, thrift shops, and local housing authorities
- Individuals who are socially, geographically, linguistically, or culturally isolated and at risk of not being able to live
    - Seeking referrals through HHSC, TWC, SSA, and Workforce Solutions Offices
    - Networking with Meals on Wheels programs for seniors, churches, and local community organizations to identify and connect with these individuals
    - Talking with roadside business owners in geographically isolated areas to identify where potentially eligible seniors live
- Individuals who are minorities
    - Using recruitment methods listed for individuals who are ELLs
    - Networking with ministers and leaders at churches with predominantly minority congregations
    - Making presentations at minority agencies, community centers, and chambers of commerce serving minority communities
    - Visiting food banks, restaurants, senior centers, and other organizations in minority neighborhoods
    - Networking with HHSC, SSA, AAAs, and Workforce Solutions Offices

2. LIST THE CITIES AND COUNTIES WHERE THE PROJECT WILL BE CONDUCTED. INCLUDE THE NUMBER OF SCSEP AUTHORIZED POSITIONS AND INDICATE WHERE THE POSITIONS CHANGED FROM THE PRIOR YEAR.

The chart below identifies the counties in which SCSEP is administered by TWC and includes the number of SCSEP authorized positions and changes from the prior year.

Texas SCSEP PY'21 List of Counties and Authorized Positions

Texas	County	Authorized Positions	Current Enrollments	Authorized Positions + / - Change from Previous Year
48007	Aransas	4	6	0
48005	Angelina	9	4	0
48013	Atascosa	5	1	0
48015	Austin	3	0	0
48019	Bandera	3	0	0
48025	Bee	3	7	0
48027	Bell	22	13	0
48035	Bosque	2	0	0
48037	Bowie	9	5	0
48039	Brazoria	20	12	0
48041	Brazos	11	3	0
48047	Brooks	2	3	0
48049	Brown	4	11	0
48057	Calhoun	2	0	0
48073	Cherokee	5	12	0
48077	Clay	2	0	0
48089	Colorado	2	0	0
48091	Comal	9	6	0
48123	DeWitt	3	1	0
48131	Duval	2	6	0
48135	Ector	10	6	0
48157	Fort Bend	31	25	1
48163	Frio	2	0	0
48171	Gillespie	3	0	0

Texas	County	Authorized Positions	Current Enrollments	Authorized Positions + / - Change from Previous Year
48175	Goliad	1	0	0
48177	Gonzales	2	1	0
48183	Gregg	12	6	0
48185	Grimes	3	1	0
48187	Guadalupe	11	5	0
48203	Harrison	8	10	0
48221	Hood	5	3	0
48229	Hudspeth	1	0	0
48237	Jack	1	0	0
48239	Jackson	2	3	0
48247	Jim Hogg	1	3	0
48249	Jim Wells	6	4	0
48255	Karnes	2	1	0
48259	Kendall	3	0	0
48265	Kerr	6	0	0
48273	Kleberg	3	3	0
48283	La Salle	1	0	0
48285	Lavaca	2	0	0
48289	Leon	2	0	0
48293	Limestone	3	2	0
48297	Live Oak	2	0	0
48309	McLennan	20	12	0
48313	Madison	1	0	0
48315	Marion	2	1	0
48321	Matagorda	6	6	0
48323	Maverick	10	13	0
48325	Medina	6	6	0
48329	Midland	9	1	0
48347	Nacogdoches	5	7	0

Texas	County	Authorized Positions	Current Enrollments	Authorized Positions + / - Change from Previous Year
48365	Panola	2	2	0
48371	Pecos	2	0	0
48377	Presidio	2	0	0
48379	Rains	2	0	0
48385	Real	1	1	0
48389	Reeves	2	0	0
48391	Refugio	1	0	0
48395	Robertson	2	0	0
48401	Rusk	5	6	0
48409	San Patricio	6	4	0
48419	Shelby	3	5	0
48423	Smith	22	21	0
48427	Starr	11	6	0
48457	Tyler	3	2	0
48459	Upshur	5	1	0
48463	Uvalde	4	8	0
48467	Van Zandt	7	6	0
48469	Victoria	9	8	0
48473	Waller	4	0	0
48475	Ward	2	0	0
48477	Washington	3	1	0
48481	Wharton	5	10	0
48485	Wichita	13	19	0
48487	Wilbarger	2	2	0
48489	Willacy	4	5	0
48491	Williamson	19	3	0
48493	Wilson	3	0	0
48495	Winkler	1	0	0
48499	Wood	6	2	0

