



Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc.
Board Plan for Program Years 2025-2028

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The Honorable Judge Justin Lewis
Hill County Judge

Board Chair
Russ Foster

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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 Board Plan for Program Years 2025-2028, 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 for the Heart of Texas 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 in support of regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency.

The Board's strategic plan for workforce development services is aligned with the following statewide plans:

- Texas Workforce Commission 2023-2027 Strategic Plan
- Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2024-2031
- WIOA Combined State Plan Program Years 2024-2027
- Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2021-2026
- Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan 2023-2025

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.

Goals for preparing an Educated and Skilled Workforce for all Customer Groups:

The Board's goals include for the provision of early education services, services for youth and individuals with barriers to employment are as follows:

- Expanding and increasing access to high-quality early education services to support school readiness, a strong workforce and recruiting businesses.
- 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 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 the access and efficiency of employment, training, and retention services for 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's Goals related to Performance Accountability Measures:

Adult and Dislocated Worker performance measures include:

- Adult and Dislocated Worker Employed Q2 Post Exit - the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit.
- Adult and Dislocated Worker Employed Q4 Post Exit - the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit.
- 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.
- 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.
- Adult and Dislocated Worker 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.

Youth performance measures include:

- 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.

- 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.
- Youth Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit.
- 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.
- 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.

B. Board Strategies

The Board collaborates with partners that carry out Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) activities and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to align resources that are available in the Heart of Texas region to achieve the Board's vision and goals. The Board has an existing, well-established working relationship with both AEL and VR.

With the goal of aligning resources and fostering communication, the Board uses the following strategies to collaborate with AEL:

- Serves in an advisory role with AEL to engage in regional planning and facilitate the co-enrollment of customers.
- AEL classroom space is made available at each of the four Workforce Centers. This dedicated space is a fully equipped learning environment that provides AEL customers with an accessible location and the environment needed to achieve their learning objectives.
- Participates in the professional development training of AEL staff to increase collaboration and promotion of Workforce Solutions services.
- Provides labor market and career information to AEL teachers for classroom display and disbursement to AEL customers.
- 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.

- Actively promote information regarding adult education opportunities, support services, and career resources through the Board’s website and social media channels. This online presence ensures that both potential students and workforce customers can easily access information on AEL programs.

To continue to align resources and strengthen its established relationship with VR, the Board uses the following strategies to collaborate with VR:

- Regularly meets with VR staff to communicate information to enhance each organization’s referral process and to educate businesses on the underutilize talent pool.
- Participates in professional development training with VR staff to increase collaboration and promotion of Workforce Solutions services.
- Actively promotes VR services through the Board’s website and social media channels. This online presence ensures that both VR and workforce customers can easily access information on VR services.
- Equipping Workforce Centers with accessible equipment to better serve customers.
- Coordinate to enhance the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) work experience program by providing assistance via the Board’s Business Solutions team to aid in securing worksites for SEAL youth participants.
- Host the annual Walk-N-Roll Hiring Fair that provides an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to connect directly with hiring employers in the region.

Through coordinated efforts with the region’s AEL provider and with VR, the Board is actively carrying out its strategies to best align resources to achieve its vision and goals. This strategic alignment not only ensures that both the Board and its partners, AEL and VR, effectively utilize resources but ensures that the Board meets the immediate and long-term needs of the region’s workforce and its employers.

C. High-Performing Board

Consistent with the factors developed by the Texas Workforce Investment Council’s (TWIC), the Board will implement the following strategies to ensure a delivery system that is high performing:

Employer Engagement: Employers are central to the economic vitality of the region and of the state of Texas. The Board will continue to strengthen its partnerships with stakeholders to meet the needs of employers in the region. As a known leader in the region for serving employers, the Board’s Business Solutions team (BSU) works with entities like the Texas Veterans Commission and Vocational Rehabilitation staff, chambers of commerce, economic development entities, and other organizations to coordinate outreach efforts that reduce the number of asks from

employers. 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 industry/employer needs, (3) are consultative resources in both planning and deployment of workforce strategies, and (4) provide excellent customer service because of their expertise. Thus, the Board is better positioned to have a greater understanding of business needs, be able to communicate those needs to other stakeholders, and as a result coordinate efforts to meet the needs of employers.

Coordinated efforts to gain more insights from employers include participation in the Heart of Texas regional conveners grant that was awarded by the Texas Education Agency and is a part of the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network. The Board's Business Solutions team regularly makes visits to employers in the region as well as attend multiple networking events to gain additional insights from employers. The Board also conducts community input meetings and employer interviews to engage and gain further information on the needs of businesses in our region.

Improving Outcomes for Individuals with Barriers to Employment: The Board has made significant strides in improving outcomes for individuals with barriers to employment through its collaborative and partnership efforts. Examples of these efforts include:

- Hosting the annual Make Your Winning Move Hiring Fair and Suit Up Event. This hiring event provides an opportunity for previously incarcerated individuals to meet with employers who are open to hiring this population. Days prior to the hiring fair, the Board hosts a Suit Up Event at the Adult Probation office in McLennan County. This suit up event allows individuals to obtain an interview outfit that is free of charge to prepare them for the hiring fair.
- Hosting of the annual Walk-N-Roll Hiring Fair: This hiring fair focuses on connecting individuals with disabilities to hiring employers. The Board partners with VR to outreach this population. Because of the Board's established relationship with VR, the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program is successful in helping youth with disabilities to gain work experience. This past summer, 41 youth were referred to the SEAL program and 22 worksites were secured. The Board's Business Solutions team has integrated VR staff into its team meetings. This integration allows VR to learn about the employment needs of businesses in the region as well as gives the Business Solutions team direct access to this talent pool that leads to direct candidate referrals to hiring businesses.
- The Board's efforts around its YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) initiative provide improved career opportunities for youth. The Board's YES! Expo, the premier career exploration for youth in the Heart of Texas, provides high school students with the opportunity to explore hands-on careers with leading businesses and college programs in the region. After attending the YES! Expo, one high school student stated, "I never knew

these types of careers existed” and another stated, “I like that I can talk directly with representatives from different companies.” Providing access and hands-on exploration for youth is another example of how the Board is committed to helping opportunity youth and foster youth to gain knowledge and access to careers that they never knew existed.

- Public Access Points is the Board’s collaboration with the region’s 28 libraries and the Waco Housing Authority to provide individuals with barriers access to workforce services. The Board understands that many individuals with transportation barriers seek employment assistance and resources at their nearest library or housing authority. Through partnership, the Board provides these public access points with printed information about workforce services for their patrons/customers. Each year, the Board hosts its annual Public Access Points Workshop to inform libraries and the housing authority about workforce services and how these services can help their customers.

These efforts demonstrate promising practices in supportive services models and outcomes that demonstrate success. As the Board continues to strive to be a high-performing board, the Board will continue to seek innovative methods of delivering and providing access to workforce solutions services for all customer groups, including veterans, youth, and individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, job seekers, parents, and employers.

Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions: The Board relies on accurate, relevant data to guide investment decisions and support regional partners. The Texas Workforce Commission’s Labor Market data as well as data from sources such as Lightcast help to identify target occupations for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training, provide labor market insights to educators, assist students with career exploration, and support economic development and chamber of commerce efforts. In addition, performance data provided by TWC also aids in analyzing and identifying areas for service delivery improvement and operational efficiency.

Using relevant and accurate data, the Board has strategically implemented and funded initiatives that have led to program participant credential attainment and employment. For example, data demonstrated the need for a technically skilled workforce thus through grant funding, the Board and its partners have implemented and held the:

- Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3) pre-apprenticeship training that helps to build a skilled workforce for employers. This initiative is in partnership with the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers Local Union 72, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 529, and McLennan Community College. This past June, 14 individuals earned the MC3 certificate of completion along with continuing education credit hours from McLennan Community College. Ten of those graduates are now working in a field related to the training program and of those 10, three have become 1st year apprentices while the other seven participants will be interviewing with local unions to become 1st year apprentices in January.

- YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) High School Student Welding Internship for welding juniors and seniors in partnership with Waco ISD's Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy. Through this internship, high school students gained valuable hands-on experience with leading employers in the region, earn a dual college credit through Texas State Technical College, and earn an American Welding Society Level I or Level II industry-recognized credential.

The Board will continue to use data to guide its efforts in identifying and targeting strategic investments to improve system performance to meet the workforce needs of the region.

Part 2: Economic and Workforce Analysis

A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis

The Board's workforce development board area is in the Heart of Texas region and serves the counties of Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone, and Bosque. As of 2023, the six-county Heart of Texas region has a combined estimated population of 385,657 people with McLennan County representing the largest populated county (Lightcast). 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 which contains the state's five largest cities and is home to most of the state's population.

The top three largest industries by employment in the region are Government, Manufacturing, and Retail Trade. Together, these top three employed 62,521 in 2023. The table below lists the top 10 largest industries by employment.

2023 Top 10 Largest Industries by Employment

Industry	2023 Employment
Government	28,877
Manufacturing	18,773
Retail Trade	18,050
Health Care and Social Assistance	17,993
Accommodation and Food Services	15,129
Construction	13,049
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	9,717
Other Services (except Public Administration)	7,842
Educational Services	7,766

Wholesale Trade	6,936
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Source: Lightcast

Top five companies within the Heart of Texas region include Baylor University, Baylor Scott & White Health, Texas State Technical College, McLennan Community College and United States Department of Veterans. While the top five companies posting jobs include: Baylor Scott & White Health, Baylor University, Cefco, Ascension, and Texas State Technical College (Lightcast).

TWC Labor Market Information (LMCI) data projects that the following industries will be industries with the highest annual average of employment by 2032.

