



**Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc.
Board Plan for Program Years 2021-2024**

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FOREWORD

The Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc., dba Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas is the public workforce system that serves the six-county Heart of Texas region that includes the counties of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan. We provide solutions that help employers address workforce needs and we help people build careers with the goal of ensuring economic growth for the Heart of Texas region and the state of Texas.

We are a local nonprofit, governmental organization that governs the workforce development system for the Heart of Texas region and we are responsible for the oversight, planning, and evaluation of workforce services. We are one of 28 local workforce development boards under the direction of the Texas Workforce Commission.

Our volunteer Board of Directors is comprised of members appointed by the chief elected officials, who are the county judges from each of the six counties and the City of Waco Mayor and are approved by the Governor of Texas. Members of the Board represent business, labor, education, community organizations, and government, with the majority of board members and the appointed board chair representing private-sector employers.

Our Board members, along with the dedicated professional staff of Workforce Solutions are tasked with implementing a local, data-driven plan for developing our region's pool of workforce talent to meet employment needs in our area. To guarantee that we are fulfilling our area's obligations to the Texas Workforce Commission under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, this Local Plan examines our estimated economic needs and our strategy for serving the Heart of Texas region.

Through its 2021-2024 Local Plan, the Board:

- Projects labor market conditions and identifies the needs of skilled workers
- Sets the strategic direction of Workforce Solutions and the Board's investments to meet the needs for an educated and skilled workforce for employers
- Describes how Workforce Solutions is organized to deliver high-quality services to meet the needs of our region's employers and individuals
- Ensures the public workforce system is open and accessible to its customers and accountable to the Texas Workforce Commission and stakeholders

The Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc. and our Workforce Solutions team are dedicated to providing a well-trained workforce for the Heart of Texas region and to providing solutions for the employers and individuals that we serve.

Part 1: Board Vision and Strategies

The Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc., dba Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas proudly serves the Heart of Texas region which includes the counties of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and McLennan. We are committed to collaborating and partnering with schools, colleges, local city and county governments, non-profits, and social service providers as well as the business community and other stakeholders to meet the needs of our region and to help carry out our vision and mission.

A. Vision and Goals

Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas's vision is to provide a highly valued workforce system that meets the economic demands of the Heart of Texas communities. Our mission is to provide a well-trained workforce for employers in order to ensure the economic growth of the region.

The Board's goal for preparing an educated and skilled workforce for all customer groups, including veterans, youth, individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, job seekers, workers, parents, and employers include:

- Collaborating with post-secondary institutions to promote training opportunities that educate and prepare a skilled workforce that meets employer needs
- Leveraging training resources with partners to increase the number of training opportunities for customers
- Partnering with agencies to build career pathways that ensure credits and certificates are portable, stackable, and transferable
- Working to ensure the workforce system has the capabilities and assistive technologies and other means to ensure positive employment outcomes for individuals with barriers to employment
- Leveraging state and federal resources, programs, and local resources that accommodate the needs of Veterans, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment to successfully prepare them to enter the workforce
- Improving access and efficiency of employment, training, and retention services to individuals with barriers to employment, including veterans, individuals with disabilities, long-term unemployed individuals, trade-affected individuals, ex-offenders, homeless individuals, older individuals, and youth

The Board negotiates performance expectations with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) annually, to include Performance Accountability measures for core programs described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A). Relevant performance expectations are included in contracts of service providers responsible for the delivery of WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs in the Heart of Texas workforce service area.

The Board's goals related to performance accountability measures are outlined below.

Adult and Dislocated Worker performance measures include:

- 1) Adult and Dislocated Worker Employed Q2 Post Exit - the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit
- 2) Adult and Dislocated Worker Employed Q4 Post Exit - the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit
- 3) Adult and Dislocated Worker Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit
- 4) Adult and Dislocated Worker Credential Rate - the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit

Youth performance measures include:

- 1) Youth Employed or Enrolled Q2 Post Exit - the percentage of program participants who are in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the second quarter after exit
- 2) Youth Employed or Enrolled Q4 Post Exit - percentage of program participants who are in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the fourth quarter after exit
- 3) Youth Credential Rate - the percentage of program participants who obtain a high school diploma, HSE, or a recognized postsecondary credential, during participation in or within one year after exit
- 4) Youth Measurable Skills Gain - the percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment

TWC negotiated measures are supplemented by local accountability measures that align to (1) the Board's goals and priorities, (2) community-wide goals and priorities, and (3) the composition of the regional economy and labor market.

B. Board Strategies

The Board proposes the following strategies to work with service providers and regional partners to carry out the core programs and how we will align resources to achieve the Board's vision and goals. Our region is rich in workforce development partners, including numerous chambers of commerce, economic development entities, multiple post-secondary institutions, 46 Independent School Districts (ISDs), many non-profit organizations, and other entities. In addition, the Board will utilize its existing excellent working relationships with numerous entities within our region to help carry out this work and fulfill the Board's vision and goals.

As a leader for workforce development in the region, the Board understands the importance of bringing together key stakeholders in the region to partner and leverage resources and initiatives that produce results aimed at enhancing the vitality of this workforce development region. The Board will work with service providers and regional partners to align services that allows employers and individuals to achieve and sustain economic prosperity.

The Board will continue to work closely with employers, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, and industrial development entities to address the workforce needs of new and existing employers. The Board will also work closely with service providers to provide, align, and leverage services provided to employers.

Individuals will be connected to community and faith-based organizations that provide mentoring, life skills training, adult basic education, English as a second language, child care, transportation, and other work support services. Some of these organizations are providers for our system while many others work in partnership with Workforce Solutions using a team approach to assist customers.

The Board will continue to build on the excellent working relationship it has with the TWC Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). Both entities have staff located within Workforce Solutions' workforce center which easily allows for resources to be shared and greater aligned to better serve individuals with disabilities and veterans, respectively. In addition, the Board will continue to collaborate with TWC and TVC to engage employers in hiring from both talent pools.

Workforce Solutions also has an excellent relationship with our university, community colleges, technical college, and apprenticeship partners. Each of the four community colleges and the technical college in our region provide educational programs that lead to degrees and technical certifications, adult education, English as second language instruction, and other trainings. Our local unions that serve as our apprenticeship partners provide access to apprenticeship training and access to apprentices in our region.

The Board will collaborate with our region's post-secondary institutions to align resources to provide training to prepare individuals for employment by supporting education and training that equips individuals with in-demand skills as identified by employers. Each of these partners are certified training providers through the TWC Eligible Training Provider System and are eligible training providers for our region. Partners collaborate with the Board in the development of customized training for employers and consult with us in developing proposals related to workforce training. The colleges and unions in the area are valuable partners in developing and executing industry-based initiatives and in provide training opportunities for individuals that address and meet workforce issues in the Heart of Texas region.

The Board will continue its working relationship with the region's 46 ISDs and with Education Service Center Region 12 to align and leverage resources to meet the needs of in-school youth, out-of-school youth, and foster youth. The Board, through its Youth Services provider, will align

services to provide youth with the education and training needed to return to school, complete school, and/or enter and complete college. The Board values its partnerships with the region's ISDs and Education Service Center and will continue to collaborate to achieve the Board's vision and goals.

The Board understands that the well-being of young children and adults is inextricably linked to the quality of their early care and education (ECE) experience. The Board will continue to collaborate with stakeholders throughout our region to identify policies and projects that strengthen the quality of our region's ECE system and that provides support to working families.

C. High-Performing Board

Workforce Solutions has overarching goals that guide the work that we do to provide a delivery system that drives the Board to be high performing. The actions that the Board takes include:

- **Commitment to Continuous Improvement:** The Board values high quality in its work and is committed to improving its processes and strategies for serving its customers and for providing high-quality customer service.
- **Partnership:** The Board recognizes the importance and value that partnerships have on the success in serving its customers. The Board will partner with others to create a common focus around workforce issues and to improve the quality and skills of the workforce of the present and the future.
- **Access to Services:** The Board will seek innovative methods to provide access to services for all customer groups, including veterans, youth, and individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, job seekers, workers, parents, and employers.
- **Efficiencies through Technology and Logistics:** The Board recognizes the benefits that efficiencies can bring. The Board will identify ways to apply new innovations in technology and efficiencies in logistics to enhance the delivery of workforce services, education, and training.
- **Visionary Leadership:** The Board will promote a vision that inspires a commitment to lifetime learning, high skills, strong work, equal opportunity for all, and creativity that moves the organization towards achieving its goals.
- **Market Driven:** The Board will be a market-driven organization that meets the needs of the employer and the job seeker, to meet the needs of the economic demands in the region.

Part 2: Economic and Workforce Analysis

A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis

The Board’s workforce development board area is located in the Heart of Texas region and serves the counties of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and Bosque. The six-county Heart of Texas region has a combined estimated population of 373,806 people with McLennan county representing the largest populated county (www.demographics.texas.gov). The remaining five counties are classified as rural by federal standards. The region consists of over 50 municipalities and more than 100 communities, covering about 5,648 square miles.

The Heart of Texas region has convenient access to the metropolises of Dallas/Fort Worth (60 miles), Houston (90 miles), Austin (90 miles), and San Antonio (150 miles). The area within these metropolises is known as the Texas Triangle that contains the state’s five largest cities and is home to most of the state’s population.

The top three 2020 largest industries by employment in the region are Government, Manufacturing, and Health Care and Social Assistance. Together, these top three employed 63,941 in 2020. The table below further lists the top 10 industries by employment.

2020 Largest Industries by Employment

Industry	2020 Jobs
Government	28,621
Manufacturing	17,681
Health Care and Social Assistance	17,639
Retail Trade	16,885
Accommodation and Food Services	13,740
Construction	11,769
Educational Services	10,403
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	9,837
Other Services (except Public Administration)	8,366
Finance and Insurance	5,889

Source: EMSI

Top companies within the Heart of Texas region include Baylor University, McLennan Community College, Texas State Technical College, L-3 Harris, and Waco ISD. While top companies posting jobs include: CRST International, Inc., Dollar General Corporation, Baylor Scott & White Health, and Texas Department of State Health Services (Source: EMSI).

TWC Labor Market Information (LMCI) data projects that the following industries will be industries with the highest annual average of employment by 2028.

Top Industries by Annual Average Employment 2028

Industry	Annual Average Employment 2028
Health Care and Social Assistance	20,510
Educational Services	19,665
Manufacturing	18,916
Retail Trade	16,416
Accommodation and Food Services	15,747
Government, Except Postal Services, State and Local Education & Hospitals	12,226
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	10,296
Construction	9,594
Wholesale Trade	6,070
Other Services (except Public Administration)	6,056
Health Care and Social Assistance	20,510

Source: TWC LMCI

The Heart of Texas region sits within the Texas Triangle (Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio) and has access to the state’s largest cities. Due to its convenient location, the region is positioned as a hub for manufacturing, warehouse, distribution, production, and logistics. Furthermore, the region is attracting new businesses to the area and current businesses are expanding. All of which are adding to the diverse group of employers within the region.