Texas	County	Authorized Positions	Current Enrollments	Authorized Positions + / - Change from Previous Year
48505	Zapata	2	10	0
48507	Zavala	2	1	0
TOTAL		459	333	1

*Deleted counties were transferred to another SCSEP DOL National provider; added counties were transferred to the Texas state grant.

Equitable Distribution

The number of DOL-authorized SCSEP positions by county is based on the ratio of eligible individuals in each county to the total eligible population in the state.

Current Distribution

The following table provides the number of counties that are underserved and overserved, both statewide and for each county. Texas defines significant variance as both over +/– 10 percent variance and more than +/– three positions variance.

Summary of Counties with Variances in PY'20 Quarter 4

Grantee	Number of Counties	Percent of All Counties with Authorized Positions (232)	Average Percentage of Variance
Underserved Statewide	138	65.7%	33.4%
AARP Foundation	17	60.7%	22.7%
Institute for Indian Development	4	100%	56.4%
SER – Jobs for Progress National, Inc.	4	57.1%	25.6%
Center for Workforce Inclusion	59	61.5%	55%
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging	0	0%	0%
State Grantee	60	70.6%	52.8%
Overserved Statewide	52	24.8%	62.2%
AARP Foundation	9	32.1%	40.7%
Institute for Indian Development	0	0%	0%
SER – Jobs for Progress National, Inc.	1	14.3%	54.2%

Grantee	Number of Counties	Percent of All Counties with Authorized Positions (232)	Average Percentage of Variance
Center for Workforce Inclusion	27	28.1%	66.4%
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging	0	0%	0%
State Grantee	19	22.4%	76.8%

Combined Total Under- and Overserved Counties in PY'20 Quarter 4

Grantee	Number of Counties	Percent of All Counties with Authorized Positions (232)	Average Percentage of Variance
Under-and Overserved Statewide	190	90.5%	35.7%
AARP Foundation	26	92.9%	22.9%
Institute for Indian Development	4	100%	56.4%
SER – Jobs for Progress National, Inc.	5	71.4%	27.1%
Center for Workforce Inclusion	86	89.6%	55.4%
National Asian Pacific Center on Aging	0	0%	0%
State Grantee	79	92.9%	54.8%

3. DESCRIBE CURRENT SLOT IMBALANCES AND PROPOSED STEPS TO CORRECT INEQUITIES TO ACHIEVE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION.

Counties are underserved because of the following issues:

State Grantee:

Decreased enrollments resulted from increased voluntary exits and decreased enrollment activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. An examination of results from a trend analysis completed by subgrantee, AARP, revealed insufficient program awareness in many Texas counties. To address this issue and improve under-enrollment variances, state grantee will incorporate awareness campaigns into outreach activities. Activities will be tailored to address varying needs in each county served.

AARP Foundation

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted staff's ability to travel and recruit participants. Currently, Texas has a total variance of 25.70 percent based on 4th quarter data. This is a significant increase of 14.6 percent from 4th quarter PY'19. Under-enrollment spikes of 25 percent or more were recorded in Bexar, Dallas, El Paso, Harris, Hidalgo, and Travis counties. These increases can be attributed to normal enrollment fluctuations along with recruitment challenges in Hidalgo and Travis counties. Despite analysis showing that COVID-19 did cause a significant

under-enrollment, there is evidence that a persistent ED variance in multiple counties cannot be entirely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. To address under-enrollment variances, AARP will increase its variety of marketing campaigns and increase “boots-on-the-ground" campaigns in under-enrolled counties.

SER-Jobs for Progress, Inc.

Various governmental and official public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a lack of available participants and host agencies. SER is implementing strategies to surmount the current under-enrollments by informing citizens of the availability of the program as well as the potential virtual trainings and remote community service assignments. Virtual trainings are a response to the many governmental and public health restrictions in place due to the pandemic. Additionally, SER will increase the variety of marketing techniques to reach potential participants in under-enrolled counties, such as advertising with American Job Centers, partnering with Food Banks to distribute flyers, and advertising on cable and radio.