Top Industries by Annual Average Employment 2032

Industry	Annual Average Employment 2032
Educational Services	25,560
Health Care and Social Assistance	20,433
Manufacturing	19,473
Retail Trade	18,532
Accommodation and Food Services	16,467
Government, Except Post Services, State and Local Education & Hospitals	11,938
Construction	10,608
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	9,359
Wholesale Trade	6,578
Finance and Insurance	6,053
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5,821

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 add to the diverse group of employers within the region and positions the Heart of Texas for continued economic growth and opportunity. New and expanding businesses include:

- **VanTran Transformers:** a leading manufacturer of oil filled transformers will expand manufacturing capabilities in Waco, Texas. The expansion is expected to add up to 700 jobs over the next five years and will retain the company's existing 198 workforce. With the expansion representing a capital investment of more than \$20 million, construction of the new site has begun, and production is anticipated to begin by Q1 of 2025.

- **Electrolit:** a leading manufacturer of a scientifically formulated premium hydration beverage plans to construct a \$400 million state-of-the-art manufacturing facility and it's first U.S. production in Waco. This highly automated production and distribution 600,000 square-foot facility is set to open in early 2026 and will employ more than 200 skilled professionals and technicians.
- **EFC Gases & Advanced Materials:** an integral part of the semiconductor supply chain serves both the semiconductor and aerospace industries with plants in Hatfield and Cherryville, Pennsylvania and is set to expand its operations to McGregor. This \$210 million investment will add to the diverse industries in the region and is projected to create 120 jobs.
- **Metal Finishing Solutions:** a company that provides quick turn metal finishing and plating services will expand its metal finishing operations with a new 110,000 square foot manufacturing facility in Robinson. This \$20 million capital investment project is expected to be completed in 2025 and will create 80 new jobs.
- **Walmart Manufacturing:** is set to build its next state-of-the-art milk manufacturing facility in Robinson. This \$380 million capital investment project is expected to be completed in 2026, will have 310,00 square feet of production and distribution space, and will create nearly 400 new jobs for the region upon completion in 2026.
- **BrightFarms:** a national leader in the indoor farming indoor industry that produces fresh lettuce recently opened its new 16-acre greenhouse property in Lorena. The company will grow an estimated 35 million pounds of fresh produce a year and is expected to create 250 jobs in the agriculture sector.
- **Graphic Packaging International:** a leading manufacturer of fiber-based consumer packaging solutions for the world's leading consumer product and foodservice companies recently built a new production and warehousing facility in Waco. The \$1 billion capital investment over the next three years will create approximately 230 new jobs with an average annual salary of \$65,000 and full benefits.

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 Lightcast 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 2022 through 2032 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 were 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 targeted industries for the Board are listed below. The list below includes the industry sector name, the NAICS code, and the targeted industry sector name. TWC Labor Market Information data along with local wisdom gathered via stakeholder Community Input Meetings were used to build the targeted industries list. In addition, a growth rate of 4.1% and occupations that support each industry were used as data criteria when selecting industries for the list. Industries that were targeted by the Office of the Governor and the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce were also criteria that was considered. 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	2371	Utility System Construction
	2373	Highway, Street, and Bridge Construction
	2381	Building Foundation And Exterior Contractors
	2382	Building Equipment Contractors
	2389	Other Specialty Trade Contractors
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	6211	Office of Physicians
	6212	Office of Dentists
	6213	Offices of Other Health Practitioners
	6221	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals
	6231	Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Facilities)
Manufacturing	3116	Animal Slaughtering and Processing
	3335	Metalworking Machinery Manufacturing
	3362	Motor Vehicle Body and Trailer Manufacturing
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	8111	Automotive Repair and Maintenance
	8112	Electronic and Precision Equipment Repair and Maintenance
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5412	Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll Services

	5413	Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services
	5415	Computer Systems Design and Related Services
	5416	Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services
	5419	Other Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
	5617	Services to Buildings and Dwellings
Transportation and Warehousing	4931	Warehousing and Storage

The Board has targeted 42 occupations that support the region's industries, meet employer needs, and have been identified as the best employment opportunities for the region. TWC Labor Market Information (LMI) data along with valuable stakeholder Community Input Meetings were used to help build the targeted occupations list. 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 post-secondary education and training beyond a high school diploma. Thresholds included occupational employment percentage growth of 5% or higher, a starting salary per hour (entry wage) of \$14.00, and available training offered for occupations. As well as criteria on occupations that were identified by TWC LMI data as adding the most jobs, fastest growing occupations, and having the most annual average job openings. 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. Community stakeholders validated and verified the need for specific occupations to be targeted based on the need of skilled workers and requested training by local employers. The table below lists the Board's targeted occupations. The selected targeted occupations guide the investment of workforce program funds, such as 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	Occupation 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 and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists
47-2031	Carpenters
51-9161	Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Operators
15-1232	Computer User Support Specialists

33-3012	Correctional Officers and Jailers
31-9091	Dental Assistants
29-1292	Dental Hygienists
49-9051	Electric Power-Line Installers and Repairers
17-3023	Electrical & Electronics Engineering Technicians
47-2111	Electricians
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education
29-2042	Emergency Medical Technicians
17-3029	Engineering Technologists and Technicians, Except Drafters, All Other
33-2011	Firefighters
47-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers
11-1021	General and Operations Manager
49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics
15-1212	Information Security Analysts
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses
51-4041	Machinists
31-9092	Medical Assistants
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
31-2011	Occupational Therapy Assistants
47-2073	Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators
29-2052	Pharmacy Technicians
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants
47-2152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters
33-3051	Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians
29-1141	Registered Nurses
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians
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. TWC Labor Market Information data was the starting point that was used to build the in-demand list. Threshold criteria included occupations that were identified by TWC LMI data as adding the most jobs, fastest growing occupations, and having the most annual average job openings. Further, local wisdom gathered through stakeholder Community Input Meetings, was also used to identify in-demand occupations. The table below lists the Board's in-demand occupations.

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

SOC	Occupation Title
39-9011	Childcare Workers
47-2061	Construction Laborers
35-2014	Cooks, Restaurant
43-4051	Customer Service Representatives
35-3023	Fast Food and Counter Workers
35-1012	First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers
41-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers
37-2011	Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand
53-3033	Light Truck Drivers
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General
29-2072	Medical Records Specialists
43-6013	Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants
31-1131	Nursing Assistants
51-9111	Packaging and Filling Machine Operators and Tenders
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education
41-2031	Retail Salespersons
41-4012	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products
33-9032	Security Guards
53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers
25-9045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary
35-3031	Waiters and Waitresses

The Board's staff attend a variety of community events and continuously interact with several organizations such as chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, the 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 to meet employer expectations.

Additionally, employers were interviewed to gain additional feedback. Businesses that were interviewed included business from industries representing Healthcare, Manufacturing, and Construction. Some of what they told us is confirmed through labor market data. Other

interesting and invaluable insights only emerged during our conversations about their staffing needs and recruitment challenges. The common challenge shared by these employers was that the shortage of skilled workers is now acute. Employers agreed that many workers did not have any relevant work experience; Microsoft Excel skills were needed, as well as bachelor's degree and industry-certifications were needed. In the Healthcare industry, large and small employers need Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses, and Certified Nursing Assistants. Companies in Manufacturing and Aerospace need skilled workers such as service technicians that can work on equipment, maintenance technicians, maintenance machinists, forklift and lift truck operators, avionics technicians and aviation mechanics.

Employers interviewed collectively agreed that some of the top skills needed to meet their workforce needs are 'soft skills'. Most notably, professionalism, respect, the willingness to show up to work, work hard, have compassionate care (for those in the Healthcare industry), written and oral communication skills, and following company policy.

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.

B. Labor Force Analysis and Trends

The TWC LMI's Local Area Unemployment Statistics Report for October 2024, shows that the civilian labor force for the Heart of Texas region was 185,627, which is an increase of 5,702 from October 2023. The table below further depicts the Civilian Labor Force for each county and the region, from October 2023 to October 2024. Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone and McLennan counties all show an increase in the Civilian Labor Force.

Civilian Labor Force

Area	October 2023 Civilian Labor Force	October 2024 Civilian Labor Force	Change in Labor Force
Bosque	8,758	8,948	190
Falls	6,959	7,117	158
Freestone	6,545	6,844	299
Hill	17,997	18,514	517
Limestone	9,142	9,928	786
McLennan	130,524	134,276	3,752
Heart of Texas	179,925	185,627	5,702

Source: TWC LMI Local Area Unemployment Statistic Report

The 2024 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 16.

2024 Labor Force Breakdown

	Population
Population	389,441
Total Working Age Population	300,673
Not in Labor Force (16+)	115,269
Labor Force	185,404
Employed	178,358
Unemployed	7,046
Under 16, Military, and Institutionalized	88,767

Source: Lightcast

Across the region, unemployment rates increased from October 2023 to October 2024.

Unemployment Rate

Area	October 2023 Unemployment Rate	October 2024 Unemployment Rate	Change in Unemployment Rate
Bosque	3.3	3.8	0.5
Falls	3.8	4.3	0.5
Freestone	4.8	5.1	0.3
Hill	3.8	4.0	0.2
Limestone	3.9	4.6	0.7
McLennan	3.3	3.8	0.5
Heart of Texas	3.5	3.9	0.4

Source: TWC LMI Local Area Unemployment Statistic Report

According to Lightcast data, in 2023 the Heart of Texas region's population increased by 4.0% since 2020, growing by 15,488. Population is expected to continue to grow through 2030, increasing to 411,221 by 2030. The table below depicts population trends of the region from 2020 to 2030.

Population 2020 – 2030

Timeframe	Population
2020	373,953
2021	377,559
2022	381,287
2023	385,657

2024	389,441
2025	393,176
2026	396,849
2027	400,570
2028	404,080
2029	407,893
2030	411,221

Source: Lightcast

Further analysis of the region's population characteristics shows that the population of Millennials (ages 25-39) is over 70,000, Veterans make up 22,033 of the population, persons who will be retiring soon exceed 111,000, and the racial diversity population is 163,502.