The Heart of Texas Economic Development District, Inc.’s 2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy report, lists the region’s newest employers and businesses that are expanding. The attraction and expansion of businesses represent a wide variety of industries that include transportation, aviation, logistics, supply chain, hospitality, manufacturing, agricultures, office, and retail. The report lists the following:

- **Retail and Entertainment Centers** are being built in the region and current retail businesses are expanding:
 - Magnolia Market at the Silos which is a large entertainment and dining center is expanding
 - 143-acre Cottonwood Creek Market is being built, featuring Cinemark Theatre, Top Golf, and a bowling center
 - Brazos Riverfront, an active mixed-use waterfront district along the Brazos River in downtown Waco, Texas and adjacent to Baylor University is being built
- **Warehousing/Distribution** businesses are being built in the region and current businesses are expanding:
 - The introduction of Amazon Fulfillment Center will create 1,000 jobs paying \$15 an hour, and is a good step toward economic recovery

- Holt Cat is the largest distributor of Caterpillar equipment is expanding and will provide 100 jobs
- Ryonet Corporation, a screen-printing supply distributor, will employ 10 people with plans for growth
- **Manufacturing and Production** companies are flocking to the region and current companies are expanding:
 - Hello Bello's Diaper manufacturing and distribution company will create 110 jobs
 - Merrick Engineering, a leading manufacturer of plastic and injection molded consumer product, will create 20 jobs
 - Envases Group, a Mexico-based global leader in the production of packaging solutions, will create 120 jobs
 - ZinkPower, leader in hot-dip galvanizing and powder-coating services, will create 100 jobs
 - Aspen Custom Trailers, a high-end custom commercial trailer manufacturer, will add 70 new highly skilled jobs
 - Laminate Technologies, a laminate panel and fabrication manufacturer, will create 40 jobs
 - Advanced Rail Systems, leaders in railway automation, will create 69 new high-skilled jobs
 - The Coca-Cola Company, a national manufacturing company, will expand their facility, retaining 350 jobs and creating 20 new jobs
- **Healthcare** is expanding:
 - New Era Partners, a Behavioral Health Hospital network, will create 90 jobs
 - **Renewable Energy** is resulting in new wind and solar farms are being built in the region
 - **Wind**
 - Engie, in Limestone and McLennan
 - Prairie Hill Wind Farm project in McLennan and Limestone
 - **Solar**
 - Cypress Creek Renewables in Robinson
 - Hecate Energy LLC in Falls
 - Eddy II in Bruceville-Eddy
 - OCI Solar Power in Falls
 - Glory Leasing in McLennan and Bosque

The Aerospace and Defense Industry is also a large part of the Heart of Texas region with more than 30 companies engaged in various aviation and support activities – from a range of transportation, systems integration, engineering, research and aerospace products and parts. Support and promotion for aerospace industries is provided by the Greater Waco Aviation Alliance, three local airports, plus training and research programs through local colleges. These

aerospace companies employ more than 3,500 area residents and key companies include L-3 Harris, SpaceX, Blackhawk Modifications, Freeflight Systems, and Ram Aircraft.

The Board identified the employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and targeted occupations. Labor market information provided by TWC and EMSI was the starting point for data analysis on targeted industries, in-demand occupations, and targeted industries. To build the list of targeted industries and occupations, we analyzed data from the 2018 through 2028 employment projections and retained those industries and occupations that met specific criteria for total employment, growth, and average earnings for workers.

Information and local wisdom was also gathered from focus groups through Community Input Meetings in which business organizations, economic development entities, chambers of commerce, local government entities, post-secondary institutions, and independent school districts provided valuable local wisdom and information regarding the Board’s targeted occupations. The Board’s Future Workforce Committee, whose members include employers, economic development corporations, and post-secondary institutions, also served as a focus group and provided valuable information that helped to also shape the Board’s targeted occupations.

The targeted industries for the Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board are listed below. The list below includes the industry sector name, the NAICS code, and the targeted industry sector name. The industry sectors listed below support two industries identified in TWC’s Texas Industry Cluster Initiative and two industries identified by the Office of the Governor’s Target Industry Clusters. In addition, the Board’s targeted industries support the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce’s targeted industries.

Targeted Industries for Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas

Industry Sector	NAICS Code	Targeted Industry Name
Construction	2382	Building Equipment Contractors
	2371	Utility System Construction
Educational Services	6111	Elementary and Secondary Schools
Government, Except Postal Services, State and Local Education & Hospitals	9039	Local Government, Excluding Education & Hospital
Health Care and Social Assistance	6221	Home Health Care Services
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	8113	Commercial and Industrial Machinery and Equipment (except Automotive and Electronic) Repair and Maintenance
Manufacturing	3364	Aerospace Product & Parts Manufacturing
	3273	Cement & Concrete Product Manufacturing

	3327	Machine Shops; Turned Product; and Screw, Nut, and Bolt Manufacturing
	3330A1	Machinery manufacturing (3331, 3332, 3334, and 3339 only)
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	8111	Automotive Repair and Maintenance
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5412	Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll Services
	5413	Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services
Transportation and Warehousing	4842	Specialized Freight Trucking
	4931	Warehousing and Storage

The Board has targeted 33 occupations that support the region’s industries, meet employer need, and have been identified as the best employment opportunities for the region. To build the list we analyzed a combination of factors such as expected occupational employment in the future, growth rate, occupations that were identified as fastest growing and adding the most jobs in the region along with the need for postsecondary education and training beyond a high school diploma. Occasionally, occupations are included irrespective of the aforementioned criteria due to expressed need communicated by employers and other stakeholders. Through multiple Community Input Meetings, the Board gathered highly desirable local wisdom regarding occupations that data could not provide. The table below lists the Board’s targeted occupations. The selected targeted occupations guide the investment of workforce program funds, such for training and other individualized services that lead to job placement and guide the support of grants and proposals.

Targeted Occupations for Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas

SOC	Occupational Title
49-3011	Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians
51-2011	Aircraft Structure, Surfaces, Rigging and Systems Assemblers
49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
49-2091	Avionics Technicians
43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks
49-3031	Bus & Truck Mechanics & Diesel Engine Specialists
47-2031	Carpenters
15-1151	Computer User Support Specialists
51-4011	Computer-Controlled Machine Tool Operators, Metal and Plastic
31-9091	Dental Assistants
49-9051	Electric Power-Line Installers and Repairers
17-3023	Electrical & Electronics Engineering Technicians
47-2111	Electricians
33-2011	Firefighters

51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production & Operating Workers
11-1021	General and Operations Managers
49-9021	Heating, AC, & Refrigeration Mechanics & Installers
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics
29-2061	Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses
51-4041	Machinists
31-9092	Medical Assistants
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Ex Special/Career/Technical Education
47-2073	Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators
29-2052	Pharmacy Technicians
47-2152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, & Steamfitters
33-3051	Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists
29-1141	Registered Nurses
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
25-3097	Teachers and Instructors, All Other, Except Substitute Teachers
51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers

The in-demand occupations primarily are occupations that support the Board's targeted industries. The in-demand occupations are entry-level occupations that have the highest opportunity for job placement. The table below lists the Board's in-demand occupations.

In-Demand Occupations for Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas

SOC	Occupation Title
53-3022	Bus Drivers, School or Special Client
39-9011	Childcare Workers
35-3021	Combined Food Preparation and Serving Workers, Including Fast Food
47-2061	Construction Laborers
35-2014	Cooks, Restaurant
43-4051	Customer Service Representatives
35-1012	First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers
41-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers
31-1011	Home Health Aides
37-2011	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand
37-3011	Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers
53-3033	Light Truck or Delivery Services Drivers
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General
43-6013	Medical Secretaries

31-1014	Nursing Assistants
43-9061	Office Clerks, General
41-2031	Retail Salespersons
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products
33-9032	Security Guards
43-5081	Stock Clerks and Order Fillers
25-9041	Teacher Assistants
35-3031	Waiters and Waitresses

B. Knowledge and Skills Analysis

The Board’s staff attend a variety of community events and continuously interact with several organizations such as Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Organizations, Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), educators, local governments, and many other community groups. These groups provide an array of information and relationships necessary to get an overall perspective of the employer and job seeker needs in the Heart of Texas region.

As of recent, the Board held community input meetings with stakeholders such as independent school districts (both rural and urban), higher education entities, chambers of commerce, economic development entities and employers to gain feedback about the skills (both technical skills and soft skills) that job seekers need in order to meet employer expectation. Additionally, employers were also surveyed to gain additional feedback.

These recent interactions echoed and confirmed what is stated in the findings of a regional labor market analysis document, *Everyone Starts Somewhere: Career Pathways to Heart of Texas Target Occupations* prepared by RC Froeschle Consulting for the Board. Employers interviewed collectively agreed that some of the top skills needed to meet their needs are ‘soft skills’. Most notably, written, and oral communication skills are needed among job applicants and their own existing workers. Allergan grouped communication skills with the ability to work in a team environment, honesty, and integrity. These soft skills have great value individually and together they provide a better all-around employee.

Another employer, Comfort Keepers, noted that people skills and the ability to document activities/actions go hand in hand with communication skills. Comfort keepers expects their employees to communicate and listen to their customers while documenting all activities performed during each visit. Divine Living Assistance also cites attention to detail as a soft skill needed to ensure their customers are taken care of properly. L3 Harris also sees the importance of good written and oral communications skills and added adaptability to change as an instrumental soft skill to have in their line of business. L3 Harris noted that their supervisors want reliability to be a honed soft skill; employees need to show up to work, show up on time and do your job. In their line of work, L3 Harris also expects integrity and critical thinking to be a part of an employee’s soft skills. These two skills are important because the work done has a direct impact on American service members.

MarathonNorco Aerospace takes into consideration and employee’s attendance, punctuality, and communication skills with coworkers for promotions within the company. Sanderson Farms uses how applicants communicate during an interview as a screening tool for finding good candidates. The department of Water Utilities for the City of Waco hires individuals with basic skills, a good/positive attitude and enthusiasm. The City of Waco also looks at communication skills and customer service skills.

For in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations and target occupations, employers’ needs include basic to mid-level math skills, computer skills, good grammar skills and the ability to troubleshoot problems. In addition to these basic skills, the employers mentioned previously and those participating in the focus groups mentioned reading blueprints, using a tape measure, mechanical aptitude, workplace awareness and safety in the workplace skills. Employers also noted that relevant skills to the industry or occupation would help meet their employment needs but will take an applicant with the desired soft skills over technical skills because they can teach the technical skills.

C. Labor Force Analysis and Trends

The TWC LMI’s Local Area Unemployment Statistics Report for December 2020, shows that the civilian labor force for the Heart of Texas region was 168,640, which is an increase of 2,229 from December 2019. The table below further depicts the Civilian Labor Force for each county and the region, from December 2019 to December 2020. Bosque and Freestone counties show a decrease in the civilian, while Hill, Limestone and McLennan counties show an increase.

Civilian Labor Force

Area	December 2019 Civilian Labor Force	December 2020 Civilian Labor Force	Change in Labor Force
Bosque	8,322	8,265	-57
Falls	6,580	6,685	105
Freestone	6,363	6,245	-118
Hill	16,493	16,508	15
Limestone	8,617	8,720	103
McLennan	120,036	122,217	2,181
Heart of Texas	166,411	168,640	2,229

Source: TWC LMI Local Area Unemployment Statistic Report

The 2020 labor force breakdown shown below provides insight into the total working age population, those that are not in the labor force, those in the labor force, the population that is employed, unemployed and the population under 15.

2020 Labor Force Breakdown

Population	
Population	375,847
Total Working Age Population	301,769
Not in Labor Force (15+)	132,485
Labor Force	169,284
Employed	157,855
Unemployed	11,429
Under 15	74,078

Source: EMSI

Across the region, unemployment rates increased from December 2019 to December 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic was the most notable reason for which rates increased in each of the six counties and throughout the region.

Unemployment Rate

Area	December 2019 Unemployment Rate	December 2020 Unemployment Rate	Change in Unemployment Rate
Bosque	3.3	5.7	2
Falls	3	6	3
Freestone	4.6	8.5	4
Hill	3	6.3	3
Limestone	3.7	7.5	4
McLennan	3	5.9	3
Heart of Texas	3.1	6.1	3

Source: TWC LMI Local Area Unemployment Statistic Report

According to EMSI data, in 2020 the Heart of Texas region's population increased by 4.8% since 2015, growing by 17,307. Population is expected to increase by 3.2% between 2020 and 2025, adding 12,053. The table below depicts population trends of the region from 2015 to 2025 and shows that the Heart of Texas region has seen steady growth in population.