Center for Workforce Inclusion

In their PY’20 equitable distribution report for Q4 to the DOL, the Center for Workforce Inclusion reported that 45 of their 69 counties served were under-enrolled. While Andrews, Archer, Baylor, Camp, Castro, Cochran, Coleman, Dickens, Fischer, Franklin, Gray, Hall, Hardmen, Haskell, Jones, Lynn, Newton, Parmer, Scurry, Somervell, Stephens, and Yoakum show significant variance percentage, their actual participant slot variance is collectively negligible. The Center for Workforce Inclusion attributes under-enrollments to impacts from the pandemic. To reduce the variance in under-enrolled counties, the Center for Workforce Inclusion will seek to partner with new host agencies, with a specific focus on improving connections with TWC and other WIOA partner programs to increase referrals.

Institute for Indian Development

Significant variance of under-service in PY’20 was due to the COVID-19 pandemic effects experienced in the second half of PY’19. To address under-enrollment variances, the Institute for Indian Development (IID) will enroll participants from waiting lists in overserved areas and will use a gradual approach to redistribute the slots through attrition to Indian/Native American eligible participants. Additionally, IID will employ more strategic placement of its field offices and schedule regular outreach times and community networking in each underserved county.

County	# of participants served since July 1	% of slots served	Variance b/s # served for year and # of slots
Eastland	1	25%	-3
Kaufman	6	67%	-2
Liberty	6	67%	-2
Wise	2	20%	-3

SCSEP grantees in Texas overserved counties for the following reasons:

- Our previous subgrantee, Experience Works, used over-enrollment to compensate for counties in which recruitment of income-eligible individuals is difficult. Under the administration of our current grantee, AARP Foundation, over-enrollment is steadily decreasing as participants transition to unsubsidized employment.
- SER–Jobs for Progress, Inc.—Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many host agencies closed down permanently or are having to incorporate drastic reductions in the number of

training positions available. These effects on host agencies then impact a participant's ability to gain skills and transition to unsubsidized employment.

- Center for Workforce Inclusion—Subgrantee staff enrolled applicants who were available and willing to work to keep overall service level up, given the difficulties in recruiting in other, more difficult to serve counties. To reduce variance in over-enrolled counties, primary efforts will be focused on increasing enrollments and reducing variance in under-enrolled counties. Over time, this strategy will reduce the need to enroll extra participants in overserved areas to boost overall service levels.

Texas most recently reported 141 counties experiencing enrollment deficiencies and 49 counties with service levels exceeding current equitable distribution allocations. We attribute these significant variances to COVID-19. As a SCSEP grantee, we will continue to improve our equitable distribution levels by researching local job markets, aligning participant skills and training with employer needs, and recruiting host agencies that can offer training assignments that will lead to unsubsidized employment opportunities.

4. THE STATE'S LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING AN EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF SCSEP POSITIONS WITHIN THE STATE THAT:

A. MOVES POSITIONS FROM OVER-SERVED TO UNDERSERVED LOCATIONS WITHIN THE STATE IN COMPLIANCE WITH 20 CFR 641.365.

To address under-enrollment, grantees will:

- focus on and schedule time for community networking and recruitment in underserved counties;
- locate participant staff in rural areas where recruitment is more challenging;
- strive to enroll new participants more promptly after participants exit; and
- work more closely with Workforce Solutions Offices to recruit and enroll participants.

To address over-enrollment, grantees will:

- train subgrantee staff on the importance of achieving "zero balance" with number of authorized positions;
- focus on placing participants in overserved counties in unsubsidized jobs; and
- freeze enrollments in significantly overserved counties.

B. EQUITABLY SERVES RURAL AND URBAN AREAS.

SCSEP grantees in Texas will review the latest equitable distribution quarterly, reinforce strategies used, and share ideas to support achieving "zero balance" in particularly challenging counties.

