

Texas Workforce Commission

Program Year 2019 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Annual Report, Titles I and III

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Introduction

Comparability Assurance

The Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) annual report and report elements are consistent with the federal reporting guidance that allows state-to-state comparison.

Vision

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

Focus on Integration

Historically, Texas has been a leader in workforce integration. The Texas workforce development system includes TWC; the Texas Workforce Investment Council; multiple education, nonprofit, and economic development partners; 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards); and more than 180 comprehensive and affiliate Workforce Solutions Offices that provide locally customized services to address the needs of each region of the state. This comprehensive system continues to refine and improve Texas' integrated structure to operate in the most efficient and effective manner possible, while ensuring that the workforce system remains both flexible and adaptable. Improved access and efficiency, along with value-added services, are among the many benefits customers receive from an integrated system. One such improvement to the Texas workforce system was initiated in Program Year 2016 (PY'16), when TWC began integrating and supporting the delivery of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to help individuals with disabilities gain skills to prepare them for sustainable employment. Through June 30, 2020, 14 Boards had completed integration of VR services within their local workforce development areas (workforce areas), and VR services had colocated in 82 Workforce Solutions Offices in 27 of the state's 28 workforce areas.

COVID-19 Response

Following the presidential declaration of COVID-19 as a national emergency on March 13, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for Texas. Over the course of the first month, many "nonessential" businesses and services were closed, causing employers to lay off workers and/or reduce hours. During this time, the number of weekly unemployment insurance claims filed rose from an average of 13,000 to 158,000. Within a month, more than a million Texans had filed for unemployment, exceeding the 750,000 total claims filed in 2019.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, TWC has aimed to provide continuous service to underemployed and unemployed Texans in need of workforce-related assistance. This has involved a shift from in-person to virtual services. All Local Workforce Development Boards in Texas are now offering all WIOA services virtually, and they continue to offer in-person or curbside service delivery for some services.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Waivers

The Texas workforce system and its customers have benefited from the US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration's (DOLETA) authority to waive certain statutory and regulatory provisions. These waivers have provided TWC and Boards with the flexibility to be more innovative and efficient in delivering workforce services.

On September 20, 2018, DOLETA approved the following five Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) waivers for Texas for PY'18 and PY'19 (July 1, 2018, through June 30, 2020):

Out-of-School Youth Expenditure Requirement

This waiver waives the requirement under WIOA §129(a)(4) and 20 CFR §681.410 that the state and workforce areas spend not less than 75 percent of youth funds to provide services to out-of-school youth (OSY). It reduces the expenditure requirement to not less than 50 percent, giving workforce areas the flexibility to direct more funds to in-school youth (ISY) as necessary to meet local and statewide conditions. The waiver provides Boards the flexibility to serve the participants most in need in their region. This flexibility is especially beneficial in rural areas, where there can be a larger ISY population and thus more need for services to prevent dropouts and encourage postsecondary enrollments. In PY'17, 13 percent of youth participants statewide were ISY. By PY'19, ISY participation was up to 15 percent. The state submitted a renewal request for this waiver with its WIOA Combined State Plan for PY'20-'23, and the waiver request was conditionally approved.

Use of Individual Training Accounts for In-School Youth

This waiver waives the requirement under the WIOA rule at 20 CFR §681.550, which limits the use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for youth participants to OSY ages 16 to 24. It allows TWC to extend the use of ITAs to ISY, thus permitting Boards to serve ISY in the workforce area while maintaining priority of service for OSY. Use of this flexibility has been limited but nonetheless critically valuable. In 2019, 12 Boards developed plans to implement programs that would use this waiver to fund dual-credit or career and technical education (CTE) training for ISY through ITAs or to engage with youth in need of financial assistance who would otherwise be ineligible through other channels. The state submitted a renewal request for this waiver with its WIOA Combined State Plan for PY'20-'23, and the waiver request was conditionally approved.

Local Performance Accountability Flexibility

This limited waiver from WIOA §116(c) pertaining to local performance accountability measures for Subtitle B provides TWC with greater flexibility when contracting performance measures with Boards. This allows TWC to promote further integration of services within Workforce Solutions Offices. The state submitted a renewal request for this waiver with its WIOA Combined State Plan for PY'20-'23, and the waiver request was approved.

Eligible Training Provider Performance Reports

This waiver waives WIOA §116(d)(4) and 20 CFR §677.230(a)(5) to allow eligible training providers to collect and report performance data for WIOA-funded participants only. TWC chose not to implement the flexibility allowed by this waiver and did not seek renewal of the waiver when submitting its WIOA Combined State Plan for PY'20–'23.