Population Characteristic

Population Characteristic	Population
Millennials (ages 25-39)	72,313
Veterans	22,033
Retiring Soon	111,048
Racial Diversity	163,502

Source: Lightcast

Concerning educational attainment, 15.1% of the selected region's residents possess a bachelor's degree (5.9% below the state average), and 10.1% hold an associate degree (2.1% above the national average). The table below further depicts educational attainment by levels in the Heart of Texas compared to the state of Texas for 2024.

Educational Level

Educational Level	2024 % of the Heart of Texas Population	2024 State % of Population
Less Than 9th Grade	5.1%	7%
9th Grade to 12th Grade	8.2%	7%
High School Diploma	28.9%	24%
Some College	23.5%	20%
Associate degree	10.1%	8%
Bachelor's Degree	15.1%	21%
Graduate Degree and Higher	9.1%	12%

Source: Lightcast

C. Workforce Development Analysis

The Heart of Texas region has multiple workforce development activities of which include education and training. The region is rich in education and training opportunities. Baylor University, a four-year, private college located in Waco, Texas State Technical College Waco is the region's technical college, and three additional community colleges that include McLennan Community College in Waco, Navarro College in Mexia, and Hill College in Hillsboro. Further, the Education Service Center Region 12 in Waco provides educational support, professional development, and resources to enhance teaching and learning for Region 12 school districts.

Additional education and training activities include:

- UpSkill Waco is a collaboration of workforce and education partners to provide accessible skills training, credentials, and job placement support in high demand occupations across McLennan County. UpSkill Waco partners with McLennan Community College and Texas State Technical College Waco to study emerging job trends and increase industry-driven training to ensure our local workforce is equipped with the skills needed for high-demand occupations. UpSkill Waco provides scholarship opportunities to low-income students.
- 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.
- 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). Success coaches work with cohorts of students entering 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 current 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.
- 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.
- The WorkSITE is a collaboration of McLennan County, the City of Waco, and TSTC. The WorkSITE offers custom workforce training and micro credentials aimed at addressing the industrial skills gap for existing and future industries of Waco and McLennan County.

The Board operates the YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) initiative; a K-12 workforce development activity to increase awareness among high school students, parents, teachers and counselors about careers and education, and to promote entry into in-demand training and occupations. The YES! has multiple initiatives that includes the YES! Expo (career exploration event), the YES! website (www.yestoyouth.com) which provides resources to students, parents, and teachers, the YES! Summer Teacher Externship that provides high school teachers with hands-on externship opportunities with employers of targeted industries, and the YES! High School Student 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. In addition, and in support of additional K-12 education and training activities, the Board sits on various advisory committees that include Waco ISD's Future Educators Academy and its Business Advisory Committee.

The Board is committed to increasing education activities for Early Childhood Education. Activities that the Board oversees, and supports are professional development of Workforce Solutions child care staff and Early Learning Center staff. Education and training provided for teachers and administrators of Early Learning Centers include training in first-aid, CPR, Ages & Stages Developmental Screening, scholarships for teachers to earn Child Development Accreditation and to attend the Annual Week of the Young Child conference and the Frog Street Infant Curriculum Implementation training. In addition, Quality Initiatives Coaches and Mentors Coaches and Mentoring Coaches provide additional training and support Early Learning Center staff across the region. Through a grant from TWC, the Board launched its Early Educator Apprenticeship program, a first in the region, which provides career pathways for early childhood education and allows them to earn wages while gaining industry-recognized credentials and on-the-job training.

The strengths of activities of workforce development activities in the area include the availability of the number of training opportunities available throughout the region and the number of training providers that offer a variety of training options in the region. From a four-year college, multiple community colleges, a technical college, and education service center, and multiple collaborations to offer training options for both individuals and businesses, the Heart of Texas has many education and training opportunities available. Opportunities for improvement include additional collaboration by training providers to 1. Provide training that is in-demand and that meets the needs of employers and 2. Increase scholarship opportunities for individuals that need assistance with paying for education and training.

The effectiveness of programs and services is evidenced by the educational level of the Heart of Texas population. According to Lightcast, the Heart of Texas region is above the state educational level in population earning a 9th grade to 12th grade high school diploma (28.9% Heart of Texas, 7% state), having some college (23.5% Heart of Texas, 20% state), and 10.1% of the population have earned an Associate degree in the Heart of Texas as opposed to the state at 7 percent.

Providing education and training to individuals with disabilities is made possible by the Board's

established working relationship with VR. Together, resources are aligned to provide opportunities for this population such as the coordination of the region's Summer Earn and Learn work experience program that provides opportunities for youth with disabilities. In addition, the Board hosts the annual Walk-N-Roll Hiring Fair that provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to connect directly with hiring employers in the region.

Through coordinated efforts with the region's AEL provider and with VR, the Board is actively carrying out its strategies to best align resources to achieve its vision and goals. This strategic alignment not only ensures that both the Board and its partners, AEL and VR, effectively utilize resources but ensures that the Board meets the immediate and long-term needs of the region's workforce and its employers.

The Board will continue to strengthen its partnerships with stakeholders to meet the needs of employers in the region. As a known leader in the region for serving employers, the Board's Business Solutions team (BSU) works with entities like the Texas Veterans Commission's and Vocational Rehabilitation' staff, chambers of commerce, economic development entities, and other organizations to coordinate outreach efforts that reduce the number of asks from employers. 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 because of their expertise. Thus, bettering positioning the Board to have a greater understanding of business needs, be able to communicate those needs to other stakeholders, and coordinate efforts to meet the needs of employers. It is because of this structure that the Board has the capacity to provide workforce development activities that meet the needs of the region's employers.

The Board continues to increase its capacity to provide workforce development activities through a Tri-Agency Regional Conveners grant that is funded by Texas Education Agency. Last year the Texas Education Agency (TEA) awarded the Board a Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners, to expand career pathways and K-12 work-based learning in high-demand, high-wage occupations within our 6-county workforce development area. The Regional Convener Pathways project aims to identify, train, and designate Regional Conveners in each of Texas' 28 workforce development areas to oversee the creation, execution, and supervision of high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries in each region.

As part of the Regional Convener Pathways project, the Board developed a regional partnership who along with the Board that includes Hill College, Navarro College, McLennan Community College, and the Educational Service Center Region 12, will serve as a regional convener that will oversee the development, implementation, and monitoring of the regional strategy for high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries across an entire workforce development area. Part of that regional strategy is to expand opportunities and knowledge of work-based learning activities in the Heart of Texas region through employer engagement.

Further, through its Tri-Agency Regional Convener grant, the Board seeks to develop a website that will focus on information pertaining to career pathways and work-based learning opportunities that center around recognized postsecondary credentials.

Part 3: Core Programs

A: Workforce Development System

The Board highly values partnerships and collaboration to ensure a continued, robust local workforce development system. The Board will work with entities to carry out core and required partner programs to support the alignment and provision of services that support the strategies identified in TWC's WIOA Combined State Plan. 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 the Board's contracted service providers. Core programs under direct oversight of the Board include:

- Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
 - Adult
 - Dislocated Worker
 - Youth
 - Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Trade Adjustment Act (TAA)
 - Reemployment Service and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and
 - Educational Outreach

The Board will work with service providers and other entities to coordinate service delivery of core programs, support alignment 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 the Board to operate the Workforce Centers. The Board will work with the service provider to coordinate the

delivery of Wagner-Peyser Employment Services to include the support of alignment with other workforce programs.

- 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 the co-enrollment of customers. The Board will continue to partner with AEL to enhance services to AEL customers by providing access to classroom space in workforce centers, promoting AEL services to center customers, and by providing training to AEL staff on workforce services.
- Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation & Unemployment Insurance Programs: The Board is engaged in joint planning activities with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) - 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. In addition, the Board will also work with TWC to support and carry out Unemployment Insurance programs. The Board will also continue to build on its existing relationship with TWC Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to coordinate services to benefit customers that include coordination of hiring fairs, referrals of Resource Room customers to VR, direct employment referrals, and promotion of VR's services via the Board's social media platforms and workforce center video boards. Furthermore, the Board's Business Solutions Team will continue to incorporate VR Employment Representative staff into weekly staff meetings as a method to keep VR staff at the forefront of the workforce needs of businesses.
- Texas Veterans Commission: The Board is also engaged in joint planning activities with the Texas Veterans Commission's (TVC) Local Veterans Employment Representatives to identify opportunities for coordination of services and to develop joint service strategies that efficiently serve veteran customers and employers while also leveraging partners' collective resources. The Board will continue its working relationship with TVC to meet the needs of customers by coordinating hiring fairs that are veteran focused, promoting TVC services via social media and video board platforms, making direct referrals of center customers to TVC representatives within workforce centers, and by including TVC in the Board's Business Solutions Team weekly meetings.
- Apprenticeship Programs: The Board will continue to build on its current working relationship with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local Union 72 and the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 529, both of which are registered apprenticeship programs in the Heart of Texas region to encourage these local unions to register as eligible training providers to receive WIOA funding. The Board will also continue to partner with local unions to provide the Multi-Craft Core Curriculum Pre-Apprenticeship training to interested individuals and to make customer referrals to the local union for employment.

- Child Care Services: The Board will work with its contracted service provider to offer child care services throughout the Heart of Texas region. The Board will continue its working partnership with its Child Care Services contracted service provider to include child care quality across the region by providing professional development to child care workers, supporting early learning programs to achieve Texas Rising Star certification and to provide child care assistance to families, provide scholarships to eligible individuals to meet educational goals and to secure employment.
- Partners Operating Additional Workforce Programs: The Board also collaborates with partners operating workforce programs who are not considered core workforce programs but provide services complementary to core programs. Example partnerships include but are not limited to the Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries, The WorkSITE, Heart of Texas P-20 Council, Waco ISD's Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy, and Prosper Waco. The Board will continue to build on these relationships to support the co-enrollment of job seekers, provide customer referrals to these additional workforce programs, partner to provide employment training and on-the-job training opportunities when appropriate.