C. SERVES INDIVIDUALS AFFORDED PRIORITY FOR SERVICE UNDER 20 CFR 641.520. (20 CFR 641.302(A), 641.365, 641.520)

One of SCSEP's primary goals is to provide services for eligible individuals who need additional training and employment support services to help them overcome significant barriers and obtain unsubsidized jobs.

In accordance with 20 CFR §641.520(c), grant recipients apply priority of service for

enrollment in the following order:

- Veterans or qualified spouses who have at least one of the other priority characteristics
- Veterans or qualified spouses who do not have one of the other priority characteristics
- Individuals who do not qualify as veterans or qualified spouses and who have at least one of the other priority characteristics

As specified in 20 CFR §641.520(a), the other priority characteristics include the following:

- Being 65 years of age or older
- Having a disability
- Having limited English proficiency
- Having low literacy skills
- Residing in a rural area
- Being a veteran or a spouse of a veteran
- Having low employment prospects
- Having failed to find employment after using services provided through the one-stop delivery system
- Being homeless or being at risk of homelessness
- Being formerly incarcerated individuals as defined in 20 CFR §641.140

Per TEGL 17-20, issued April 15, 2021, and titled "Senior Community Service Employment Program—Updated Guidance on Priority of Service, Durational Limits, and State Plan Submissions," TWC will include information regarding the updated priority population list in the Four-Year State Plan, which is due in 2023, to address the specific guidance ETA will provide.

5. THE RATIO OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS IN EACH SERVICE AREA TO THE TOTAL ELIGIBLE POPULATION IN THE STATE. (20 CFR 641.325(A))

Workforce Area	Urban SCSEP–Eligible Population	Rural SCSEP–Eligible Population	Total SCSEP–Eligible Population	% Rural Population
Statewide	655,343	157,659	813,002	19.4%
Alamo	70,351	6,298	76,649	8.2%

Workforce Area	Urban SCSEP–Eligible Population	Rural SCSEP–Eligible Population	Total SCSEP–Eligible Population	% Rural Population
Borderplex	43,661	1,148	44,809	2.6%
Brazos Valley	5,799	3,056	8,855	34.5%
Cameron County	25,060	1,190	26,250	4.5%
Capital Area	20,219	0	20,219	0.0%
Central Texas	9,573	2,647	12,220	21.7%
Coastal Bend	21,157	13,930	35,087	39.7%
Concho Valley	4,731	1,914	6,645	28.8%
Dallas	65,354	0	65,354	0.0%
Deep East Texas	4,622	14,201	18,823	75.4%
East Texas	19,836	15,186	35,022	43.4%
Golden Crescent	3,869	4,106	7,975	51.5%
Gulf Coast	150,465	11,288	161,753	7.0%
Heart of Texas	10,315	3,508	13,823	25.4%
Lower Rio Grande	43,225	0	43,225	0.0%
Middle Rio Grande	0	12,534	12,534	100.0%
North Central	29,620	13,614	43,234	31.5%
North East Texas	4,343	9,038	13,381	67.5%
North Texas	4,855	2,835	7,690	36.9%
Panhandle	7,688	6,842	14,530	47.1%
Permian Basin	8,559	7,274	15,833	45.9%
Rural Capital Area	13,559	4,312	17,871	24.1%
South Plains	9,179	5,770	14,949	38.6%
South Texas	11,254	5,915	17,169	34.5%
Southeast Texas	15,241	0	15,241	0.0%
Tarrant	42,573	0	42,573	0.0%
Texoma	5,075	2,431	7,506	32.4%

Sources: Ratios created for each workforce area using zip code populations from 2010 SF1 100% Census File through American Fact Finder (Table P1), zip–to–rural code file (Census Data http://ruralhealth.und.edu/ruca/final310.csv), and TWC zip–to–wda crosswalk.

6. THE RELATIVE DISTRIBUTION OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO:

A. RESIDE IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS WITHIN THE STATE

Current census data identifies the total SCSEP-eligible population in Texas as 813,002. Of this number, 80.6 percent reside in urban areas. 14.6 percent of the statewide SCSEP-eligible population resides in rural areas.

Urban and rural distribution data is identified by county in the Strategies to Address Rural Service Delivery Challenges of this report.

B. HAVE THE GREATEST ECONOMIC NEED

Of the total SCSEP-eligible population in Texas, 79 percent has been identified as having the greatest economic need, with incomes at or below the federal poverty level.