Population 2015- 2025

Timeframe	Population
2015	358,540
2016	361,081
2017	366,009
2018	369,353
2019	372,408

2020	375,847
2021	378,886
2022	381,449
2023	383,773
2024	385,931
2025	387,900

Source: EMSI

Further analysis of the region’s population characteristics shows that the population of Millennials (ages 25-39) is over 70,000, Veterans make up 23,488 of the population, persons who will be retiring soon exceed 100,000, and the racial diversity population is 155,000.

Population Characteristic

Population Characteristic	Population
Millennials (ages 25-39)	70,569
Veterans	23,488
Retiring Soon	106,842
Racial Diversity	155,667

Source: EMSI

Concerning educational attainment, 14% of the selected region’s residents possess a bachelor’s degree (5% below the state average), and 10% hold an associate degree (3% above the national average). The table below further depicts educational attainment by levels in the Heart of Texas compared to the state of Texas.

Education Level

Educational Level	2019 % of the Heart of Texas Population	2019 State % of Population
Less Than 9th Grade	6%	8%
9th Grade to 12th Grade	10%	8%
High School Diploma	30%	25%
Some College	23%	22%
Associate degree	10%	7%
Bachelor's Degree	14%	19%
Graduate Degree and Higher	7%	10%

Source: EMSI

D. Workforce Development Activities

The Heart of Texas region has multiple workforce development activities of which include education and training. These activities include:

- UpSkill Waco which is a program that provides multiple fast-tracked training course to help those who are looking for employment. The activity is a partnership between Prosper Waco and the City of Waco. UpSkill Waco partnered with Texas State Technical College to provide the first training course, which will be a six-week program for Industrial Maintenance Technician beginning in March 2021.
- Prosper Waco is a collective impact initiative focused on addressing issues facing the Greater Waco community in the areas of Education, Health, and Financial Security. Collective impact is an approach to addressing complex social problems through a focused, collaborative effort that is facilitated and guided by a dedicated organization called a “backbone.” Prosper Waco and community partners are currently working on collaborative and partner-led projects, along with supporting and facilitating collaborative grant applications to capture resources for the community.
- The Central Texas Literacy Coalition is a dedicated volunteer-driven non-profit 501(c)3 organization that promotes awareness of adult literacy and serves as a clearinghouse for literacy providers for academic and personal enrichment of citizens in the Heart of Texas Service. Scholarship funds provided by the coalition helped GED students secure funding to participate in CNA training at local colleges. Furthermore, training addressed the needs of employers in the region and assisted those with barriers to employment increase their opportunity for training.
- Area Reach Out & Read program trains doctors and nurses to help parents understand the importance of reading with their children and provides bilingual books to parents when they bring their child to the doctor for a well-child appointment. Reach Out and Read is an evidence-based program proven to increase the frequency with which parents read to their children, which in turn increases children’s school readiness.
- Project Link is a multi-year, \$1 million grant funded by the Rapoport Foundation, which aims to bridge the gap between high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment/completion by placing success coaches at three high schools, McLennan Community College (MCC) and Texas State Technical College (TSTC). These success coaches work with cohorts of students entering the ninth grade until they graduate from MCC or TSTC by providing support in areas such as tutoring, financial aid, finding the right college, time management and much more. The collaborative team behind Project Link is working to develop a model of support for college completion that can be made available to all students in McLennan County. The success of this program will directly influence postsecondary completions rates in education and double the percentage of economically disadvantaged students who complete a workforce certificate or college degree.
- Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries, Inc.’s Accelerate program helps individuals fast track their job search for sustainable employment within 3-4 months of enrollment. Training and resources provided to individuals help participants to secure steady employment and build healthy financial futures.
- Christian Women’s Job Corps provides free GED and job training classes to the women

of McLennan County helping them to transform their lives, their families, and their communities.

- Christian Men’s Job Corps of Waco provides a Christian context in which men in need are equipped for life and employment, and a mission’s context in which men mentor men.
- Mission Waco World provides an array of programs and services for families, adults, youth, and children. The goals of Mission Waco World is to provide Christian-based, holistic, relationship-based programs that empower the poor and marginalized; mobilize middle-class Americans to become more compassionately involved among the poor; and seek ways to overcome the systemic issues of social injustice which oppress the poor and marginalized.
- Midway ISD’s Career and Technical Education addition is set to expand the capacity of the high school by more than 400 students and will expand its STEM programs (Engineering, Computer Science, Health Science, and Biomed) and its Robotics and Hospital Lab.
- McLennan Community College Workforce Readiness Certificate is an industry informed employment training curriculum that helps workforce employees understand the necessary skills and workplace expectations of local employers. The Workforce Readiness Certified goal is to increase the employability and workplace retention of students who complete the program.
- The Board operates the YES! Youth Employment Solutions initiative to increase awareness among high school student, parents, teacher and counselors about careers and education, and to promote entry into in-demand training and occupations. The YES! has multiple initiatives which in the YES! Expo (career exploration event), the YES! website (www.yestoyouth.com) which provides resources to students, parents, and teachers, the YES! Teacher Externship that provides high school teachers with hands-on externship opportunities with employers of targeted industries, and the YES! High School Welding Internship that provides high school students the opportunity to participate in a paid internship, earn an American Welding Society industry-recognized credential, and pays for the student’s welding course at Texas State Technical College.
- Multiple school districts around the region have been awarded a Jobs and Education for Texas grant through TWC. These school districts have used the grant awards to build CTE programs within their high schools.

Part 3: Core Programs

A: Workforce Development System

The Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) authorizes and brings together the following core programs of federal investment under the workforce system:

- Employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers and youth

- Wagner-Peyser employment services
- Adult education and literacy programs and
- Vocational Rehabilitation state grant programs that assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment.

Employment and training services for adults, dislocated workers, and youth are provided to the community by Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas' contracted service providers. Core programs under direct oversight of the Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc. include:

- Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
 - Adult
 - Dislocated Worker
 - Youth
 - Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
 - Temporary Assistance to Needy Families Non-Custodial Parent (TANF NCP)
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Trade Adjustment Act (TAA)

The Board will work with service providers and other entities to coordinate service delivery of core programs as well as additional workforce programs, including:

- Wagner-Peyser Employment Services: The Board operates the program in adherence to the Texas Model, whereby Texas Workforce Commission Employment Services staff fall under direct supervision of the service provider contracted by WSHOT to operate the Workforce Centers.
- Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Services: AEL services are provided to the Heart of Texas region by McLennan Community College (MCC), under contract with the Texas Workforce Commission. The Board serves in an advisory role to MCC and engages in regional planning with AEL partners to align resources and facilitate co-enrollment of customers.
- Vocational Rehabilitation: is engaged in joint planning activities with the Texas Workforce Solutions - Vocational Rehabilitation Services to identify opportunities for coordination of services and to develop joint service strategies that efficiently serve customers with disabilities leveraging partners' collective resources.
- Partners Operating Additional Workforce Programs: The Board also collaborates with partners operating workforce programs not considered core workforce programs but provide services complementary to core programs. Example partnerships include Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries, Heart of Texas P-20 Council, Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy, and Prosper Waco.

Workforce System Services: The Board’s operated core workforce programs, and AEL, Rehabilitative, and Employment Services partners comprise the workforce system, with the primary entry point being the Workforce Centers. Services available at each of the Workforce Centers include both (1) basic career services, and (2) individualized career services. An overview of services offered is included in the table below.

Workforce Center Services

<p>Labor exchange services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job vacancies in labor market areas • Information on job skills necessary to obtain the jobs • Local, in-demand occupations and related earning potential • Opportunities for advancement in those occupations
<p>Career services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach, intake, and orientation • Initial assessment • Labor exchange services • Eligibility for services • Referrals to programs • Performance and cost information • Information on unemployment insurance • Financial aid information • Follow-up services
<p>Individualized services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Employment Plan (IEP) • Career planning and counseling • Comprehensive assessment • Short-term prevocational services • Internship and work experience including transitional jobs and industry partnerships • Workforce preparation • Out-of-area job search • English language acquisition • Financial literacy

B. Core Programs – Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access

The Board provides quality service options to all residents in the Heart of Texas region and works

aggressively to remove barriers to access through (1) efficient deployment of technology, and (2) leveraging of community partnerships and initiatives.

Efficient deployment of technology: The Heart of Texas region is comprised of a large population center, the City of Waco, and is surrounded by rural communities with extremely low population density. This dynamic poses challenges in providing consistent access to services via traditional brick and mortar Workforce Centers. To address this challenge, the Board has positioned www.hotworkforce.com as a web-based information hub that is accessible 24/7. The Board's website recently was overhauled and now contains more resources for customers to access services. The Board takes pride in giving customers the choice of how they would like to be served, online or in-person, when possible. Assistance can be provided to customers by phone, email, chat, online, Zoom, curbside, and in-person. Each Workforce Center is equipped with access to the internet from the Center's parking lots and bandwidth for each center was recently upgraded to provide better customer service.

The Board has three websites to assist customers. Its main website, www.hotworkforce.com, provides the general public with access to jobs, registrations for hiring events and workshops, and information regarding workforce programs. The Board's ChildOne website, www.childone.com, provides resources and information to parents and child care providers. The Board's YES! website, www.yestoyouth.com, provides resources and information to youth, parents/guardians, and educators on youth employment solutions.

The Board utilizes social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) to provide information regarding services to individuals and employers. These social media platforms provide the Board the ability to interact with customers virtually, removing constraints associated with geography and hours of operation.

Workforce Solutions emphasizes collaboration in developing strategies (1) to serve target populations and (2) to leverage Workforce Solutions resources to enhance and extend the reach of services. The following are strategies in place to support these goals for target populations.

Veterans and spouses: In partnership with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), well-trained staff dedicated to meeting the unique needs of the veteran population and their spouses, are available to provide employment and training services. Veterans receive priority of service in all Workforce Centers and for all applicable programs. In addition, the Board engages in complementary local and state initiatives to support the veteran population, and actively partners with state and local organizations, employers, and educational institutions to increase awareness and support of veteran initiatives. The Board coordinates and manages the annual Red, White and You job fair, a hiring event targeting veterans, and is a partner in the annual McLennan County Veterans Job Fair and Benefits Information Fair. Further, a TVC staff member works closely with the Board's Business Solutions team to coordinate efforts in outreach to employers and the referral of veterans to job openings.

Individuals with disabilities: The Board provides outstanding services to individuals with disabilities and language barriers. The Board strives to provide services that are meaningful and accessible to all customers. Workforce Centers have expanded existing technology to enhance accessibility to services, resource rooms, and self-service options for job seekers. Workforce Center resource rooms have adaptive equipment with access stations that include 19" wide-screen monitors, hands-free mouse, video magnifier for printed materials (CCTV), portable assistive listening devices, text magnification, and screen reading software.

Second Language (ESL): The Board is sensitive to the needs of English language learners. Forms and instructions are available in both English and Spanish and the website has a translation button. Signs are posted in Workforce Centers in both English and Spanish, asking customers if they require assistance due to limited English proficiency, and free interpreter services are offered if needed. Each Workforce Center provides Vocational English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education, and GED classes at its Workforce Centers.

The Board also focuses on job-training efforts, including ESL, in industries that provide high-skill, and high-wage jobs that meet established self-sufficiency wages. Job training is correlated to employment that provides individuals an opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency and growth opportunities. To ensure ESL services remain relevant and effective, the Board collaborates with local literacy councils and is a member of the Central Texas Literacy Coalition.