Reallocation of Local Funds

This waiver waives the provisions of WIOA §128(c)(3) and §133(c) and 20 CFR §683.140 regarding reallocation of WIOA funds among local areas, thus granting TWC flexibility in redistributing funds among workforce areas. The state submitted a renewal request for this waiver with its WIOA Combined State Plan for PY'20–'23, and the waiver request was approved.

Measuring Success

Evaluations

The three most important resources available to the Texas workforce system are its various customer groups, its employees (including TWC, Boards, and other workforce partners), and its data. TWC's Division of Operational Insight (DOI) was created to improve and leverage relevant data to advance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the system. DOI has the primary responsibility to conduct and coordinate evaluations of the Texas workforce system.

Although TWC uses a variety of statistical techniques to conduct evaluations, it has historically relied on quasi-experimental evaluation techniques. While less academic in approach than random controlled trials, quasi-experimental evaluations balance evaluation rigor with the ability to implement process changes and new initiatives quickly. However, TWC is now beginning to conduct random controlled trial-based evaluations as well. For example, we are exploring where machine learning and artificial intelligence can help identify strengths and weaknesses in our programs and ways in which we can maximize the former and minimize the latter.

Additionally, TWC uses a blend of Six Sigma, Lean, and Theory of Constraints called "Rapid Process Improvement" (RPI) to evaluate system processes, identify opportunities for improvement, and test the results of implemented changes. RPI is part of the core of TWC's approach to continuous improvement.

TWC is continuously exploring new ways to conduct evaluations. This past year TWC participated in the US Department of Labor (DOL) Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort with a team composed of staff members from multiple workforce programs, local representatives, and DOI. Additionally, a team from Texas, including two staff members in the TWC Workforce Development Division (WDD), was accepted into a fellowship program with Results for America, where the team will build evidence-based design in awarding and contracting certain grants.

TWC works with Boards, partners, and academic researchers on system evaluations and has participated in numerous federal studies such as the Workforce Investment Act Gold Standard Study. TWC is constantly looking for opportunities to engage with the Secretaries of Labor and Education on studies that complement and enhance the research priorities of TWC, Boards, and partners. Additionally, TWC believes that the webinars and regional calls held by DOL and the US Department of Education (ED) provide a valuable opportunity for coordinating such work and sharing results between the states and the departments. TWC anticipates being active in the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) community and sharing results and best practices with other community members.

Most recently, TWC participated in a new National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) Evaluation Learning Community. This 15-month project brought together research and evaluation experts from many states to develop and conduct high-value evaluation projects for adult education and literacy (AEL). In TWC's case, we evaluated the impact that different forms of intake and onboarding mechanisms used by AEL grantees had on measures such as length of

participation. The final report for the project is under internal review now and is anticipated to be published by the end of the year.

TWC has also recently been performing evaluation work related to the Vocational Rehabilitation program (VR). One such project involved a logistical regression analysis of neurodevelopmental participants served by the system. Results found that customers with autism had higher probabilities of successful outcomes even when the participant experienced other neurodevelopmental disabilities in addition to autism. At the request of the Rehabilitation Council of Texas, TWC conducted an evaluation relating to the impact of race or ethnicity on VR outcomes. The evaluation found that race and ethnicity did not have a significant effect on outcomes, but that disability type did. DOI staff has a variety of other VR-related projects in progress. DOI is working with WDD on a variety of evaluations for DOL-funded programs, although most of them are in the early stages. Two of these projects relate to the RESEA program. The first study is a quasi-experimental design addressing the impact of the program on benefit use and return to work. We anticipate the study to meet CLEAR's "moderate causality" standard. We are also working on the design for a randomized controlled trial in which we will test a new model for service delivery to RESEA participants through a second engagement of a specific course of services as well as co-enrollment in the WIOA Dislocated Worker program. We anticipate that this study will meet CLEAR's "high causality" standard.

Additionally, we are working on studies involving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), SNAP E&T, and the WIOA Adult program. The timing on these studies is extremely important, as many of the jobs that lower-income workers tend to occupy were in those industries hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, Texas is participating in the University of Richmond's Vocational Rehabilitation Return on Investment project. TWC is providing data to the study and serving in project advisory and steering roles.

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

Performance Accountability System

While true WIOA performance accountability was delayed at the national level as DOL and ED waited to obtain sufficient "Post-WIOA Begin" data, Texas completed its move to a WIOA-based performance accountability system in fall 2017, when TWC first reported WIOA-based program outcomes for state and local purposes.