C. ARE MINORITIES

Based on current census data, the statewide SCSEP-eligible population consists of the following minority groups:

Minority Group	Percent of Eligible Population
Hispanic / Latino	53% of eligible population
Black / African American	36% of eligible population
Asian	14% of eligible population
Pacific Islander	.02% of eligible population
American Indian	.004% of eligible population

D. ARE LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT

Twenty-two percent of the statewide SCSEP-eligible population is identified as having limited English proficiency.

E. HAVE THE GREATEST SOCIAL NEED. (20 CFR 641.325(B))

A special population identified in the Older Americans Act Amendments of 2006 is the SCSEP-eligible individuals who have the "greatest social need," caused by noneconomic factors, which include physical and mental disabilities; language barriers; and cultural, social, or geographic isolation. Although there are no statistics available for those with the greatest social need, the estimates for the proportion of subset categories include SCSEP-eligible individuals:

- with disabilities—44.7 percent;
- with limited English proficiency—20.2 percent; and

- experiencing geographic isolation—2.4 percent residing in 64 frontier counties averaging fewer than seven persons per square mile.

F. FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS, AS DEFINED IN TEGL 17-20

Per TEGL 17-20, staff will include information on this priority population in Texas' WIOA Combined State Plan for 2024-2027 that will address the specific guidance provided by DOLETA.

7. A DESCRIPTION OF THE STEPS TAKEN TO AVOID DISRUPTIONS TO THE GREATEST EXTENT POSSIBLE, WHEN POSITIONS ARE REDISTRIBUTED, AS PROVIDED IN 20 CFR 641.365; WHEN NEW CENSUS OR OTHER RELIABLE DATA BECOME AVAILABLE; OR WHEN THERE IS OVER-ENROLLMENT FOR ANY OTHER REASON. (20 CFR 641.325(I), 641.302(B))

Strategies to Avoid Participant Disruption

When there is a change in grantee and/or grantee service area, TWC will host a meeting or conference call to develop a transition plan and timetable for:

- informing participants and host agencies in advance;
- transferring records;
- holding orientations for participants and host agencies; and
- supporting continuity in administrative and programmatic functions.

When positions need to be shifted from overserved to underserved counties, grantees will:

- use a gradual approach to redistribute the slots through attrition; and
- encourage and work intensively to assist job-ready participants in overserved counties find unsubsidized employment.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	70.0%	70.0%	71.0%	70.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	64.0%	67.0%	65.0%	67.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5400	$5400	$5500	$5400
Credential Attainment Rate	73.0%	73.0%	74.0%	73.0%
Measurable Skill	67.5%	67.5%	68.0%	67.5%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Gains				
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	71.0%	71.0%	72.0%	71.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	72.5%	72.5%	73.5%	72.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$8700	$9134	$8750	$9134
Credential Attainment Rate	75.0%	75.0%	76.0%	75.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	70.0%	70.0%	70.0%	70.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	69.0%	72.0%	70.0%	72.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	70.0%	70.0%	71.0%	70.0%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$3200	$3200	$3250	$3200
Credential Attainment Rate	60.0%	60.0%	61.0%	60.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	57.5%	55.0%	58.0%	55.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT - WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	61.0%	61.0%	62.0%	61.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	61.0%	63.0%	62.0%	63.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5900	$6300	$5950	$6300
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM - ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter	37.0%	37.0%	39.0%	39.0%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
After Exit)				
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	36.0%	36.0%	38.0%	38.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5150	$5150	$5200	$5200
Credential Attainment Rate	35.0%	35.0%	41.0%	41.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	43.0%	43.0%	45.0%	45.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	57.8%	57.8%	58.2%	58.2%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	54.4%	54.5%	54.9%	55.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5500	$5500	$5600	$5600
Credential Attainment Rate	44.0%	44.0%	45.0%	45.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	43.0%	43.0%	44.0%	44.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

Additional Indicators of Performance
Employer Hiring Partner Rate
New Employment Connection Rate (two versions: one employer-focused, one individual-focused)
Child Care Parent Reemployment
Maintaining Employment Connection Rate
Earnings Increase and Earnings Replacement