Further, the Board is committed to working with the following required partners that include:

- Community Services Block Grant Program (CSBG) - The Board will continue to partner with Economic Opportunities Advancement Corporation (EOAC), administrator of the CSBG in the Heart of Texas region, to provide referrals of individuals to the CSBG program for assistance. In addition, the Board will continue its work to co-enroll job seekers, when appropriate, to provide additional support services that will help individuals to succeed in finding and retaining employment.
- Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) – The Board to partner with AARP Foundation, administrator of SCSEP in the region, to provide referrals of job seekers who are over 55 to SCSEP. The Board will continue to promote the program to this target population and when possible, co-enroll job seekers to provide wrap around services that will help individuals in finding employment.
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers Program – The Board is committed to providing services to job seeker who identify themselves as a Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker. The Board is committed to ensure that these individuals have the same access to available workforce services that can help them to become employed.

Workforce System Services: The Board's operated core workforce programs and child care services program, along with its employment and training services partners: AEL, Vocational Rehabilitation, TVC Local Veterans Employment Representatives and TWC's Unemployment Services program, comprise the workforce system with the primary entry point being the Workforce Solutions Centers. Services available at each of the Workforce Centers include both

basic career services and individualized career services. An overview of Workforce System Center Services include:

Labor exchange services that include:

- 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

Career services that include:

- 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

Individualized services that include:

- 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
- Occupational/Vocational training to include Apprenticeship training
- Out-of-area job search
- English language acquisition
- Financial literacy

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

The Board is committed to working with its contracted service providers to carry out core programs to expand access to employment, training, education, and support services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment; facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment in core programs and improve access to activities that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential.

Expanding Access to Employment, Training, Education, and Support Services: The Board is dedicated to working with entities that facilitate core programs to expand access for all eligible participants. Key partners include the Board's contracted service provider, Texas Workforce

Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Adult Education and Literacy for the Heart of Texas (the region's AEL provider).

The Board 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 their 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 Hiring Red, White and YOU! Hiring 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 outreach efforts to employers and in 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.
- English as a 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 classroom space.

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 and 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.

The Board 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 Communities 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 Board holds meetings throughout the year with the AEL provider, McLennan Community College, to ensure that coordination of resources takes 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, Education Service Center Region 12, 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 identify critical career pathways.

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

Furthermore, Board will continue to facilitate the development of career pathways through its Tri-Agency Regional Conveners grant that is funded by Texas Education Agency. Along with the

Board's partners, Hill College, Navarro College, McLennan Community College, and the Educational Service Center Region 12, will serve as a regional convener that will oversee the development, implementation, and monitoring of the regional strategy for high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries across an entire workforce development area.

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, the Board strives to improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential by:

- Soliciting 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 to gain work experience and to earn a Level 1 or Level 2 American Welding Society industry-recognized credential.

Further, through its Tri-Agency Regional Convener grant, the Board seeks to develop a website that will focus on information pertaining to career pathways and work-based learning opportunities that center around recognized postsecondary credentials.

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 have 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 in remote areas of the region. Through these partnerships, individuals can 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 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

The Board has put these practices into practice by:

- Maintaining policies and procedures regarding the physical accessibility for individuals with disabilities at 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 with 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 co-location allow 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. 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:

- Structuring the business service unit to engage employers from target industry sectors
- Implementing market-driven strategies that operate at the speed of business, and
- 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 because 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 Solutions 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, efficiency, and access to upskilling and reskilling programs. 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 for 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 apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeship, and incumbent worker programs, as appropriate. Includes connecting employers with the 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:

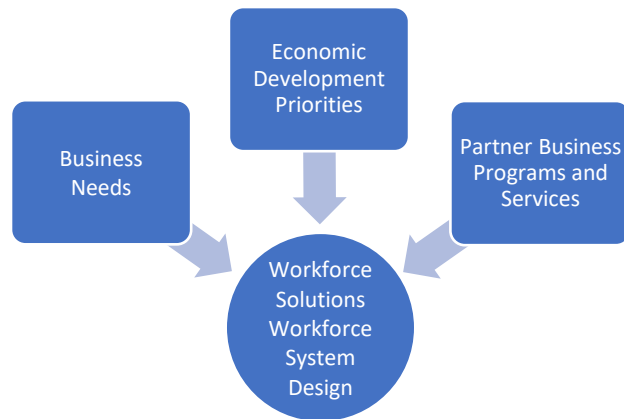
1. Fill gaps in service to business customers that are not addressed by the workforce system including the promoting of entrepreneurial-skills training that is offered through community partners, and

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. These partnerships lead to the discovery of additional services and resources available to assist businesses and microenterprises. These services include entrepreneurial skills training to assist individuals with starting, maintaining and growing a new business. Key partners for entrepreneurial and microenterprise services are local chambers of commerce in both urban and rural areas. The BSU connects individuals to chambers of commerce who provide specific resources and assistance to entrepreneurs and microenterprises.

The Board 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 for all employers including entrepreneurs, micro-enterprises and local start-ups. These solutions are highly beneficial to entrepreneurs, microenterprises and start-ups since they usually start out with little to no staff. The BSU team serves as an extension of these individuals' businesses. The BSU team also maintains a working relationship with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to enable the referral of individuals seeking to be entrepreneurs or microbusiness owners. The SBA can assist entrepreneurs and microenterprises with business plans, business funding resources and additional community resources. These additional resources include Startup Waco, which helps new small businesses, entrepreneurs and expanding microbusinesses get a running start. Another great resource is the McLennan Community Investment Fund which assists microenterprises with non-traditional funding resources.

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 Board, spearheaded by the Business Solutions team, as a liaison between businesses, community-based organizations, and secondary and post-secondary educational institutions. In this role, the Board 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 Tableau and WorkinTexas to identify current users of workforce program services, previous users and potential new employers. Through continued review of these reports, the Board 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) released 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 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
- Groesbeck Economic Development Corporation
- Fairfield Economic Development Council
- Fairfield Chamber of Commerce
- Cen-Tex African American Chamber of Commerce
- Cen-Tex Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Hillsboro Economic Development Corporation
- Hillsboro Chamber of Commerce

- Meridian Economic Development Corporation
- McGregor 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
- Whitney Chamber of Commerce
- Small Business Administration
- Startup Waco
- McLennan Community Investment Fund

The Board engages in 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 attractions
- 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, support 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 team (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, the Board:

- 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 job seekers with referrals to hiring employers
- Conducts Rapid Re-Employment Service (RRES) orientations and referrals to the WIOA program
- Conducts Job Readiness workshops to prepare UI claimants and other job seekers
- Conducts Rapid Response orientations and workshops to help affected workers transition to their next employment opportunities

C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services

Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas' Workforce Centers operate in full compliance with the Texas Model, whereby the Board contracts with a service provider to operate the region's workforce centers. The contracted service providers have full responsibility for the day-to-day supervision of TWC (Employment Services) Wagner-Peyser funded staff.

While TWC retains administrative oversight regarding human resource issues, local managers employed by the service provider directs daily assignment and work activities, in addition to setting and monitoring performance goals, interviewing and selecting potential employees, and initiating disciplinary action, if needed.

As the Board has fully implemented and works under the Texas model, coordination within the system is ensured and any duplication of services is kept at a minimum. In addition, to further integrate efforts and to continue to gain system efficiency, the following strategies are deployed:

- Team meetings at Workforce Solutions 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

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

- Case managers are expected to provide greater 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 in completing Wagner-Peyser certified WIT.com applications so that they can be found by employers and make quality matches to available job openings

D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management

The Board has made a comprehensive and smooth transition into the WorkinTexas Case Management System (WITCMS) which supports the implementation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs and other partner services at one-stop centers.

Transition and Training Process (WITCMS):

- Board Involvement in Development: A Board staff member actively participated in the state's development team for WITCMS, providing regular updates to both Board and service provider staff, ensuring early familiarity with the new system.
- Train-the-Trainer Model: Management staff from both the Board and the service provider participated in TWC's train-the-trainer sessions, allowing them to deliver in-depth training to frontline staff. This approach ensured all staff were adequately prepared and practiced on the system before the official launch.
- Ongoing Feedback and Issue Resolution: The Board continuously seeks feedback from service provider staff on WITCMS's functionality and any issues that arise. This feedback is shared with TWC to address system-wide concerns and improve the platform for all users

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:

- WorkInTexas.com: A web-based, integrated intake, eligibility, case management, reporting, and labor exchange system for employment and training services. WorkInTexas.com acts as the central repository for customer information and includes interfaces with WorkInTexas.com, UI benefits system, and Health and Human Services information system
- Kinder Track: Allows parents to record attendance by entering a four-digit code at a point-of-service device located at authorized child care facilities
- VOS Greeter: A component of WorkInTexas.com, is a check-in and tracking system used at Workforce Solutions Centers, job fairs, and other events/activities to record and report on usage

Furthermore, the Board's website provides an online WIOA Pre-Application for customers who are interested in WIOA training and services. Customers can easily access this online form, complete the pre-application and submit it online. Thus, offering an additional streamlined service delivery for customers. By also offering the Board's targeted occupations and eligible training providers on its website, streamline efforts are enhanced for the customers to help them make the best decision for career training that leads to employment.

E. Third Party Partnership in SNAP Employment and Training Programs

Third-Party Partnerships (TPP) is a new initiative offering Boards an opportunity to expand the current service model for SNAP E&T recipients. The Board, in conjunction with TWC will begin planning for this expansion and will participate in all training, meetings, and strategic conversations on the program. This is a new concept, so preparations are in the very early stages. The Board plans to find, assess, and vet potential TPPs, discuss service provision, negotiate a budget, train the TPP on program requirements including case management, and plan to enter into contracts for the provision of these services.

Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities

A. 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 the 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 ensure (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.