Leveraging community partnerships and initiatives to expand access: The Board actively partners with agencies such as the Texas Veterans Commission and the Texas Workforce Solutions - Vocational Rehabilitation Services to improve access to workforce services and expand access to employment, training, education, and support services. Workforce Solutions staff also engages in the following initiatives and partnerships to expand access to customers, particularly individuals with barriers to employment.

- The Annual Ex-Offender Job Fair and Suit Up Event – this annual job fair and suit up event is in partnership with the Adult Probation, Federal Probation, and the Salvation Army, and it provides a job fair targeting those individuals who have a criminal background. The annual event draws up to 15 hiring employers who are open to hiring this population. The Suit Up event is held at the local Adult Probation office and provides interview outfits, at no-cost, to those who are in need.
- The Annual Walk-N-Roll Job Fair – this annual job fair is in partnership with TWS-Vocational Rehabilitation Services Division in Waco and is focused on connecting those job seekers who have a disability to hiring businesses. The annual job fair draws up to 20 employers.
- Through our partnership with Communities in Schools of the Heart of Texas (CIS), the Board's contracted WIOA Youth service provider, and the operator of the Community in Schools Heart of Texas program, provides a unique relationship for the Board to gain unique access through leveraged resources and school-based access points to assist in-school and out-of-school youth to become career and college ready.

- The Future Workforce Committee was developed to strengthen the Board’s position in addressing the “workforce pipeline” issues and opportunities. The FWC is comprised of private employers, three two-year colleges, an economic development corporation, a chamber of commerce, and past industry employees. The FWC’s goal is to advocate and support opportunities that prepare the talent pipeline for business and industry in the Heart of Texas region.
- The Board holds meetings throughout the year with the AEL provider, McLennan Community College, to ensure that coordination of resources take place and problem solve any issues so that services are being expanded continually to current and future GED students.

Facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment: The Board partners with regional education providers including McLennan Community College, Hill College, Navarro College, Texas State Technical College, Baylor University, and Independent School Districts (ISDs) to define career pathways that are relevant to the Heart of Texas economy and labor market and coordinate co-enrollment. Partners coordinate to align and establish education and training programs along career pathways, with clear articulation between programs at partner institutions. The Board (1) provides critical labor market analysis, (2) leverages training and employment services to focus on priority career pathways, and (3) aligns employer engagement and labor exchange activities to identified critical career pathways.

The Board also leverages its relationship with Communities in Schools (CIS) of the Heart of Texas to improve awareness about career pathways and co-enrollment for youth. CIS provides education and social support to students throughout the service region. CIS, as the contracted service WIOA youth provider, is able to offer dropout recovery/retention, employment, and training services to eligible in-school and out-of-school youth in a manner fully integrated with operation of the CIS program by providing continuity of messaging regarding career pathways.

Improve Access to Activities Leading to a Recognized Post-Secondary Credential: The Board works with regional partners in the design, development and execution of services with the vision of providing a highly valued workforce system that meets the economic demands of the Heart of Texas communities. Consistent with this approach, WSHOT strives to improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential by:

The Board solicits training programs to apply to the TWC Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) that results in industry-recognized credentials and certifications that are portable and/or stackable. The Board also works with ETPS training and education providers to encourage articulation of credit between providers to ensure customers of the system can progress along their education and career pathways. Workforce system staff are trained on the value and benefits of portable/stackable credentialing and long-term career planning to enable them to best advise their customers regarding training options.

Working in collaboration with Hill College, McLennan Community College, Navarro College, Texas State Technical College, and other area education and training providers to align service strategies. The Board leverages labor market analysis and data associated with identified in-

demand and targeted occupations to encourage area education and training providers to establish programs that align to emerging careers in the labor market.

The Board also works with area AEL providers to encourage contextualized programs that promote vocational literacy. Where viable, the Board advises providers on opportunities to incorporate short-term credential attainment.

In addition, the Board actively seeks grant funding opportunities that improve access to activities that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials. The Board has been awarded grant funding to promote high-school welding internships for students who earn a Level 1 or Level 2 American Welding Society industry-recognized credential.

The Board currently works with the Governor’s industry cluster and will continue to do so when actively seeking grant funding or pursuing new opportunities and initiatives.

Part 4: One-Stop Delivery System

A. One-Stop Delivery System

Continuous Improvement of Eligible Providers: The Board engages in ‘continuous service confirmation’ to (1) ensure all services offered by the workforce system meet the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers, and (2) drive continuous improvement efforts in all aspects of service delivery to include Eligible Training Providers. This strategy involves continuous monitoring of system performance across a spectrum of indicators, and rapid identification of areas requiring service improvement. The intent is to achieve the Board’s goal of: ‘Setting the Standard for Service’.

The ‘continuous service confirmation’ indicators include:

- ✓ Customer satisfaction surveying
- ✓ Secret shopper reports from ‘customers’ with direct experience with Center services and staff
- ✓ Routine observation and interviews by Workforce Center and Board staff, and
- ✓ Daily and weekly review of standard reports (e.g. ‘internal management system’) on key service items and activities

Specific to Eligible Training providers, the Board continuously evaluates enrollment, completion, placement, and training related placement data to ensure training sponsored by the workforce system is garnering sufficient Return on Investment. To ensure the highest quality of training opportunities to customers of the workforce system, the Board publishes an invitation to community colleges, area career and technical education schools, registered apprenticeship programs, and other training providers to encourage submission of applications for determination as an eligible training provider.

Facilitating access: To ensure all residents access to the local one-stop workforce system, the Board operates a large Workforce Center in Waco (McLennan County) as well as three (3) rural Workforce Centers in Falls, Hill, and Freestone Counties. To extend services beyond the physical infrastructure of the Workforce Centers and further reduce barriers to accessing services, the Board:

- Partners with local communities to provide access points via regional public libraries that are located in remote areas of the region. Through these partnerships, individuals are able to access our online and virtual services through the library's computers and are able to Zoom with Workforce Solutions staff.
- Leverages technology to extend resources through the Board's websites, social media platforms, its virtual job fairs and hiring events, its chat feature, a dedicated email address, Zoom options, and the extension of internet access to each of the Workforce Center's parking lots.

Compliance with WIOA §188 and Americans with Disabilities Act: Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas strives to achieve excellence by adhering to TWC's three core principles in accessibility by:

1. Ensuring that all customers can effectively use workforce products and services
2. Creating a workspace accessible for individuals with disabilities, and by
3. Complying with all federal and state legal requirements

WSHOT has put these practices into practice by:

- Maintaining policies and procedures regarding the physical accessibility for individuals with disabilities at the Workforce Centers at both the Board and Contracted Service Provider level. Policies require that the Board and the Contracted Service Provider ensure that programs and activities are physically and programmatically accessible to individuals with disabilities
- Making its website and other electronic and information resources accessible and user friendly for individuals with disabilities and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) customers
- Developing/implementing remediation plans for non-compliant websites, applications, and products are remediated
- Ensuring that each Workforce Center maintains sufficient adaptive equipment for customers and/or staff to ensure accessibility to individuals with disabilities
- Regularly meeting with accessibility liaisons
- Providing staff access to TWC's comprehensive seven-hour course, titled "Access for All" (or comparable partner training), tailored to Workforce Solutions Offices staff which provides comprehensive instruction on serving individuals with disabilities. This training

focuses on the basics of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, and how to apply the rules and regulations in Workforce Solutions Centers

- Assessing the language needs of constituents of the regional workforce system to ensure the needs of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) customers are met (to include forms and instructions availability, website content, and signage are available/posted in both English and Spanish)
- Providing customers access to bilingual staff and/or to free interpreter services if needed
- Continuous monitoring of service delivery systems to ensure LEP customers can access the system, and
- Ensuring that all federal and state legal requirements are met

Equal Opportunity (EO) Officer: The Board employs an EO Officer that regularly monitors each Workforce Center to ensure that all compliance requirements are met and to address additional needs and/or concerns that may arise. The EO Officer is responsible for coordinating with TWC on all EO monitoring reviews and responding, as needed, to ensure all aspects of the system maintain compliance. The EO officer is also responsible for ensuring services meet 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

Roles and resource contributions of one-stop partners: The table below summarizes the roles and resource contributions of one-stop partners.

Roles and Resource Contributions

Partner	Roles and Resources
The Board	Through contracted service providers, the Board manages and operates core workforce programs via the Workforce Center network, including Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Choices, TANF Non-Custodial Parent (TANF NCP) Choices, Supplemental Assistance for Needy Families Employment and Training program (SNAP E&T), and additional special grants and initiatives.
Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)	TWC state merit staff provide Wagner-Peyser funded employment services via the Workforce Center. TWC staff are co-managed by a contracted service provider responsible for managing and operating the Workforce Center network.

Texas Veterans Commission (TVC)	Veterans Employment Services offers employment services to Texas veterans and their spouses, and helps employers find qualified veteran job applicants. Priority service is provided at all offices, including job placement services, job search resources, training programs, résumé and application assistance, and career development assistance.
McLennan Community College	Provides access to Adult Education & Literacy (AEL)/GED and English as a Second Language (ESL) at all four Workforce Centers as well as the Youth Services location.
Texas Workforce Solutions Rehabilitative Services Division	Provides services, as needed, to disabled job seekers via the Workforce Center network. Enhanced coordination and colocation allows for greater integration and co-enrollment of services.
Local libraries	Provides access points to customers using WorkInTexas.com, the Workforce Solutions websites, and to receive additional services offered via community partner locations.

B. Cooperative Agreements

Currently, the Board is in the process of updating our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation Division. It is the Board's understanding that once TWS VR updates their agreement to include WIOA elements, then our MOU with VR will move towards completion.

In addition, the Board is also in the process of updating its current agreement with McLennan Community College, which is the service provider for Adult Education and Literacy for the Heart of Texas region.

C. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination

The Board utilizes a multi-faceted approach to engage employers in the regional workforce development programs by:

1. Structuring the business service unit to engage employers from target industry sectors
2. Implementing market-driven strategies that operate at the speed of business, and
3. Emphasizing collaboration with public and private partners

All Workforce Solutions business engagement efforts prioritize small businesses and target employers from in demand industry sectors and/or with concentrations of target occupations and in-demand occupations.

Business Solutions Team: The Business Solutions Team (BSU) serves as the Board's advocate in the business community and customizes 'one-stop' business solutions to area businesses,

including recruiting, screening, and training. The BSU is structured with dedicated Business Solutions Specialists that liaise with and provide services to regional industry sectors that are prioritized by the Board and regional economic development partners. This approach results in Business Solutions Specialists that (1) have a deep knowledge of the industry's workforce challenges, (2) are adept at deploying custom service solutions to meet their needs, (3) are consultative resources in both planning and deployment of workforce strategies, and (4) provide excellent customer service as a result of their expertise. Industry sectors targeted by the BSU include:

1. Aerospace/Advanced Manufacturing
2. Energy
3. Healthcare/Bioscience
4. Construction
5. Transportation/Distribution/Warehousing
6. Information Technology
7. Business/Finance
8. Education/Training

Business Service Specialists ensure all employers are fully supported by the BSU, including new and small employers, through:

- ✓ Weekly outreach to businesses to assess their needs and offer solutions by tapping into all available programs, resources, and services.
- ✓ Engagement of new employers to orient them to the workforce development programs, resources, and services for businesses within our service area.
- ✓ Participation in regular and special meetings with area chambers of commerce and other employer partners to educate and inform small and large businesses about workforce programs, services, and resources available to them. These meetings also generate ideas, suggestions, and comments on how to address business needs, shortages, and expectations.