TWC supplemented the WIOA statutory measures to address inconsistencies between the measures and the statutory vision. While WIOA emphasizes the importance of career pathways, its measures only recognize steps along a career pathway as success for former youth participants. From TWC's perspective, helping a veteran who recently transitioned out of the military or a worker looking for a mid-career change to identify a new career pathway and enroll in an education or training program that will lead to that new career constitutes an important

success, even if the workforce system is not funding the education or training. Therefore, TWC's supplemental WIOA-based measures look for either employment or educational enrollment in the quarters after exit.

Additionally, the statutory employment measures that focus on Quarter 4 (Q4) after exit vary little from the Q2 numbers. Furthermore, TWC questions whether the workforce system deserves recognition for an individual who exits but is unemployed and not enrolled in education for the first three quarters after exit, but then is employed or enrolled in Q4. While it is possible that the workforce system affected the result, it is just as likely that it did not.

Therefore, Texas has replaced and supplemented the statutory Employment (and Employment/Enrollment) Q4 measures with a measure that accounts for those who are employed or enrolled in Q2 and then analyzes what happens to the individuals in Q3 and Q4. This functions as a retention measure and disregards whether the individual was enrolled or employed in all three quarters or had a mixture of employment and enrollment across the three quarters. The measures build as follows:

- 1) Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post-Exit: What percent of exiters were employed or enrolled in Q2?
- 2) Median Earnings Q2 Post-Exit: How much were those employed in Q2 earning?
- 3) Employed/Enrolled Q2–Q4 Post-Exit: Of those employed or enrolled in Q2, what percent were also employed or enrolled in both Q3 and Q4?

TWC has yet to receive its year-end adjusted targets for PY'19, which makes it impossible to determine whether TWC met PY'19 performance expectations. When analyzing performance compared to the PY'19 performance targets that the agency initially negotiated with DOL for WIOA Title I and Title III Wagner-Peyser programs, there are several areas where performance came in under ideal levels, specifically regarding the Dislocated Worker Credential and Youth Credential. These are areas where TWC's data systems were recently modified and where TWC is working on developing new tools to help Boards identify those who will be in the Credential Rate measures that will ensure a more complete reporting system. TWC's common exit policy applies to Titles I and III and the Jobs for Veterans State Grant, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Disaster Dislocated Worker Grant (DDWG), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Employment and Training, and TANF. TWC would like the option to apply this policy to Titles II and IV in the future, when replacing the case management systems, in order to facilitate greater coordination of services across TWC's programs, should ED eventually allow this option.¹

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

TWC holds the Texas employer as a primary customer in the workforce system and agrees that measuring the success of services provided to employers is important for the state's economic success. However, TWC has raised concerns over all three measures that DOL and ED chose to pilot in response to information collection requests published by the departments to obtain input

¹ When TWC suggested that states have this option when commenting on proposed WIOA rule §677.150, the agency was told that the ED will explore the feasibility of the use of a common exit policy for its Title II and VR programs in the future.

on the proposals. The agency has continued to report all three measures to ensure that DOL and ED have complete data to use in evaluating the measures and, ideally, developing improvements.

Data Validation

TWC takes a four-pronged approach when validating data.

- TWC's case management system uses data validation code to ensure consistent data collection. In this system, field values must meet the required Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL).
- TWC's Subrecipient Monitoring Department (SRM) conducts data validation testing for all Boards. Beginning in September 2019, in coordination with TWC's Regulatory Integrity Division's Business Support group, SRM developed a dedicated database to capture testing results while allowing TWC to generate testing outcomes by Board area.
- DOI, TWC's reporting branch, performs error-checking audits designed to conform with DOL reporting requirements.
- Additionally, as part of TWC's data validation practices, the agency maintains a case management system with internal data integrity (DINT) functions. This function provides local system partners with the ability to make error corrections to data entries in the system, while enabling TWC to validate the corrections and approve or invalidate them based on standardized procedures. The DINT process is engaged when edits or corrections are submitted for system entries made in the previous quarter plus 20 days, effectively giving Boards 20 days after the previous quarter to make edits or corrections without the need to submit a DINT request, after which time all previous quarter entries require validation and approval by TWC's Workforce Automation department.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, SRM was able to evaluate only 12 Boards between September 2019 and March 2020. Following the governor's COVID-19 disaster proclamation, a moratorium was placed on travel. Between March 2020 and August 2020, data validation audits at the Workforce Solutions Offices ceased. SRM implemented remote data validation audits in September 2020, which is due to continue through December 2020. The remote data validation audit process and travel moratorium will be re-evaluated before January 2021; however, SRM is prepared to provide remote data validation audits through Fiscal Year 2021.