B. Youth Activities and Services

The Board recognizes that youth are the future workforce for the Heart of Texas region and for the state of Texas. As such, the Board, in coordination with its Youth service provider, offers a wide range of workforce investment activities for both in-school and out-of-school youth that are designed to prepare youth for the workforce by providing essential skills, career exploration, internship opportunities, and support in overcoming employment barriers. These activities are inclusive and accessible, ensuring that youth with disabilities have full participation in all available programs.

Types of Workforce Investment Activities for Youth include:

- **Work Readiness and Job Search Assistance:** Youth have access to job search support, workshops, career counseling, and short-term educational training, preparing them for successful entry into the workforce.
- **Work Experience Programs:** A key component of the youth program, work experiences provide hands-on learning, enabling youth to develop valuable workplace skills. These experiences are especially beneficial for youth who are new to employment, as they offer practical skill-building and career exploration opportunities.
- **Career Exploration:** Youth engage in career exploration both virtually and in-person. Through the use of Virtual Reality headsets, youth can virtually discover a wide range of high-demand, well-paying occupations while at the same time virtually exploring job environments and duties. In addition, youth can explore careers in-person via the Board's YES! Expo, the premier career exploration event for youth in the Heart of Texas.

Furthermore, because of the Board's strong working relationship with TWC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services, coordination of services ensure that youth with disabilities are provided with sufficient accommodations to participate in workforce investment activities and services throughout the Heart of Texas service area.

Successful models of such activities include:

- Providing year round work experience programming
- Partnering for a successful Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program: the Board's WIOA Youth Contractor, Communities in Schools of the Heart of Texas (CIS) received 41 referral from Vocational Rehabilitation Services. CIS provided work readiness training and summer work experience services placing youth at 22 worksites during the past summer.
- Offering a robust Workforce Readiness/Educational Outreach program: CIS Educational Outreach staff provided workforce readiness services including career exploration through virtual reality simulations using VR goggles and workshops covering life skills and

budgeting. During BCY 23-24, CIS served 2,322 youth at 39 high schools within 19 ISDs.

- Partnering to providing high school students with internship opportunities: the Board partners with Waco ISD's Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy to provide welding juniors and seniors with hands-on work experience, access to dual credit college courses, and the opportunity to earn an American Welding Society industry-recognized certificate through its YES! High School Student Welding Internship.
- Offering hands-on career exploration to high school students: Through the Board's initiative, the YES! Expo, thousands of high school students from in and around the Heart of Texas region attend the YES! Expo to explore careers and career pathways offered through college programs and businesses alike. At the 2024 YES! Expo, over 1,800 high school students met with 120 businesses, college programs, branches of the military and apprenticeship program to explore the many career opportunities that are available to them.
- Accessibility to on-demand exploring career and education opportunities via the Board's yestoyouth.com; a website committed to providing students, teachers/counselors, parents/guardians and businesses access to career and education information opportunities.

C. 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 support available to customers of these systems to ensure completion,
- (3) Better alignment of systems to meet the needs of area employers, and
- (4) Increases the impact of collective workforce and education resources have on the community to avoid duplication and enhance services

The Board deploys the following strategies with partners to ensure 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 for the Heart of Texas (AEL) 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 to traditional classroom training that is 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.
- 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 by providing in- and out-of-school youth with earning credentials, certificates, and licenses that meet the needs of employers.

D. Child Care and Early Learning

The Board is committed to increasing the availability and affordability of high-quality early learning programs. Quality early learning programs create an important foundation for later success in school and life, making it an important, but often overlooked part of the workforce development pipeline. Early learning programs not only fuel our region's economy by allowing parents to enter the workforce and/or complete education/training but they also build the workforce of our future.

The Board strategically manages child care and early learning within the workforce system to enhance school readiness and strengthen and support the child care industry. The plan is a result of a strategic and collaborative process that included stakeholder input regarding needs, goals, strategies and projects.

The Board uses multiple strategies to increase awareness of early learning as a workforce and economic development tool. Engaging Board members, CEOs, businesses, child care directors, and community foundations, are part of this outreach and communication process. The Board

uses print and electronic messaging to increase awareness of the importance of quality early education.

The Board has led the state in the percentage of Texas Rising Star (TRS) programs and the percentage of children participating in a TRS rated program. These numbers fluctuate, but it demonstrates our commitment to quality early learning. Our Quality Improvement team is tenured and passionate about increasing the quality of child care and raising awareness about the Texas Rising Star program and the opportunities available to strengthen the child care industry.

The Board provides TRS programs with a shared services tool called Brightwheel. It is compatible with the new TX3C data system that will go live in early 2025.

Incorporates and Coordinates the Design and Management of Child Care Services: The Board incorporates and coordinates the design and management of child care services with workforce employment, job training, and educational services using a comprehensive and integrated approach that includes:

- **Integrated Service Delivery:** The Child Care Services (CCS) program is co-located with other workforce programs in our full-service McLennan County Workforce Solutions Center. Customers can access assistance by telephone, our website, or from our other Workforce Centers in our region.
- **Partnerships:** the Board partners with multiple stakeholders, including schools, colleges, job training programs, community organizations, local foundations businesses, and other organizations.
- **Coordinated Planning:** The Board's strategic planning process includes aligning Child Care Services (CCS) with the various workforce development programs in our system. Effective and ongoing communication ensures that services provided meet the evolving needs of the residents in the Heart of Texas. Coordinated planning among the CCS Program Managers occurs regularly. Staff share updates, program changes, facility updates, futures events, and customer needs.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** The Board also uses data to collect, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our integrated service delivery. This data-driven approach allows for continuous improvement in our facilities and our online presence. Data collection ensures that we are meeting the needs of individuals, families, businesses, and system partners.
- **Support for Low-Income Families:** Low-income families make up the majority of families enrolled in Child Care Services. Connecting parents with our Business Solutions Team, training and education program (WIOA) and other Workforce programs creates opportunities that can lead to training, education opportunities and greater self-sufficiency.

Maximizes the Delivery and Availability of safe and stable Child Care Services: The Board assists families seeking to become independent, or who are at risk of becoming dependent on public assistance, while parents are either working or attending a job training or educational program. The Board maximizes the delivery and availability of safe and stable child care services through:

- **Quality Improvement Initiatives:** The Board's investment in the Texas Rising Star quality rated program, our Early Educator Apprenticeship program, along with several other initiatives ensures that child care providers are able to meet high standards of care.
- **Access to Comprehensive Services:** The Board integrates child care services with other workforce and educational services. This holistic approach ensures that families have access to a range of support services, including job training, educational opportunities, and employment assistance.
- **Support for Child Care Providers:** The Board offers support and resources to child care providers to help them maintain high-quality care and education. This includes training, technical assistance, funding for facility improvements, and opportunities to become a host site for the region's Early Educator Apprenticeship.
- **Family Engagement and Education:** The Board emphasizes the importance of family engagement and education. By providing parents with information and resources on child development and parenting, the Board helps families create a supportive home environment that complements the care provided by child care centers.
- **Flexible Scheduling and Non-Traditional Hours:** Recognizing the diverse needs of working families, the Board plans to recruit and support child care providers that offer flexible scheduling and care during non-traditional hours. This ensures that parents with varying work schedules can still access reliable child care.

The Board plans to continue to support the development of a robust child care system that supports families in achieving economic independence and stability while ensuring that children receive safe and high-quality care and early education.

Contracted Slot Agreements: The Board plans to explore strategies for contracted slot agreements that increase access to high-quality care for targeted communities. Contracted slot agreements are a strategic tool used to increase access to high-quality child care for targeted communities. The Board plans to explore this opportunity. Contracted slots ensure that child care spots are reserved for families in high-need areas. There are many benefits to this project that include stabilizing provider income and ensuring that vulnerable populations have access to quality child care.

Strategic Quality Improvement Goals: The Board's Plan includes multiple projects that enhance school readiness. The Board's plan to implement strategic quality improvement goals for school readiness includes multiple projects that enhance school readiness which focus on providing

curriculum, Ages & Stages Developmental Screening, the purchase of curriculum, and professional development. The Board will begin by accessing data about program quality, and community needs to identify areas for improvement. The Board will set measurable goals aimed at enhancing school readiness. Goals may include support to increase TRS star level, support literacy and numeracy skills, incorporating Ages & Stages developmental screenings, and/or family engagement activities.

Strengthen and Support the Child Care Industry: The Board's plan to strengthen and support the child care industry involves several strategic initiatives designed to enhance the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of child care services which include:

- **Financial Support:** through stipends and wage increases. This support helps providers maintain and improve their services, ensuring higher quality for families.
- **Professional Development and Training:** The Board invests in the professional development of child care workers. This includes offering access to training, that include our newly DOL registered Early Educator Apprenticeship, workshops, and certifications that help educators and caregivers enhance their skills and stay updated with best practices in early childhood education.
- **Quality Improvement Programs:** Programs like Texas Rising Star offer resources and support to child care providers to help them meet higher standards of care. These programs include assessments, coaching, and financial incentives for providers who achieve and maintain high-quality ratings.

E. Transportation and Other Support Services

The Board provides transportation assistance for eligible WIOA program participants to participate in and complete assigned educational, training and/or work-based activities. Participants are assessed for supportive service needs upon entry into the program and individual case managers provide referrals to community resources that may be helpful to a participant's needs.

Other support services that are directly related to training and/or employment activities may be provided on a case-by-case basis as needed for a participant to enter into or to maintain classroom participation or employment. These 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 also 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, the Board's staff serves on the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council. Representation ensures that the needs of job seekers, shift workers, urban and rural workers, and customers participating in training and college are understood and have a voice on these issues.

F. 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 workforce investment activities in an effort to reduce duplication and maximize resources. AEL classroom space is provided in each of the four Workforce Centers, and classrooms are equipped with dedicated computers, document readers, projectors, access to printing and designated Wi-Fi access for AEL classrooms. 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 workforce investment activities with AEL providers include:

- Participating 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 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.
- Resource Accessibility: Information on adult education opportunities, support services, and career resources is made available through the Board's website and social media channels. This online presence ensures that both potential students and workforce customers can easily access information on AEL programs, including points of contact and pathways to career advancement.