Market-driven strategies at the Speed of Business: The BSU works with employers to develop tailored service strategies that are relevant to the current economy and labor market, and that prioritize speed and efficiency. Tenets of the service strategy approach include:

- Proposing a service strategy that includes needed business services, as well as human capital solutions available via intensive workforce programs
- Tailoring strategies to small employers in order to act as an extension of their human resources departments

- Coordinating industry-specific efforts when planning hiring events, job fairs, and in building and training in career pathways
- Connecting employers to TWC employer initiatives, Skills Development and Self-Sufficiency fund grants, Skills for Small Business, Skills for Veterans, and local employer initiatives to include Subsidized Employment and Job Development to develop career pathways
- Promotion of registered apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and incumbent worker programs, as appropriate. Includes connecting employers with appropriate Texas Workforce Commission and Department of Labor resources
- Exploring local Apprenticeship programs registered with the Department of Labor to add alternative career pathways through blended training (education/work/pay advancements)
- Providing information on benefits offered by Federal and State governments through programs like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), American Disability Act (ADA) tax credit, and the ADA tax deduction for improving accessibility
- Providing Rapid Response services, as needed, tailored to the employer and employee circumstances, and
- Referral to community organizations and business networks based on additional needs

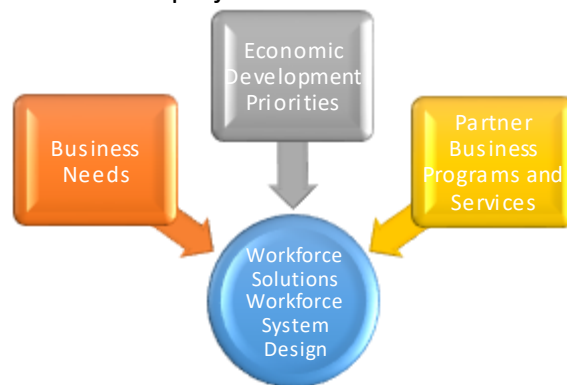
Collaboration: To ensure the business community is fully supported, the Board actively partners, collaborates, and works with key community partners to:

1. Fill gaps in service to business customers that are not addressed by the workforce system, and
2. Fully leverage all community business resources available for the benefit of the region, its employers, and residents

Key community partners include local business organizations, community workgroups, chambers of commerce, business round tables, small business committees, and industry alliances. WSHOT also maintains relationships with community colleges, technical institutions, local alliances, and vocational academies that allow the BSU to facilitate solutions to industry-specific needs in outreach, recruitment, screening, hiring, and training.

Meeting the needs of local business: To ensure the workforce system meets the needs of businesses in the local area, the Board has positioned itself as a convener and collaborator in local and regional partnerships with community organizations, post-secondary institutions, vocational academies, chambers of commerce, and economic development councils. Investing in these partnerships allows the Board to engage business and community leaders on a regular basis in order to (1) keep the pulse of the local business community, (2) understand regional

economic development priorities, (3) stay abreast of regional programs and services that assist local businesses, and (4) adapt workforce programs and services operated by Workforce Solutions to best meet the current and projected needs of the local business community.



These collaborations also position the Workforce Solutions, spearheaded by the Business Solutions Unit, as a liaison between businesses, community-based organizations, and secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. In this role, Workforce Solutions can provide input and information that informs the design of partner agency business services by:

- Providing labor market information to partners and employers to support grants, programs, and employer expansions
- Providing input in local discussions and development of TWC’s Skills Development Fund grant proposals in partnership with post-secondary institutions and employers
- Engaging in round table discussions regarding targeted occupations, training programs, special grants, and industry alliances
- Working and partnering with local independent school districts, Adult Education and Literacy for the Heart of Texas, and post-secondary institutions for the development of career pathways, training programs, and other grants that will aid in meeting the needs of employers
- Conducting weekly outreach to employers who are current users of workforce program services to ensure that their needs are being met, and to market workforce programs that the employer may not be using but may need; and
- Conducting outreach to employers who have not used workforce services or could benefit from additional workforce services

Data Analysis and Continuous Improvement: The Board conducts ongoing data analysis to drive continuous improvement in its delivery of services to local businesses. Regular analysis conducted includes:

- ✓ Monthly review of Ad Hoc reports generated by TWC’s TWIST and WorkinTexas to identify current users of workforce program services, previous users and potential new employers. Through continued review of these reports, WSHOT is apt to better meet the needs of the area’s employers and provide additional opportunities to workforce programs services for employers
- ✓ Monthly evaluation of Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and Current Employment Statistics (CES) releases by TWC to identify and react to local, state, and national labor market and economic trends
- ✓ Quarterly evaluation of the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) released by TWC to evaluate current job growth trends
- ✓ Semi-annual evaluation of industry and occupational employment projections by TWC, DOL, and other sources to evaluate workforce system alignment, and
- ✓ Formal and informal surveying of business customers to determine effectiveness in meeting their workforce needs

Coordination with economic development: To better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development, the Board builds and strengthens relationships with community organizations, post-secondary institutions, vocational academies, independent school districts, chambers of commerce, economic development councils, and local/regional employers. Coordinated efforts are vital to the success of workforce programs, projects, and initiatives. Success in these areas leads to a positive impact on local and regional economic development, which contributes to keeping the Heart of Texas service area competitive within Texas, the United States, and in the global economy.

Economic development partners: The Board works closely with area economic development organizations to increase the awareness of the programs and services available via the workforce system, and to lend expertise and input regarding critical workforce issues. Economic development organizations with which the Board maintains close working relationships are:

- ✓ Waco-McLennan Economic Development Corporation
- ✓ Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Falls County/Marlin Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Limestone County/Groesbeck Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Fairfield Economic Development Council
- ✓ Fairfield Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Cen-Tex African American Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Cen-Tex Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

- ✓ Hillsboro Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Meridian Economic Development Corporation
- ✓ McGregor Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Mexia Economic Development Corporation
- ✓ Mexia Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Greater Hewitt Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Greater Robinson Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Clifton Chamber of Commerce
- ✓ Clifton Economic Development Corporation

The Board engages the following targeted strategies to improve collaboration and better support the economic development community in the area:

- Participates in employer site visits and round table discussions with local chambers, economic development corporations, and potential employer prospects
- Provides and presents labor market information to support business retention, expansion, and new business attraction
- Connects employers to resources and business opportunities, such as the Texas Business Forums, the Governor’s Small Business Forums, and Texas Town Hall Meetings, to encourage economic development
- Solicits feedback from stakeholders who provide valuable, current information from employers about their workforce needs
- Collaborates and partners with economic development entities and chambers to host job fairs that aid in connecting employers to high-skilled candidates which, in turn, supports economic development; and
- Presents at community events and participates in career days to promote economic development.

In addition, the Board has positioned the Business Solutions Unit (BSU) to serve as a facilitator among employers and other key stakeholders. The BSU has established strong relationships with local and regional business communities and thus is a conduit for valuable economic development and employer activity information.

Strengthening linkages to unemployment insurance programs: To strengthen linkages between the workforce system and the unemployment insurance program, Workforce Solutions:

- ✓ Provides one-stop services for Unemployed Insurance (UI) claimants
- ✓ Offers testing and assessments for employers
- ✓ Emphasizes one-on-one personalization to meet employer and job seeker customer needs
- ✓ Provides interview rooms
- ✓ Provides information on education and training including Registered Apprenticeship options
- ✓ Provides referrals, and
- ✓ Conducts Rapid Re-Employment Service (RRES) orientations and referrals to the WIOA program

D. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services

Workforce Solutions' Workforce Centers operate in full compliance with the Texas Model, whereby contracted service providers who are responsible for managing and operating regional Workforce Centers provide direction and oversight to TWC Wagner-Peyser funded staff. To further integration efforts and to continue to gain system efficiencies, the following strategies are deployed:

- Team meetings at Workforce Centers include TWC staff to ensure that all system staff are updated on program status / updates
- All staff, including TWC staff, are coached, trained, and expected to provide cross-referrals between programs and services
- All staff, including TWC staff, are required to attend an annual WorkInTexas.com training

Additionally, the following operational strategies have been implemented to maximize coordination and enhance employer services:

- Case Managers are expected to provide more individual attention to referrals during one-on-one meetings
- Case Managers are expected to address referrals given in previous meetings with customers
- Relevant job referrals are provided during assessment activities to attempt to engage customers early with employment opportunities
- Work Search Assistance Workshops are provided for job seekers to improve their work search skills and WorkInTexas.com applications, and

- Staff assist job seekers to complete their Wagner-Peyser certified WIT.com applications so that they can be found by employers and make quality matches to available job openings

E. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management

Workforce Solutions operates a fully integrated workforce system in the region, based on the Texas Model.

Technology-enabled intake and case management: The Board is committed to leveraging technology to enhance workforce services and streamline service delivery for workforce customers. The following TWC-provided information systems are utilized for technology enabled intake and case management for programs carried out under WIOA and by one-stop partners:

- The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST): An integrated intake, eligibility, case management, and reporting system for employment and training services. TWIST acts as the central repository for customer information and includes interfaces with WorkInTexas.com, UI benefits system, and Health and Human Services information system
- WorkInTexas.com: Web-based labor exchange system
- Child Care Attendance and Automation (CCAA): Allows parents to record attendance using a swipe card at a point-of-service device located at authorized child care facilities
- VOS Greeter: A check-in and tracking system used at Workforce Centers, job fairs, and other events/activities to record and report on usage

Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities

A. Economic Development and Entrepreneurial/Microenterprise Activities

The Board is dedicated to leading an integrated workforce system that meets the needs of employers and job seekers and is characterized by strong coordination between workforce development programs and economic development activities.

The Board will continue to develop and refine strategies to engage and support regional economic development including but not limited to: (1) hosting hiring events, (2) supporting proposals that bring training funds to the region that provide job seekers training to include a skilled workforce for the region, (3) participating in business retention, expansion, and new business attraction, and (4) participating in community development planning that demonstrates workforce development as an asset to the region. In addition, the Board will continue to shape local policies and procedures based upon market-driven economic principals and to strengthen coordination between workforce and economic development partners.

Entrepreneurial-skills training and microenterprise services: The Board is committed to supporting entrepreneurs and small business leaders in the community with robust service opportunities tailored to their needs. To meet this demand, and support WIOA's renewed focus on this customer group, Workforce Solutions builds strong linkages to local economic development and education/training providers serving these individuals by providing referrals and funded-service options to meet their needs.

- ✓ McLennan Small Business Development Center offers technical assistance, business mentoring, training, and resources for all stages of small business. Services offered include consultative assistance with business startup, market research, growth strategy, financial management, finding new markets, and access to expansion capital. Programs offered include market research, capital access, small business technology commercialization, procurement, international business development, and technology for managing small business.
- ✓ Baylor University department of Entrepreneurship and Corporate Innovation is dedicated to the study, teaching and practice of new venture creation and development. The department offers degrees as well as certificates in Media Technology Entrepreneurship and Technology Entrepreneurship.
- ✓ 1 Million Cups is a national program to engage, educate and connect local entrepreneurs, to which Waco is a new chapter. 1 Million Cups—based on the notion that entrepreneur's network and discover solutions over a million cups of coffee—is a free, weekly gathering that helps to build startup communities on a grassroots level.