Activities Provided with Funds Reserved by the Governor

TWC uses governor's reserve statewide funding in conjunction with TANF funds, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act State Leadership funding, and other funding, where feasible and appropriate, to encourage innovation in workforce areas through grants to Boards, institutions of higher education, community-based organizations, and other eligible entities. TWC prioritizes programs that assist specific populations and initiatives, including veterans, youth, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs.

The following activities were undertaken in whole or in part with WIOA funds reserved by the governor:

Veterans Initiatives

College Credit for Heroes

This program maximizes college credits awarded to veterans and service members for their military experience by developing streamlined degree paths and workforce certifications to expedite their transition into the Texas workforce. The College Credit for Heroes (CCH) online portal allows veterans and active-duty service members to request evaluations of credit to be used at colleges and universities throughout Texas. From its launch in 2012 through PY' 18, the portal received approximately 43,000 requests for evaluation. On August 31, 2019, the portal was closed, as many colleges and universities have developed local evaluation and credit-award programs. TWC now maintains a web-based list of participating CCH institutions and assists in connecting veterans and transitioning service members to the schools of their choice.

Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative

TWC conducted a competitive procurement to solicit applications for the provision of services to hard-to-serve veterans who have one or more barriers to employment, such as homelessness; a history of substance abuse; physical, mental, or learning disabilities; post-traumatic stress disorder; ex-offender status; or recent discharge from military duty. One grantee, American GI Forum, was awarded WIOA statewide funds and then implemented the program in San Antonio, Houston, the Dallas/Fort-Worth metro area, and El Paso.

The Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative is designed to:

- Outreach hard-to-serve veterans who are not currently being served through Workforce Solutions Offices;
- address employment barriers faced by hard-to-serve veterans; and
- reintegrate hard-to-serve veterans into meaningful employment.

Under the guidance of a case manager, employment challenges are addressed and resources are accessed to help veterans overcome challenges to employment. Veterans benefit from a range of services, including:

- assessments;
- job development and job placement;

- individual case management services, including guidance, encouragement, and resources; and
- support services such as transportation; rent and utility assistance; mental health assistance, including clinical counseling; wheelchairs, crutches, and medical beds; food assistance; and financial assistance.

For the period of February 2019 to January 2020, the project provided 421 veterans with assessment and enrolled 335 into the program. Of those enrolled, 182 successfully gained employment. The current grant runs from March 1, 2020, through February 28, 2021.

Veterans Network

TWC awarded two grants to community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop networks of organizations whose missions include providing services and support to veterans, other CBOs, the Texas Veterans Commission, and other entities and to create opportunities to share referral and service information that will allow for coordination of services over large areas of the state, regardless of the community in which veterans seek services.

Youth Initiatives

Teacher Externships

TWC supports externships for middle school and high school teachers to allow them to learn firsthand about the skills required for in-demand occupations. These externships allow teachers to better understand in-demand careers in their local economy and to convey to students the array of opportunities available to them. More than 2,500 teachers have participated in the program since 2015.

Texas Science Careers Consortium/Texas Science and Engineering Fair (TXSEF)

This science and engineering fair is a competition for state middle school and high school science fair winners to showcase their research projects in STEM fields.

Governor's Challenge Camp

The Governor's Science and Technology Champions' Academy provides a STEM-related one-week residential camp for the winners of the TXSEF. In PY'19, 44 TXSEF champions attended the academy, which provided a number of activities in different focus areas including Drones, Hardware Hacking, Sea Monsters Unearthed, and Nanobots.

Youth Job Skills

WIOA identifies dropping out of high school as a significant barrier to employment. TWC concluded that workforce areas with high concentrations of youth dropouts and UI claimants under age 24 could benefit from additional funding to develop strategies to better provide the skills needed to obtain and retain employment. TWC distributed \$2.2 million to the five workforce areas that were designated as having the highest dropout rates and number of unemployment claimants under age 24. Eligible participants received services leading to the attainment of a secondary school diploma or equivalent credential, preparation for postsecondary educational and training opportunities, and academic or career and technical training, with the

goal of attaining recognized postsecondary credentials. These services have been designed to prepare participants for unsubsidized employment opportunities that align with in-demand occupations in their workforce areas.

Other Selected Initiatives

Military Family Support Program

TWC recognizes that military spouses are an important part of their communities, yet they often have limited employment, education, and training opportunities due to the constant relocation of their families. This program provides employment assistance to military spouses who are experiencing difficulty obtaining employment, appropriate licensure or certifications, or new skills to compete in the job market. Assistance includes job search help, skills assessment, labor market information, help with résumé writing and interviewing skills, and support training in in-demand occupations.