Local Application Review Process includes: 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.

Through coordinated efforts with the region's AEL provider, data sharing, and streamlined referral processes, the Board integrates workforce investment and adult education services to support skill development, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency for Heart of Texas residents. This strategic alignment ensures that both workforce and educational resources are utilized efficiently, meeting both the immediate and long-term needs of the region's workforce.

Part 6: Adult, Dislocated Worker Employment and Training

A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training

The Board provides a comprehensive range of employment and training activities tailored to the needs of adults and dislocated workers. These services support job readiness, skills training, and career advancement, assisting individuals in overcoming employment barriers and securing meaningful employment.

Employment and Training Activities:

- Work Readiness and Job Search Assistance: The Board offers staff-assisted job search services, workshops on resume writing and interview skills, and various work readiness training sessions. These activities are customized through each participant's individual employment plan and are designed to enhance engagement in the job search process, with the ultimate goal of employment.
- On-the-Job Training (OJT): This program provides eligible participants with structured, hands-on skills training directly in the workplace. Through OJT, customers are employed by local businesses while receiving training for up to six months, during which employers

are reimbursed 50% of the training wage. This program is particularly effective for dislocated workers who seek immediate employment with a steady income. OJT has proven to be successful in bridging skill gaps and offering steady employment pathways for individuals with barriers to employment.

- **Occupational and Vocational Training:** For eligible adults and dislocated workers, the Board offers occupational and vocational training through individual training accounts. Training is provided through community colleges and technical schools listed on the Eligible Training Provider List. By focusing on in-demand industries and targeted occupations, these programs offer pathways to sustainable employment, meeting or exceeding state goals for training completion and employment outcomes.
- **Online Training via Metrix Learning:** In partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission, the Board offers access to the Metrix online training catalog, which features over 5,000 courses, including skill tracks leading to industry certifications. This flexible online option allows customers to complete courses at their convenience, providing an opportunity to reskill or upskill for high demand occupations.

Assessment Tools Used for Adult and Dislocated Worker Services: To ensure that customers receive appropriate support and are matched with suitable training programs, the Board employs a variety of assessment instruments:

- **TABE and CASAS:** These assessments determine educational functioning levels and identify basic skills deficiencies among adult and dislocated worker customers. These tools provide insights into customers' readiness for specific training programs.
- **Accuplacer:** If a customer has already been assessed by a local community college, the Board accepts Accuplacer scores to determine academic levels and suitability for vocational training.
- **CareerScope:** This career assessment evaluates customers' interests and aptitudes, providing guidance on career suitability. CareerScope is a valuable tool in creating tailored employment plans that align with customers' strengths and aspirations.

Assessment and Continuous Improvement: The Board continuously assesses the effectiveness of its employment and training activities by monitoring program completion rates, employment outcomes, and customer satisfaction. Success in these programs is evidenced by high completion rates, positive employment outcomes, and achievement of state performance goals. By offering targeted training programs and leveraging both in-person and online resources, the Board ensures that adult and dislocated workers have access to the necessary tools to succeed in the Heart of Texas.

B. Service Priority

The Board ensures priority of service with individualized career services and training services given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient as consistent with WIOA §134(c)(3)(E) and 20 CFR §680.600, along with veterans and foster youth, according to the priority order outlined in the WIOA Guidelines for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth.

The Board's Policy HWD-004-06, Change 1 noted below outlines the priority for adult individualized career services and training services that are given:

Heart of Texas Workforce Development Board, Inc. Policy – HWD-004-06

SUBJECT: Priority of Service for Veterans, Other Eligible Persons, and Foster Youth

PURPOSE: To provide Contractors with information and guidance on applying priority of service for eligible foster youth [as defined in Commission rule §801.23(5)].

REFERENCES: Texas Labor Code §302.014, and Texas Family Code, Chapter 264, direct the Commission to give priority of service to state qualified veterans and foster youth, respectively.

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

BACKGROUND: The Board adopted HWD-004-06 in February of 2006 to support the implementation of giving priority for services to veterans in all programs administered by the Board through contracts. The term "priority of service" means that an equally qualified, covered person shall be given priority over a non-covered person for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services.

PROCEDURES: Contractors must ensure that covered persons are afforded priority for employment and training services, if they meet the existing eligibility provisions.

To reinforce the priority of service provisions under the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 and to implement state priority of service provisions, Boards must ensure that federal qualified veterans and spouses, state qualified veterans, and eligible foster youth who are entitled to receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals in the receipt of workforce services are:

- determined eligible for priority at the initial point of contact; and
- notified of their entitlement to a priority.

Priority Order

Contractors must ensure that the following order of priority for workforce services is applied.

1. Federal qualified veterans and spouses continue to receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals in the receipt of services funded in whole or in part by DOL, in accordance with 38 U.S.C. §4215.

Note: Among federal qualified veterans and spouses, the following priority order applies:

- a. Special disabled veterans
 - b. Disabled veterans
 - c. Eligible veterans
 - d. Other eligible individuals
2. State qualified veterans receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals in the receipt of employment assistance or job training services funded in whole or in part by state funds, in accordance with Texas Government Code §657.002(a).
 3. Eligible foster youth receive priority over all other equally qualified individuals—except federal qualified veterans and spouses, and state qualified veterans as defined in Chapter 801—in the receipt of federal and state-funded services.

Determining Priority of Service

Contractors must ensure that individuals receiving priority of service over all other equally qualified individuals meet existing program eligibility requirements.

Foster Youth

When providing workforce services to foster youth—regardless of the funding source—Boards must use the following definition of *eligible foster youth* to apply priority of service.

Eligible Foster Youth

- Current foster youth—A youth, age 14 or older, who is receiving substitute care services under the managing conservatorship of DFPS, including youth residing in private foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, juvenile correctional institutions, and relative care; or
- Former foster youth—A youth up to 23 years of age, who formerly was under the managing conservatorship of DFPS, until:
 - a court transferred the conservatorship;
 - the youth was legally emancipated (i.e., the youth’s minority status was removed by a court); or
 - the youth attained 18 years of age.

Contractors must ensure that workforce services are prioritized and targeted for youth transitioning out of the foster care system and for former foster youth. Furthermore, where

feasible, Contractors must ensure that foster youth who need housing are referred for short-term housing stays.

Priority of Service for Support Services

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

Implementing priority of service for the majority of support services is not difficult; however, because child care services are unique, the following additional guidance is provided.

Child Care

Boards must be aware that the priority for child care services for federal qualified veterans and spouses, state qualified veterans, and eligible foster youth is contingent upon the availability of Commission child care funds. Boards with a waiting list for Commission-funded child care services must not discontinue care for a child currently enrolled in child care services in order to serve a child of a state qualified veteran or a child of a foster youth.

Commission rule §809.43(a)(2) provides that the following populations are served subject to the availability of funds, and include, in priority order:

1. children who need to receive protective services child care as referenced in §809.49;
2. children of a qualified veteran as defined in §801.23;
3. children of an eligible foster youth as defined in §801.23;
4. children of teen parents as defined in §809.2; and
5. children with disabilities as defined in §809.2.

ACTIONS REQUIRED: Contractors must develop procedures to ensure that appropriate staff complies with the requirements in this HWB Policy.

POLICY CONTINUATION: This Change adds Foster Youth for Priority of Service following Veterans as described in HWD 004-06. All of HWD 004-06 and related procedures promulgated by the Board continue in effect and are not modified by this change.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This policy is effective immediately upon approval by the Heart of Texas Workforce Board.

Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts

A. Fiscal Agent

The entity responsible for the 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 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 Local Plan, policies, and procedures, including any subsequent modifications, issuances, and directives as the Board in its sole discretion may institute.

B. Sub-Grants and Contracts

The Board is responsible for carrying out 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 as outlined in the Board's Retention and Access Policy.

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 the 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 purchases 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 the Board's website: 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 are 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 and 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

For the Board's Contract Year (BCY) 25, the Board will utilize the twenty-seven (27) performance measures contracted with the Texas Workforce Commission to measure performance. Those measures are as shown below. These measures encompass the 15 required WIOA Adult/DW/Youth outcome measures, 3 career and training WIOA-based measures, 3 reemployment services and eligibility assessment measures, 2 Texas talent assistance (TTA) measures, 2 childcare, 1 choices full engagement rate, and 1 claimant reemployment within 10 weeks. As of the development of this board plan, the WIOA measures have BCY 26 targets, but the others do not.

The Texas Workforce Commission provides all Boards with information about the development of performance measures, including methods and formulas used to reach performance goals. The Board provides information to the Texas Workforce Commission on performance targets, including relevant local events and wisdom that might result in a deviation from historic performance numbers. The 27 performance measures noted above are listed below.

- WIOA Measures
 - Adult
 - Employed Q2

- Median Earnings Q2
 - Employed Q4
 - Credential Rate
 - Measurable Skills Gain
- Dislocated Worker
 - Employed Q2
 - Median Earnings Q2
 - Employed Q4
 - Credential Rate
 - Measurable Skills Gain
- Youth
 - Employed/Enrolled Q2
 - Median Earnings Q2
 - Employed/Enrolled Q4
 - Credential Rate
 - Measurable Skills Gain
- Career and Training WIOA-Based Measures
 - Active Job Seeker New Employment Connection Rate
 - Maintaining Employment Connection Rate
 - Credential Rate – All C&T Participants
- Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) Measures
 - RESEA Outreach and Scheduling Rate
 - RESEA Initial Appointment Rate
 - RESEA Failure to Report Rate
- Choices Full Engagement Rate
- Claimant Reemployment within 10 Weeks
- Number of Employers Receiving Texas Talent Assistance (TTA)
- Successful Texas Talent Assistance Rate (STTAR)
- Child Care
 - Average Children Per Day
 - Initial Job Search Success Rate

In addition to the state contracted measures, the Board utilizes twenty (20) local performance measures in the contract with the Contracted Services Provider to measure Integrated Outcomes, Employer Engagement/Assistance, Average Wage at Placement, Child Care, Youth, and program success.