B. Rapid Response Activity Coordination

The Board coordinates workforce investment activities with statewide Rapid Response activities to meet the needs of area employers, workers, and the community in managing reductions in workforce. The Board's Rapid Response Coordinator coordinates contracted service providers throughout the process to ensure seamless service delivery. Upon notification of a potential Rapid Response event or other closure/mass layoff, the Rapid Response Coordinator meets with the employer to:

- Assess their needs and inform them of their options and offer business services, and employment/training services to address risk factors
- Discuss and pursue strategies that help the employer avert layoffs while maintaining capacity to return workers to productive employment as soon as possible
- Identify strategies to assist affected workers in becoming reemployed on or before the affected worker's last day of work through targeted transition activities that quickly engage dislocated workers in employment or training services, and
- Proactively match affected worker skill and experience profiles with hiring requirements of companies actively hiring in the community

For each layoff and/or plant closure event necessitating Rapid Response services, the Rapid Response Team provides early intervention of re-employment services. The Rapid Response Team is comprised of the Board Rapid Response Coordinator, TWC's Unemployment Insurance Benefits Field Coordinator, the Business Solutions Team, and/or the Board's Rapid Response contracted service provider.

Re-employment services are customized to meet the needs of the employer and affected workers, and include, but not limited to:

- Rapid Response Orientation (the Informational meeting/registration)
- Job Skills Analysis (the employee needs survey/abbreviated assessment)
- Job Search (labor market information)
- Workshops on Resume Techniques & Resume Writing, Interviewing, Financial Planning (money management / entrepreneurial opportunities) and Stress Management (crisis counseling)
- Referrals for Emergency Crisis Counseling (based on need and agreed upon by all parties)
- Initial WIOA Dislocated Worker and Adult Orientation (based on worker profile and funding availability), and referrals to employment and training opportunities
- Introduction to Registered Apprenticeships as additional Career Pathways
- Referrals to workforce One-Stop partners including Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Texas Veterans Commission, Child Care Services and AEL, and
- Referral to Workforce Centers for additional services including workshops, resource room (phone, computer, fax, etc.), hiring events, etc.

In addition, for every Rapid Response event, Business Services Representatives and WIOA staff join the orientation to insure (1) an overview of Workforce Center services are provided, (2) TWC Survey and WorkInTexas.com applications are completed, and (3) the TWC Unemployment Insurance Benefits Field Coordinator has ample time to review the Unemployment Insurance Benefits information.

C. Youth Activities and Services

Workforce Solutions offers the full range of WIOA eligible youth access to workforce services via (1) a large Workforce Center in Waco (McLennan County), (2) three rural Workforce Centers in Falls, Hill, and Freestone Counties, and (3) service locations of our contracted Youth service provider. Workforce Centers are located within large regional population centers to reduce transportation barriers for area residents in accessing services. Youth service provider locations are collocated with area schools and ensure quick engagement with the education system.

The goal of Workforce Solutions' Youth Services is to support the development of the WIOA eligible youth participants' maturity, employment and/or post-secondary readiness. Participants are expected to graduate from high school or earn a GED and enter post-secondary education or full-time employment.

Upon engaging the Youth Services program, eligible participants are objectively assessed for academic skills (using the TABE test, Learning Profiler and HiSET Practice Tests in Math and Reading/Language Arts as determined appropriate, unless circumstances prohibit its use, documented in TWIST), aptitudes, talents, and family and social circumstances. A thorough and accurate evaluation is the basis for the development of an appropriate service strategy and Individual Service Plan (ISP). Assessment results determine the mix of services and activities appropriate to what youth are engaged in, which include all 14 WIOA youth elements.

In addition to WSHOT services, key regional partners operate employment and training activities for youth in the region including:

- Communities In Schools of the Heart of Texas (CIS) - uses an evidence-based approach to meet our student's and communities' needs. On all partner campuses, CIS places highly trained social service professionals to provide academic, behavioral, attendance, and social support. Every student that is served is assessed and has a personalized service plan that is created to meet their individual needs.
- Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy and the Greater Waco Healthcare Academy – offers advanced technical and manufacturing training for high school students. Attendees of the academy are expected to leave the academy with one of the following exit points in mind: marketable skill awards, industry-recognized credentials and certificates, and dual-credit college credits.

Services to Youth with Disabilities: Workforce Solutions coordinates closely with Texas Workforce Solutions Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to ensure youth with disabilities are provided sufficient accommodations to participate in workforce services throughout the Heart of Texas service area. The Division serves youth with behavioral and mental health conditions; hearing impairments, including deafness; intellectual, learning and developmental disabilities; and physical disabilities, including traumatic brain and spinal cord injury, back injury, paralysis and impaired movement.

Services are also available to youth with vision-related disabilities including blindness, significant visual impairments, and deaf-blindness. Services available include pre-employment training services: (1) vocational counseling, (2) counseling on opportunities for post-secondary education, (3) work-based learning experiences, (4) training in workplace and employer expectations, and (5) training in self-advocacy and social skills. Additional services, including accommodation services, are:

- Referrals for hearing, visual and other examinations

- Assistance with medical appointments and treatment
- Rehabilitation devices, including hearing aids, wheelchairs, artificial limbs, and braces
- Therapy to address a disability, including occupational or speech therapy and applied behavioral analysis
- Physical restoration
- Medical, psychological and vocational assessments
- Assistive technologies, including screen reader software, computer equipment and other items
- Job matching and placement services
- Transportation assistance to and from your job, college or certification program, referral to other state, federal and community agencies and organizations
- Rehabilitation Teachers Services to help you learn Braille, orientation & mobility, and home and health management skills if you have a vision-related disability
- Vocational adjustment training
- Supported employment services

D. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs

The Board is committed to effective collaboration with secondary and post-secondary training programs and employers to support the educational attainment among youth, adult learners, and dislocated workers. Coordinating strategies between the broader workforce and education system:

- (1) Promotes greater educational attainment and self-sufficiency within the community through a more seamless service delivery and leveraged funding
- (2) Maximizes the supports available to customers of these systems to ensure completion,
- (3) Better aligns systems to meet the needs of area employers, and
- (4) Increases the impact of collective workforce and education resources have on the community

The Board deploys the following strategies with partners to ensure the availability and promote the attainment of industry-recognized certifications, licenses, and degrees that are portable and stackable. To that, the Board will:

- Work with Adult Education and Literacy provider to promote career pathways awareness and credential attainment among adult learners. Career Pathways activities will focus on the Board's targeted occupations

- Engage in joint service delivery planning with education partners to leverage partner training resources with WIOA training funds. Braided funding helps increase retention and completion rates by addressing service gaps inherent to single agency support
- Utilize WIOA, TANF, and SNAP supported work experience opportunities, to align experiential (worksite-based), contextualized learning/training opportunities traditional classroom training both supported by the Board and partners. Assisting customers in gaining real-world experience improves retention and completion rates and accelerates placement into unsubsidized employment
- Leverage TWC grant funds (i.e. TWC’s Local Innovation and High-Demand Occupations Training funds) to provide additional training for customers, leveraging partner relationships and resources to expand opportunities where possible
- Provide presentations to partners regarding targeted occupations and the training needed to ensure a well-trained workforce in the area
- Work with local ISDs and the Education Service Center Region 12 to educate teachers, counselors, and ISD administrative staff to coordinate strategies for training of youth
- Continue its YES! Youth Employment Solutions initiative to increase awareness among high school students, parents, teachers and counselors about careers and education, and promotes entry into in-demand training and occupations
- Aid the Future Workforce Committee in strengthening the Board’s position in addressing the “workforce pipeline” issues and opportunities
- Seek additional grant funding that can be used for the purpose of helping individuals gain the credentials and skills that employers want
- Assist Communities in Schools of the Heart of Texas with providing in and out-of- school youth with earning credentials, certificates, and licenses that meet the needs of employers

E. Child Care and Early Learning

The Board has long understood that the well-being of young children and adults is inextricably linked to the quality of their early care and education (ECE) experience. The Board strategically manages a quality improvement plan that is approved annually by our Board of Directors. Central to this plan is collaboration. In collaboration with local elected officials, school districts, foundations and other agencies serving young children and families, we identify policies and projects that strengthen the quality of our region’s ECE system and that provides support to working families.

The Heart of Texas’ most populous county, McLennan, has a collective impact initiative that works to address complex issues in the area of education, health, and financial security. This initiative includes nonprofit organizations, churches, businesses, school districts, government agencies and civic groups collaborating to reach a shared vision for change. A specific Early

Childhood Working Group focuses on improving school readiness. This group meets monthly to advance ECE plans.

Strong working relationships with the Local Elected Officials in our rural counties, quarterly reporting, regular directors' meetings, and annual parent and early learning program director surveys allows the Board to respond to changes and opportunities quickly. Our Child Care Services (CCS) contractor was the grantee for the Texas School Ready program for six years. Developing strategic relationships over this time prepared us to begin work on House Bill 680 which requires Boards to coordinate with their local Education Service Center to assign PEIMS numbers to children enrolled in CCS.

Many of our local match partners are ISDs. We work with them on various early childhood projects. Currently we are working on two PreK Partnerships that were established last year. These are informal partnerships that we plan to leverage to include additional partnerships in the coming years. We are also working with these partners to pilot a High School Child Development Associate project and that will lead to a more formalized career pathway.

Our Board area has two NAEYC accredited lab schools and the Education Service Center (ESC) Region 12 with whom we collaborate on many professional development projects toward our goals of increasing the professionalism of the early childhood workforce and increasing the supply of quality early learning programs. The ESC Region 12 invited us to participate in a virtual mentoring project in FY19 which prepared us to provide virtual mentor/coaching support during the pandemic. In FY20, we exceeded our goal of increasing the percentage of Texas Rising Star rated programs by 20% and reached a 30% increase.

Our plan also includes expanding our Shared Services project to include a business mentor and involve our local community college's Small Business & Development Center. Supporting the business skills of our child care directors and owners is a high priority as we emerge from the pandemic.

As we move into years 3-5, our attention will focus in on early learning as a workforce and economic development tool. Studies on the impressive benefits of pre-kindergarten programs have so far involved high quality programs and not average students in average programs. We estimate that the number of TRS rated programs in Heart of Texas will be close to 50%. We plan to use this increased awareness to bring together businesses, chambers of commerce, and elected officials to address the economic impacts of the region's crisis on infant and toddlers, working parents, employers, and early childhood professionals.

F. Transportation and Other Support Services

Workforce Solutions provides eligible WIOA program participants to remove barriers to program participation, education, and training. Participants are assessed for supportive service needs

upon entry into the program. Individual case managers provide referrals to community resources as they are available and applicable to participant needs.

Available supportive services include:

- Mileage Reimbursement
- Bus passes
- Car Repair
- Assistance with liability insurance payments
- Relocation expenses
- Childcare
- Dependent care
- Assistance with housing and utility payments
- Health and Medical services required to begin training such as the purchase of eyeglasses, hearing aids, immunizations, and other medical items
- GED exam fees
- Job search and work-related expenses
- Training related housing and meals

WIOA Youth participants are engaged in additional activities to raise awareness about public transportation options in the community to mitigate transportation assistance needs. These activities include bus station tours, education on bus routes/maps, and guided bus trips to learn the public transportation system as needed.

In addition, Workforce Solutions staff serves as a representative on the Waco Transit Advisory Board and on the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council. Representation ensures that the needs of jobseekers, shift workers, urban and rural workers, and customers participating in training and college are understood and have a voice on these issues.

G. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy (AEL)

The Board convenes with Adult Education and Literacy for the Heart of Texas (AEL), the AEL provider for the Heart of Texas region, on a regular basis to collaborate and coordinate activities in an effort to reduce duplication and maximize resources. AEL classroom space is provided in each of the four Workforce Centers, and classrooms have received technology upgrades that include dedicated computers, document readers, projectors, access to printing and designated Wi-Fi access for AEL classrooms. These Workforce Center classrooms are designated AEL service sites to meet the needs of customers in rural communities. Establishing dedicated, fully equipped

learning environments in the Workforce Centers provides participants an accessible location and the environment needed to achieve their learning objectives.

Additional activities related to Board coordination with AEL providers include:

- The Board participates in the professional development training of AEL staff to increase collaboration and promotion of Workforce Center services, and to facilitate the referral and intake of AEL students that come to the Workforce Center seeking assistance
- Workforce Solutions staff provide labor market and career information to AEL teachers for classroom display and disbursement to AEL students. The Board will continue its efforts in capitalizing of grant funds that are provided by TWC with the goal of providing training funds for targeted, technical training to AEL students and to support the efforts to develop integrated career pathways to increase post-secondary credentialing and employment of AEL students
- The Board also provides training to Workforce Center staff on AEL activities with the goal of increasing co-enrollment, reducing duplication of services, and enhancing programs for our customers

AEL Applications: The Board will review local applications submitted under Title II to ensure they (1) are consistent with WIOA §107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i) and WIOA §232 and (2) provide services that are in alignment with the local plan and that serve the Board's Heart of Texas region. The Board will consult with applicants, provide recommendations that promote alignment with the local plan and set in place cooperative agreements that allow for efforts of cooperation, collaboration, and coordination. This approach will enhance the services made available to all customers served.

Part 6: Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Services

A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training

Workforce Solutions offers the full range of WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker employment and training services via a large Workforce Center in Waco (McLennan County) as well as three (3) rural Workforce Centers in Falls, Hill, and Freestone Counties. Centers are located within large regional population centers to reduce transportation barriers for area residents in accessing services.

Supplementing Funding: To supplement formula WIOA funding, the Board collaborates and partners with employers, training providers, community-based organizations, economic development groups, and employers to apply for and access additional employment and training funds with the goal of:

- Aiding individual adults and dislocated workers in increased opportunity for education and training in targeted industries and occupations; and

- Improving the competitiveness of the regional workforce

The Board also collaborates, partners, promotes, and supports training proposals offered by TWC for:

- The Skills Development Fund that provides skills upgrade training opportunities for Texas businesses and workers (new and incumbent)
- The Skills for Small Business Fund that provides training funds for small businesses to train 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
- The Self Sufficiency Fund that provides skills upgrade training for new and incumbent workers who are either TANF recipients or individuals who are at risk of becoming dependent on public assistance
- Texas Industry Partnership program supports collaborations between boards and industry partners through the leveraging of matching contributions of cash or qualifying expenditures for occupational job training

B. Priority to Recipients of Public Assistance and Low-Income Individuals

The Board will ensure priority of service to recipients of public assistance and low-income individuals. For those individuals receiving WIOA individualized career services and training services the following will be provided in the following order:

1. Eligible veterans and eligible spouses (as defined in WD Letter 25-15) who are also recipients of public assistance, low-income, or basic skills deficient.
2. Non-covered persons (individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses) who are recipients of public assistance, low income, or basic skills deficient in the following order:
 - a. Foster youth and former foster youth (as defined in WD Letter 43-11, Change 2) as required by Texas Family Code §264.121
 - b. Non-foster youth.
3. All other eligible veterans and eligible spouses.
4. Priority populations established by the governor and/or Board in the following order:
 - a. All other foster youth and former foster youth, as required by Texas Labor Code §264.121.
WIOA Guidelines 18 Effective April 3, 2020
 - b. Local Board priority groups.
5. Non-covered individuals outside of the groups given priority under WIOA.

In addition, the Board's Policy HWD 004-99 provides additional guidance regarding provision of services to target populations through a priority system in accordance with the Workforce Investment Act. Target populations for occupational training include:

- Veterans and eligible spouses
- Youth who are/were part of the Health and Human Services Commission's Foster program through the Department of Family Protective Services
- Adult recipients of public assistance and low-income individuals
- Dislocated Workers whose skills are not in demand in the workforce area
- Youth 16 to 21 who are low income, have completed or dropped-out of high school, and who possess 1 or more of the following barriers:
 - Deficient in basic literacy skills
 - Foster child or former foster child
 - Homeless or run-away youth
 - Pregnant or parenting
 - Ex-offenders
 - Require assistance to complete an educational program.

Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts

A. Fiscal Agent

The entity responsible for disbursement of grant funds is Education Service Center Region 12 (2101 West Loop 340 in Waco, Texas 76712) as determined by the Chief Elected Official (CEO) at the Chief Elected Officials Meeting in September of 2006. The Education Service Center (ESC) Region 12 follows the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles and procedures mandated in the TWC Financial Manual of Grants and Contracts, the applicable Office of Management and Budget Uniform Guidance, not to exclude the following: A-110, A-122, 29 CFR and 48 CFR, Chapter 1, Part 31, Uniform Grant Management Standards, and current and subsequent funding agency promulgations, the Texas Administrative Code, and the Board's Strategic Plan, policies, and procedures, including any subsequent modifications, issuance, and directives as the Board in its sole discretion may institute.

B. Sub-Grants and Contracts

The Board is responsible for executing a competitive process to award all sub-grants and contracts for the local workforce system. Procurement includes development of the procurement document, establishment of evaluation criteria, the selection decision, and the method of contracting and development of the contract. Full documentation of all competitive procurements with comprehensive competitive procurement files containing specifications, competitive procurement advertisements, pre-competitive procurement conference minutes

and Board Meeting minutes indicating the competitive procurement awards, and related records are maintained for each procurement for three years or longer if required.

The Board utilizes a procurement process for supplies, equipment, services, program activities or goods for the programs. The procurement process is designed for maximum full and open competition and the process adhered to by the Board strives to ensure that all procurement transactions, regardless of whether by sealed bid or by negotiation and without regard to dollar value, follow these standards. These standards are intended to ensure that purchases are obtained efficiently and economically and in compliance with the provisions of applicable State and Federal law and regulations and consistent with OMB Procurement Standards, Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments, Texas Workforce Commission WIA Financial Management Manual and the Texas Administrative Code, Title 10, Part V, Chapter 187 (TAC). These standards are also applicable to any covered procurement by a subcontractor, who purchase goods or services all or in part, with Board funds.

Once authorization is obtained to procure services, the procurement process is initiated by Board staff and follows the below progression:

- a. A Request for Proposals (RFP) document is developed.
- b. RFP is publicly advertised, sent to vendors on the bidders list via e-mail, and posted on www.hotworkforce.com.
- c. A Bidders Conference is conducted to clarify and respond to questions regarding the RFP.
- d. A Question & Answers (Q&A) document is drafted detailing all clarifications and responses to submitted questions. The Q&A is sent to all attendees of the Bidders Conference and posted with the RFP on www.hotworkforce.com.
- e. A Request for Quotes (RFQ) is prepared to solicit independent reviewers and sent by e-mail to such vendors on the Bidders List (review may be conducted internally in lieu of external evaluators).
- f. Statements of Qualifications are received from potential reviewers and the most qualified individuals with whom to contract are recommended to the Board's Executive Director.
- g. A proposal review instrument is developed.
- h. A review of submitted proposals for completeness and responsiveness is performed by Board staff.
- i. Review instrument and all complete and responsive proposals are delivered in a timely fashion to independent and internal reviewers.
- j. Evaluation documents from the proposal reviewers is received.
- k. If scores seem skewed or anomalous, a telephone conference is conducted among the reviewers to ensure that their scores accurately reflect their judgment.
- l. Total scores of all evaluations are averaged, a summary and ranking of the proposals is prepared.
- m. Proposal ranking is submitted to the Board's Executive Director.
- n. A debriefing is performed for any proposer who requests such a meeting within the allotted time.

Part 8: Performance

A. Board Performance Targets

The Board has received information from TWC regarding WIOA performance measure computational methodology. The Board's staff are active in analyzing new performance targets and system performance to provide contracted service providers with technical assistance and guidance.

The following performance measures were set in accordance with WIOA § 116(c):

- Adult Employed Q2 Post Exit
- Adult Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit
- Adult Employed Q4 Post Exit
- Adult Credential Rate
- Adult Measurable Skills Gain
- Dislocated Worker Employed Q2 Post Exit
- Dislocated Worker Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit
- Dislocated Worker Employed Q4 Post Exit
- Dislocated Worker Credential Rate
- Dislocated Worker Measurable Skills Gain
- Youth Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post Exit
- Youth Employed/Enrolled Q4 Post Exit
- Youth Credential Rate
- Youth Measurable Skills Gain

Part 9: Training and Services

A. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)

The Board's Policy HWD 007-99 - Change 10 requires contracted service providers to obligate the costs of an individual's approved training through an Individual Training Account (ITA). To fund the ITA, the Board requires service providers to utilize an accountable voucher system in which the individual customer obtains a voucher for each semester, quarter or other segment for a sequence of courses to cover tuition, books, fees, uniforms, tools, etc. necessary for participating in the training program. ITAs may be fully funded in a single voucher if the training is conducted as a single classroom experience completed in six months or less, rather than a sequence of

courses. All approved ITA funded trainings (1) must be a program listed on the Texas Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and (2) conform to the costs provided by the institution as listed in the ETPL.

Customers accessing ITAs progress through the following steps:

- Participants undergo an objective comprehensive assessment based on specialized testing, in-depth interviewing, and evaluation of barriers to employment
- In consultation with the Case Manager, an Individual Employment Plan is developed. It is during the case management phase that a participant and the Case Manager establish short-term and long-term goals and evaluate whether enrollment in a training program is merited and a viable option for the participant
- Training providers that are on the list of eligible providers (ETPL) may redeem ITAs for payment.

Out-of-School Youth desiring to participate in training services through ITAs will be provided with individual career counseling regarding skills and interests, and labor market information. Youth expressing interest and aptitude for demand occupations and approved programs in the ETPL will complete the assessment and application process which includes a determination of need and budget, aptitude including basic literacy skills (measured by a standardized test like TABE). The extensive application process ensures commitment, readiness for program demands, and alignment of program to strengths, skills, and interests.

B. ITA Limitations

The Board requires that all approved training must be a Training Program on the Statewide Eligible Training Provider List and the ITA should conform to the costs provided by the institution on that system. As long as the training is being provided by a local community college, the training costs listed in ETPL can be used for the ITA. ITAs used to pay for training provided by proprietary schools or community colleges located outside of the WDA will be limited by the following chart.

Limits placed on the value of an ITA, established in the Board’s Policy HWD 007-99-Change 10, are detailed in the table below:

ITA Limits

Contact Hours	College Credit Hours	Earned Credential	Maximum ITA Value
<200	0	None	\$3,200
200-250	0	Meets Licensure Requirements or Industry Recognized Certification	\$4,500

200-100	1-40	Meets Licensure Requirements or Industry Recognized Certification	\$6,500
1001-1999	41-59	Meets Licensure Requirements or Industry Recognized Certification	\$9,000
2000+	60+	Associate Degree (non-healthcare related)	\$13,500
2000+	60+	Associate Degree (healthcare related)	\$17,500

Registered Apprenticeship

Contractors can use an ITA to cover the initial expenses required for first-year students of a registered apprenticeship program that supports a targeted occupation. These initial expenses are defined as books, tools, supplies, gloves, boots, etc. that are needed to begin classes and/or on the job training.

Registered Apprenticeship ITA

Items Covered	Maximum Value of ITA
Books, tools, equipment, supplies, boots, gloves, etc., needed to begin apprenticeship training.	Up to \$1,000

The Board’s Contract Manager (Board staff) may grant a waiver to these ITA maximums if both following conditions exist:

- 1) The published entry level wage for the occupation is at least five times the cost of the training (e.g. \$6,500 x 5 = \$32,500) AND
- 2) No other program for training in the selected occupation is available on the ETPL within a reasonable commuting distance for the maximum or less as provided in the above chart

In addition, contracted service providers are required to adhere to the following ITA Assurances.