Part 9: Training and Services

A. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)

Training Services through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs): The Board provides training services for eligible WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker customers through Individual Training

Accounts (ITAs). ITAs allow customers to access targeted training programs that align with the Board's targeted occupations list and support participants in developing skills needed for employment. Training funds are managed carefully to maximize assistance for eligible individuals while ensuring responsible use of program resources.

All approved ITA funded trainings, must (1) be a program listed on the Texas Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), (2) or have been procured by the Board, (3) or be an approved out-of-state training provider, and (4) conform to the costs provided by the institution as listed in the ETPL. The Board will follow the guidance provided in TWC Workforce Development Letters as written by TWC. In addition, the Board will also follow its policies regarding ITAs.

Contracts for Training Services with Contracts (if used): Contracts for training services will be coordinated following the Board's Policy HWD 007-99 - Change 12, which 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. Training providers that are on the list of eligible providers (ETPL), have been procured by the Board or are approved out-of-state training providers may redeem ITAs for payment.

While ITAs are the primary method for delivering training, the Board may use contracts for specialized training needs that are not effectively met through individual accounts. These contracts are coordinated with ITAs to avoid overlapping and are used in scenarios where group training can provide more efficient or specialized instruction that benefits multiple customers simultaneously. Contracted training is aligned with high demand fields and supports specific needs within the workforce area.

Ensuring Informed Customer Choice: The Board emphasizes informed customer choice by providing detailed information on available training options and supporting tools that guide customers in making decisions:

- **Comprehensive Assessment:** All ITA customers undergo an objective comprehensive assessment based on specialized testing, in-depth interviewing, and evaluation of barriers to employment to evaluate customer interests and aptitudes for specific careers. The assessment process ensures commitment, readiness for program demands, and alignment of program to strengths, skills, and interests of the customer
- **Educational Readiness Testing:** If needed, CASAS or TABE assessments are administered to verify a customer's basic literacy skills and their readiness for training.

- **ETP Information and Labor Market Insights:** Case managers share details on training programs available through the ETP list, including program costs, school locations, and course descriptions. They also provide labor market information (LMI) to discuss job prospects, wage expectations, and demand for specific occupations. This data-driven approach helps customers make informed choices about training programs with strong employment prospects
- **Individual Employment Plan:** In consultation with the case manager, an Individual Employment Plan is developed with the customer. 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 customer
- **Customer-Driven Decision Making:** Ultimately, the Board respects each customer's choice in selecting a training program. Case managers provide comprehensive information and guidance, but final decisions are left to the customer to ensure alignment with their career interests and goals.

B. ITA Limitations

The Board requires that all approved training programs on the Statewide Eligible Training Provider List adhere to the costs provided by the institution on that system and ITAs will not exceed the costs listed. If 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, community colleges located outside of the WDA, or procured training will be limited by the following chart.

Board Imposed ITA Limits: 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 ITA Limits: Contractors may 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 Limits

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

The limits described above only apply to community colleges located outside of our Board area, and proprietary schools. There are four local community colleges, McLennan Community College, TSTC Waco, Hill College and Navarro College.

Exceptions to ITA Limitations and Process for Requesting an Exception: The Board's Contract Manager (Board staff) may grant a waiver to these ITA maximums if both the 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

The process of requesting an exception requires a written request submitted to the Board's Contract Manager.

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 evolve 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 continue to 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 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 (ETPS) 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 enter 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 Waco Tribune, the Groesbeck Journal, the Fairfield Reporter, the Teague Chronicle, the Hillsboro Reporter, and The Mexia News, and on the Board's website and social media.
- 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 Thursday, December 26, 2024, to provide an opportunity for comment by members of the public, including representatives of business, labor organizations, and education.
- Comments will be received until 5 pm on Friday, January 10, 2025.
- No public comments were received.

Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements

Local Board Plan Requirements: State law requires local workforce development boards (local board) to adopt a plan that “sets broad goals and objectives for all workforce development programs in the local area consistent with statewide goals, objectives, and performance standards,”¹ as outlined in the workforce system strategic plan, Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031.

The Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council) reviews each board plan to ensure that local goals and objectives are consistent with the workforce system strategic plan. Under state law and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Council is charged with recommending the local board plans to the Governor for consideration and approval.

Local board plan responses must demonstrate alignment with the workforce system plan and, therefore, require both summary information and citations to the strategies and initiatives that advance progress towards the workforce system goals in Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031.

System Goals and Objectives

The system goals drive accelerated action by system partners in service to Texas employers, learners, partners, and those with policy and planning responsibilities, as follows:

- Employers System Goal: Accelerate the delivery of relevant education and training programs to meet the demand of employers.
- Learners System Goal: Accelerate the expansion of and access to work-based skill and knowledge acquisition to respond to the needs of learners.
- Partners System Goal: Accelerate the development and use of models to support and build system partners’ capacity, responsiveness, continuous improvement, and decision-making.
- Policy and Planning Goal: Accelerate the availability of relevant workforce, education, and other data sets and the use of applied analytics to evaluate program outcomes to respond to the needs of policy makers and planners.

1. Employers Goal – Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs

The Board’s activities, initiatives, and processes that accelerate the delivery of relevant education and training programs to meet employer needs are outlined below:

Upskilling and Reskilling Programs for Middle-Skill Workers: The Board will continue to focus its efforts on meeting employer needs through its activities and initiatives that address the upskilling

and reskilling of middle-skill workers. The Board deploys the following strategies with partners to ensure availability and promote the attainment of industry-recognized certifications, licenses, and degrees in high-demand occupations.

Collaboration with Employers: The Board's Business Solutions team works with employers to develop tailored service strategies that are relevant to the current economy and labor market, and that prioritize speed, efficiency, and access to upskilling and reskilling programs. Some of these strategies include:

- 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 into high-demand occupations.
- Promotion of registered apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeship, and incumbent worker programs, as appropriate. That includes connecting employers with the 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.

The Board also maintains relationships with community colleges, technical institutions, local alliances, and vocational academies that allow the Business Solution team to facilitate solutions to industry-specific needs in outreach, recruitment, screening, hiring, and training for all employers. The corresponding Board Plan page number that details the Board's collaboration with employers is found on pages 35 and 36.

Coordination with AEL: The Board coordinates and collaborates with the Adult Education Literacy for the Heart of Texas (AEL provider) and with Communities in Schools for the Heart of Texas (CIS), the Board's youth service provider to help individuals to transition into employment through integrated education and training programs. These strategies include:

- Working with Adult Education and Literacy for the Heart of Texas (AEL) 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.
- Provide presentations regarding targeted occupations and the relevant training needed to ensure a well-trained workforce in the area.
- 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 by providing in- and out-of-school youth with earning credentials, certificates, and licenses that meet the needs of employers.

In addition, the Board works 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 into high-demand occupations. The corresponding Board Plan page number that details the Board's collaboration with AEL and CIS is found on pages 46-47.

Attainment of Short-Term Credentials: The Board's initiatives and programs promote the attainment of short-term credentials. Initiatives include the Board's:

- Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3) pre-apprenticeship training that helps to build a skilled workforce for employers. This initiative is in partnership with the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers Local Union 72, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 529, and McLennan Community College. This past June, 14 individuals earned the MC3 certificate of completion along with continuing education credit hours from McLennan Community College. Ten of those graduates are now working in a field related to the program and of those 10, three have become 1st year apprentices while the other seven participants will be interviewing with local unions to become 1st year apprentices in January.
- YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) High School Student Welding Internship for welding juniors and seniors in partnership with Waco ISD's Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy. Through this internship, high school students gained valuable hands-on experience with leading employers in the region, earned a dual college credit through Texas State Technical College, and earned an American Welding Society industry-recognized credential.

The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail the Board's initiatives are found on pages 11, 12, 23, 31 and 45.

Populations that require Supportive Services: The Board 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. Populations that require supportive services to improve program completion, certification or attainment of short-term credentials and employment include veterans and their spouses, Individuals with disabilities, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, AEL customers and in-school and out-of-school youth. The corresponding Board Plan page number that details these populations can be found on pages 29 and 50.

Use of Data to Track Enrollment and Outcomes: The Board relies on accurate, relevant data to track enrollment and outcomes. The Board will use TWC's WorkinTexas Case Management System (WITCMS) to track enrollment and outcomes. The corresponding Board Plan page number that details the use of data can be found on page 42.

2. Learners Goal – Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship

The Board is committed to expanding work-based experiences, including apprenticeships to accelerate skills and knowledge acquisition that improves system outcomes for learners.

Work-Based Learning: The Board provides work-based learning opportunities through partnership with system stakeholders and partners. These include:

- Partnering with CIS and Vocational Rehabilitation to provide the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program that provides work-based learning opportunities for youth with disabilities.
- Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3) pre-apprenticeship training that helps to build a skilled workforce for employers. This initiative is in partnership with the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers Local Union 72, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union 529, and McLennan Community College.
- YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) High School Student Welding Internship for welding juniors and seniors in partnership with Waco ISD's Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy. Through this internship, high school students gained valuable hands-on experience with leading employers in the region, earn a dual college credit through Texas State Technical College, and earn an American Welding Society industry-recognized credential.

The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail the work-based learning activities can be found on pages 9, 10, 13, 31 and 44.

The Expansion of the Employer Network and Partnerships: Last year the Texas Education Agency (TEA) awarded the Board a Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners, to expand career pathways and K-12 work-based learning in high-demand, high-wage occupations within our 6-county workforce development area. The Regional Convener Pathways project aims to identify, train,

and designate Regional Conveners in each of Texas' 28 workforce development areas to oversee the creation, execution, and supervision of high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries in each region. As part of the Regional Convener Pathways project.

Along with the Board's partners, Hill College, Navarro College, McLennan Community College, and Educational Service Center Region 12, will serve as a regional convener that will oversee the development, implementation, and monitoring of the regional strategy for high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries across an entire workforce development area. Part of that regional strategy is to expand opportunities and knowledge of work-based learning activities in the Heart of Texas region through employer engagement. Further, through its Tri-Agency Regional Convener grant, the Board seeks to develop a website that will focus on information pertaining to career pathways and work-based learning opportunities that center around recognized postsecondary credentials. The corresponding Board Plan page number that details the use of data can be found on pages 10, 25, and 30.

3. Partner Goal – Alignment to Support Career Pathways

To build the Board's capacity, responsiveness, continuous improvement, and decision-making to identify credentials of value and streamline and clarify existing career pathways as well as increase alignment between secondary and post-secondary technical programs:

The Board identifies 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 Lightcast is the starting point for data analysis on targeted industries, in-demand occupations, and targeted industries. Information and local wisdom are 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 and any available career pathways offered in the region.

The Board partners with regional education providers including McLennan Community College, Hill College, Navarro College, Texas State Technical College, Baylor University, Education Service Center 12, 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 identify critical career pathways.

The Board also leverages its relationship with Communities in Schools of the Heart of Texas (CIS) to improve awareness about career pathways and co-enrollment for youth. CIS provides education and social support to students throughout the service region. CIS is the contracted

service WIOA youth provider, and offers dropout recovery/retention, employment, and training services to eligible in-school and out-of-school youth in a manner that fully integrates with the operation of the CIS program which allows for the continuity of messaging regarding career pathways.

Furthermore, Board will continue to facilitate the development of career pathways through its Tri-Agency Regional Conveners grant that is funded by Texas Education Agency. The Board and its partners, Hill College, Navarro College, McLennan Community College, and the Educational Service Center Region 12, will serve as a regional convener that will oversee the development, implementation, and monitoring of the regional strategy for high-quality career and education pathways into targeted industries across an entire workforce development area. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail the alignment to support career pathways can be found on pages 14 and 30.

4. Policy and Planning Goal – Relevant Data Sets

The Board’s activities, initiatives, or processes that support the availability and coordination of relevant workforce, education, and employment data to evaluate program outcomes to respond to the needs of policy makers and planners to:

Engage with Childcare Providers and Employers: The establishment of on-site or near-site, high quality childcare facilities and expanding Texas Rising Star certifications are initiatives that the Board supports. Recognizing the diverse needs of working families, the Board plans to recruit and support child care providers that offer flexible scheduling and care during non-traditional hours. This ensures that parents with varying work schedules can still access reliable child care and that employers have access to an available workforce.

The Board plans to continue to support the development of a robust child care system that supports families in achieving economic independence and stability while ensuring that children receive safe and high-quality care and early education. The Board uses multiple strategies to increase awareness of early learning as a workforce and economic development tool. Engaging Board members, CEOs, businesses, child care directors, and community foundations, are part of this outreach and communication process. The Board has led the state in the percentage of Texas Rising Star (TRS) programs and the percentage of children participating in a TRS rated program. These numbers fluctuate, but it demonstrates our commitment to quality early learning. Our Quality Improvement team is tenured and passionate about increasing the quality of child care and raising awareness about the Texas Rising Star program and the opportunities available to strengthen the child care industry. The corresponding Board Plan page number that details the engagement with employers and child care providers can be found on page 47.

Identifying and Quantifying Quality Outcomes: The Board collaborates with employers to identify certifications, licenses, and credentials aligned with high-demand industries. Staff use this feedback, along with labor market information to identify target occupations, with a high likelihood of successful employment outcomes and self-sufficient wages. The Board conducts

ongoing data analysis to identify and quantify quality outcomes to improve its delivery of services to local businesses. Regular analysis conducted includes:

- Monthly review of Ad Hoc reports generated by TWC's Tableau and WorkinTexas to identify current users of workforce program services, previous users and potential new employers. Through continued review of these reports, the Board 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) released 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

As part of the Board's contracted performance measures, staff track credential attainment, employment placement rates, and median wages post-training to measure the success of workforce programs and improve decision-making. In addition, the Board will begin additional analysis on training outcomes and certification data to align with the strategic goals of the Board's Tri-Agency Regional Convener plan. As part of this process, staff will explore additional opportunities to collect outcomes data. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail identifying and quantifying outcomes can be found on pages 7, 38, 58 and 59.

Strategic Opportunities

Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031 envisions a collaborative workforce system capable of accelerating the delivery of workforce programs, services, and initiatives to meet the needs of a thriving economy. The strategic opportunities focus system partners on three critical success factors that will lead to broad achievement of the system plan goals and objectives.

Strategic Opportunity 1 - Employer Engagement

Employers are central to the economic vitality of the region and of the state of Texas. The Board will continue to strengthen its partnerships with stakeholders to meet the needs of employers in the region. As a known leader in the region for serving employers, the Board's Business Solutions team (BSU) works with entities like the Texas Veterans Commission's and Vocational

Rehabilitation' staff, chambers of commerce, economic development entities, and other organizations to coordinate outreach efforts that reduce the number of asks from employers. 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 because of their expertise. Thus, the Board is better positioned to have a greater understanding of business needs, be able to communicate those needs to other stakeholders, and as a result coordinate efforts to meet the needs of employers.

Coordinated efforts to gain more insights from employers include participation in the Heart of Texas regional conveners grant that was awarded by the Texas Education Agency and is a part of the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network. The Board's Business Solutions team regularly makes visits to employers in the region as well as attend multiple networking events to gain additional insights from employers. The Board also conducts community input meetings and employer interviews to engage and gain further information on the needs of businesses in our region. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail identifying and quantifying outcomes can be found on pages 10, 25 and 35.

Strategic Opportunity 2 – Improving Outcomes for Individuals with Barriers to Employment

The Board has made significant strides in improving outcomes for individuals with barriers to employment through its collaborative and partnership efforts. Examples of these efforts include:

- Hosting the annual Make Your Winning Move Hiring Fair and Suit Up Event. This hiring event provides an opportunity for previously incarcerated individuals to meet with employers who are open to hiring this population. Days prior to the hiring fair, the Board hosts a Suit Up Event at the Adult Probation office in McLennan County. This suit up event allows individuals to obtain an interview outfit that is free of charge to prepare them for the hiring fair.
- Hosting of the annual Walk-N-Roll Hiring Fair: This hiring fair focuses on connecting individuals with disabilities to hiring employers. The Board partners with VR to outreach this population. Because of the Board's established relationship with VR, the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program is successful in helping youth with disabilities to gain work experience. This past summer, 41 youth were referred to the SEAL program and 22 sites were secured. The Board's Business Solutions team has integrated VR staff into its team meetings. This integration allows VR to learn about the employment needs of businesses in the region as well as giving the Business Solutions team direct access to this talent pool that leads to referrals to hiring businesses.

- The Board's efforts around its YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) initiative provide improved career opportunities for youth. The Board's YES! Expo, the premier career exploration for youth in the Heart of Texas, provides high school students with the opportunity to explore hands-on careers with leading businesses and college programs in the region. One high school student stated, "I never knew these types of careers existed" and another stated, "I like that I can talk directly with representatives from different companies." Providing access and hands-on exploration for youth is another example of how the Board is committed to helping opportunity youth and foster youth to gain knowledge about careers that they never knew existed.
- Public Access Points is the Board's collaboration with the region's 28 libraries and with the Waco Housing Authority to provide individuals with barriers access to workforce services. The Board understands that many individuals with transportation barriers seek employment assistance and resources at their nearest library or housing authority. Through partnership, the Board provides these public access points with printed information about workforce services for their patrons/customers. Each year, the Board hosts its Public Access Workshop to inform libraries and the housing authority about workforce services and how these services can help their customers.

These efforts demonstrate promising practices in supportive services models and outcomes that demonstrate success. As the Board continues to strive to be a high-performing board, the Board will continue to seek innovative methods of delivering and providing access to services for all customer groups, including veterans, youth, and individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, job seekers, parents, and employers. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that detail identifying and quantifying outcomes can be found on pages 10 and 11.

Strategic Opportunity 3 – Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions

The Board relies on accurate, relevant data to guide investment decisions and support regional partners. The Texas Workforce Commission's Labor Market data as well as data from sources such as Lightcast help to identify target occupations for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training, provide labor market insights to educators, assist students with career exploration, and support economic development and chamber of commerce efforts. In addition, performance data provided by TWC also aids in analyzing and identifying areas for service delivery improvement and operational efficiency.

Using relevant and accurate data, the Board has strategically implemented and funded initiatives that have led to program participant credential attainment and employment. For example, data demonstrated the need for a technically skilled workforce thus through grant funding, the Board and its partners:

- Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3) pre-apprenticeship training that helps to build a skilled workforce for employers. This initiative is in partnership with the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers Local Union 72, Plumbers and Pipefitters Local Union

529, and McLennan Community College. This past June, 14 individuals earned the MC3 certificate of completion along with continuing education credit hours from McLennan Community College. Ten of those graduates are now working in a field related to the program and of those 10, three have become 1st year apprentices while the other seven participants will be interviewing with local unions to become 1st year apprentices in January

- YES! (Youth Employment Solutions) High School Student Welding Internship for welding juniors and seniors in partnership with Waco ISD's Greater Waco Advanced Manufacturing Academy. Through this internship, high school students gained valuable hands-on experience with leading employers in the region, earned a dual college credit through Texas State Technical College, and earned an American Welding Society industry-recognized credential.

The Board will continue to use data to guide its efforts in identifying and targeting strategic investments to improve system performance to meet the workforce needs of the region. The corresponding Board Plan page numbers that outline strategic opportunities can be found on pages 9 – 12.