- Funds established for ITAs may not be used for any other purpose except tuition, fees, supplies, uniforms, and tools required by the course or program.
- Funds will be utilized to pay for each course only one time. If the student retakes a course from which he/she withdrew, or he/she did not pass, the student must bear the expense.
- The amount of funds authorized for an Individual Training Account will be commensurate with the service provider’s cost (tuition, books, and fees) at the time of enrollment into the program of training.

- A client is allowed a maximum of two years (six trimesters, or four semesters and up to four summer sessions) for a training program to be completed.
- Only training providers that are on the list of eligible providers may redeem ITAs for payment. Providers will be reimbursed for ITA expenses no later than 30 days after receipt of the bill.
- The Workforce Center Manager has the right to cancel an ITA for a participant's failure to participate, make acceptable progress toward completion, or for violation of the ITA agreement. Upon cancellation of an ITA, the client will be notified of the termination date and reason/s for cancellation, and will be counseled on existing employment alternatives, if any. The Workforce Solutions Center Manager or case manager will also be responsible for notifying the Board staff and the applicable Service Provider of the action.
- The student must supply a copy of his/her financial aid package prior to approval and issuance of an ITA to demonstrate their ability to support themselves and their dependents while in the program of training.
- WIOA funds are not used to pay training costs:
 - For any portion or term of training for which the participant has signed a loan as part of financial aid or
 - That were paid by the participant (or another source) before WIOA program registration

Part 10: Apprenticeship

A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs

The Board will encourage registered Apprenticeship programs to register with the TWC Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) by (1) educating current registered apprenticeship programs about the benefits of participation, and (2) encouraging new employers to establish registered apprenticeship programs.

The Board's service strategies are being developed and will be consistent with the models and recommendations outlined by the:

- Department of Labor Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, Advancing Apprenticeship as a Workforce Strategy
- ApprenticeshipUSA Making ApprenticeshipUSA Work for the Public Workforce System: Using Funds to Support Apprenticeship

Strategies will continue to adapt based on best practices and recommendations from these and other groups, as well as through guidance, recommendations, and best practices from TWC's

Workforce Program Policy (Apprenticeship Department).

Educating current registered apprenticeship programs: The Board will build on its current working relationship with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 72 and the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 52, both of which are registered apprenticeship programs in the Heart of Texas region to encourage these local unions to register as eligible training providers in order to receive WIOA funding.

The Board will also outreach any additional area registered apprenticeship programs regarding the process for becoming an eligible training provider and be available to answer any questions that may arise. In addition, the Board will connect, as needed, the registered apprenticeship programs to key staff persons within TWC's Eligible Training Provider System to help guide the apprenticeship programs through the application process in the eligible training provider system.

Encouraging new employers to establish registered apprenticeship programs: Board staff as well as contracted service provider Business Solutions staff will engage and educate regional businesses and area training providers about the benefits of establishing registered apprenticeship programs, to include eligibility for inclusion on the ETPS. Workforce Solutions staff will engage TWC Apprenticeship Department and Department of Labor expertise, as appropriate, to facilitate development. Efforts will be in place to look for traditional and non-traditional Registered Apprenticeship opportunities.

B. ApprenticeshipTexas

The Board understands the vital role that registered apprentice programs play in preparing and training workers for a career in a skilled trade or craft while helping workers gain entry into a high-wage occupation and avoiding large student debts. To that, the Board will continue to collaborate and partner with registered apprenticeship programs in the Heart of Texas region and with employers to expand registered apprenticeships in the region as well as expand the number of Apprentices. The Board will actively seek, and where appropriate, apply for grant funding to increase training funds to aid Registered Apprenticeships programs and to aid individuals seeking to become Apprentices. In addition, the Board will also collaborate and partner with businesses and organizations to provide additional apprenticeship training funds to supplement the costs of the job-related classroom instruction and to supplement program funds to include WIOA, SNAP E&T, and TANF. Continued outreach will be conducted in the business community to find opportunities to expand existing traditional Registered Apprenticeships and develop new non-traditional Registered Apprenticeships.

Part 11: Public Comment

Consistent with WIOA §108(d), 20 CFR §679.550(b) and §679.560(b) and (e), the Board used the following process to make the Board Plan available to the public and provide a period for public comment. The Board's process included:

- Providing local entities and the general public with an opportunity to review and comment on the plan by publishing notice of such an opportunity in the Secretary of State Texas Register and in the Waco Tribune-Herald on January 29, 2021.
- The Public Notice stated the purpose of the plan and that the Board Plan would be made available on the Board's website Publications page at <https://www.hotworkforce.com/home/about-us/publications/>. In addition, instructions were given on how to obtain a printed copy of the Board Plan.
- Public Comment began on Friday, January 29, 2021
- Comments were received until 1:00 pm on Friday, February 12, 2021
- Public comments of disagreement will be submitted to TWC along with the Board Plan

The Board did not receive any public comments.

Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements

Local Workforce Development Board Strategic Planning

The Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) is charged under Texas Government Code §2308.101(5), 2308.302(a), and 2308.304(a)(b)(4), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) (Public Law 113–128) with recommending the plans of Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) to the governor for consideration for approval. TWIC reviews each Board Plan to ensure that local goals and objectives are consistent with the statewide goals and objectives in the system plan, The Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan FY 2016–FY 2023, which can be found at <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/twic/System-Strategic-Plan-Update.pdf>.

Additionally, state law charges TWIC with reporting annually to the governor and to the Texas legislature on the implementation of the system's strategic plan and monitoring the operation of the state's workforce system to assess the degree to which the system is effective in achieving state and local goals and objectives. Therefore, TWIC also reviews Board Plans and plan modifications to determine each Board's progress in implementing strategies that align with the strategic plan for the Texas workforce system. Following consideration for approval at a regularly scheduled quarterly meeting, TWIC recommends the Board Plans to the governor for consideration for approval. Boards' responses to the following planning elements are reviewed by TWIC for alignment and are the basis for recommending approval.

Demonstrating Alignment with Texas' Strategic Plan for the Workforce System

The four sections below list and describe the four system goals from The Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan FY 2016–FY 2023 (2020 Update) that identify critical, high-priority system issues for the state. **For each goal, briefly describe one significant Board strategy or initiative that fulfills the intent of the goal. Also, please include the corresponding page number(s) within your plan that further details the identified strategy or initiative.**

System Goal 1 and Rationale

Focus on Employers

By accessing critical education and labor data sets, employers can better find and plan for skilled workers to meet their needs in both the immediate time frame and the future. Through greater engagement with employers, education and training providers can better design career and technical education content and delivery options that are more aligned with industry needs. Providers can make adjustments in program content to benefit employers and students, as well as address both state and regional economic needs.

System Goal 1—Local Board Response

The Board will continue to access critical education and labor market sets to continue to be responsive to the workforce needs of employers within the Heart of Texas region. The Board will focus its efforts on meeting employer workforce needs by collaborating and partnering with education and training providers to design career and technical education content as well as provide for delivery options that meet and align with employer and industry needs.

One Board initiative that fulfills the extent of this goal is the Board’s Future Workforce Committee (FWC). The FWC’s mission is to advocate and support opportunities that prepare the talent pipeline for business and industry in the Heart of Texas region. Committee members include employers, education, economic development, workforce board of directors, and past former industry employees. The FWC goals centered around this mission are to: engage Heart of Texas businesses and industry organizations around talent pipeline challenges and opportunities; increase awareness of career opportunities in the Heart of Texas region; and encourage the development of educational programs, activities, and high-skilled training that align with targeted industry’s needs. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail the Board’s initiative can be found on page 25.

System Goal 2 and Rationale

Engage in Partnerships

Through collaborative and transparent processes, workforce system partners focus on outcomes that improve the employability of all program participants—from across a wide spectrum of capabilities and experiences—to meet employer needs. The leveraging of partnerships to enhance system alignment and outcomes depends on trust, a culture of collaboration both within and external to the workforce system, deep working relationships, and technical capacity to communicate to share needs, data, and information. Partnerships can provide for common

planning, intake, and reporting on outcomes, as well as ensuring a “no wrong door” approach to the provision of workforce programs and services.

System Goal 2—Local Board Response

Collaborative and transparent processes can greatly improve the employability of program participants and foster excellent working relationship with workforce system partners. The leveraging of resources of workforce system partners not only benefit the program participant but also helps to meet the workforce need of employers within our Heart of Texas region.

One Board strategy that fulfills the extent of this goal is the Board’s current working relationship with the Texas Workforce Solutions – Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) department located within the Board’s largest workforce center. The Board actively partners with the Texas Workforce Solutions - Vocational Rehabilitation Services to improve access to workforce services and expand access to employment, training, education, and support services to program participants. In addition, because VR staff is located within the Workforce Solutions’ workforce center, this allows for easy access to shared resources and greater alignment to better serve individuals with disabilities and veterans, respectively.

Furthermore, VR staff work closely with the Board’s Business Solutions Team to engage employers around hiring persons with disabilities. The Board partners with VR to host the annual Walk-N-Roll Hiring Fair event which focuses on connecting those job seekers who have a disability to hiring businesses. The annual job fair draws up to 20 employers. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail this Board strategy can be found on pages 8, 25, 39 and 40.

System Goal 3 and Rationale **Align System Elements**

By improving transitions, aligning programs, and ensuring portability and transferability, Texas improves access and the ability of all participants to complete programs of study, earn credentials, transition to further education, and gain critical employability skills. Texas employers are better positioned to find and hire the employees they need through an enhanced education and training pipeline.

System Goal 3—Local Board Response

Aligning system elements improve access and the ability of participants to successfully complete programs of studies, earn credentials, and gain critical employment skills needed to become employed. Through the Board’s partnership with Communities in Schools of the Heart of Texas (CIS), the Board’s contracted WIOA Youth service provider and the operator of the Community in Schools Heart of Texas program, program participants benefit from this deep working relationship.

The Board’s strategy in aligning system elements with CIS allows the Board to gain and leverage unique resources to assist in-school and out-of-school youth to become career and college ready.

The Board leverages its unique relationship with CIS to improve awareness about career pathways, co-enroll youth, and provide for additional work experiences for youth coupled with providing support services, dropout recovery/retention – all aid the youth to complete their secondary education, enroll in college and/or earn a credential that employers seek. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail this Board strategy can be found on pages 25 and 26.

System Goal 4 and Rationale

Improve and Integrate Programs

Accelerate employment and improve efficiencies through shared resources that can be leveraged to create new, relevant, and innovative opportunities that serve the needs of all stakeholders. By addressing high-priority programmatic needs through an integrated strategy, decision-making at the system, partner, and participant levels is improved and system service delivery is enhanced. The changing economic and educational landscapes provide opportunities to share relevant data through appropriate “push” mechanisms in an organized manner to key stakeholders who rely on information generated by system partners.

The Board values the importance of improving and integrating programs that can help to accelerate employment of individuals and can also create innovative opportunities to serve the needs of stakeholders.

The Board’s strategy for integrating programs with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) has accelerated employment for individuals and created innovative approaches to meeting stakeholder needs. The Board has forged a strong working relationship with TVC staff who are located within the Board’s largest workforce center. TVC staff has been integrated into the Board’s Business Solutions Team and together they engage employers and other stakeholders to benefit their mutual customers and veterans. Through this integration of programs, together Workforce Solutions and TVC have hosted an annual McLennan County Veteran hiring event and coordinated efforts to accelerate employment of veterans and to meet the workforce needs of employers in the Heart of Texas region. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail this Board strategy can be found on pages 8 and 24.