High-Demand Job Training Program

TWC supports collaborations between Boards and economic development corporations (EDCs) to provide high-demand occupational job training in workforce areas. This program supports Boards' partnerships with local EDCs to leverage local economic development sales taxes for high-demand job training. Boards collaborate with local EDCs and match their local economic development sales tax funds to jointly support the provision of such training.

In PY' 19, TWC awarded seven grants totaling \$582,469 to five Boards. Funds provided through these grants were used to enhance training, support services, and skills assessments and to enhance capacity by purchasing necessary equipment and supplies. These grants have improved immediate training opportunities for 989 participants and will continue to serve Texans to fill future in-demand jobs.

Building and Construction Trades

TWC provides grants to support workforce development training for Texas adults in high-demand occupations in building and construction trades such as carpentry, plumbing, and welding. For PY' 19, the four grantees enrolled a combined 320 trainees. Of the trainees, 266 are expected to complete the training and 204 are expected to obtain employment by grant completion.

Innovative Academies

Funds have gone toward supporting innovative partnerships among schools, employers, and colleges that provide new opportunities for students to acquire skills, certifications, and credentials in high-demand occupations in key industry clusters while allowing the students to earn college credit that results in an associate's degree or an articulated agreement toward a bachelor's degree. In PY' 18–'20, 21 schools participated in the program in industry clusters including Information and Computer Technology, Biotechnology and Life Sciences, Architecture and Construction, and Aerospace and Defense.

Rapid Response

TWC works to identify early warning indicators within the BIG data warehouse that will identify employers that might benefit from Rapid Response (RR) activities and specific short-time compensation services. TWC, Boards, and Workforce Solutions Office staff offer many services to help businesses and workers deal with the effects of layoffs and plant closures, including those that result from increased competition from imports, natural disasters, and other events. RR is a proactive strategy designed to respond quickly to layoffs and plant closures by coordinating services and providing immediate aid to affected companies and workers.

During PY'19, TWC offered RR services to 143,355 dislocated workers and 2,407 employers impacted by a layoff or closure. These employees were provided with information on unemployment insurance, job search, and available workforce services, including WIOA and the Trade Adjustment Assistance programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the RR program during the last four months of PY'19. During this time, there was an increase in the number of layoffs and closure notices submitted to TWC.

During

the pandemic, TWC has used RR funds to provide employers with technology and personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep their employees working, short-term compensation through the UI program, and customized training to ensure that companies can operate safely.

Women's Entrepreneurship Bootcamps

TWC provided Boards with \$175,000 in grants to develop and disseminate information and training on business-related topics to help eligible women and women veterans create, sustain, or expand their businesses in Texas. Bootcamp topics have included developing and growing a small business, financial literacy, contracting opportunities, workforce training opportunities, and the export of products and services.

National Dislocated Worker Grants

On April 16, 2020, in response to COVID-19, DOL awarded TWC \$12,000,000 in DDWG funds to expedite disaster relief services in Texas, and on September 29, TWC received an additional \$27,685,179, for a total of \$39,685,179 to serve a minimum of 2,042 Texans. DDWGs provide disaster-relief and humanitarian assistance employment, as well as career and training services and support services, as appropriate, to minimize the employment and economic impact of declared disasters and emergency situations in disaster-declared areas. Participants are placed in disaster relief employment opportunities while earning a wage and providing valuable services to thousands of Texans. Sixteen Boards were approved for funding.

Following Hurricane Harvey, which devastated the Texas coast in 2017, TWC worked in close partnership with DOL and Boards affected by the hurricane to use \$36,000,000 in DDWG funding to support Texas' recovery efforts. The grant is scheduled to end in December 2020 and will have served more than 3,500 Texans. The work through this grant has been considered a best practice by other states and was featured in a recent DOL webinar.

Promising Practices, Lessons Learned, and Success Stories

State Success Stories

Texas Industry Partnership

Through collaborations among Boards, private employers, and corporate foundations (partners), TWC has dedicated WIOA funds to address skill gaps and ensure that skilled workers will be available to meet regional industry needs. Collaborations must engage in allowable WIOA activities that support workforce development for the following six designated industry clusters: advanced technologies and manufacturing; aerospace and defense; biotechnology and life sciences; IT; petroleum refining and chemical products; and energy.

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

In PY'19, TWC awarded six grants totaling \$339,910 to six Boards. Funds provided through these grants were used to enhance training, support services, skills assessments, and cluster analysis. These grants have improved immediate training opportunities for 115 participants and will continue to serve Texans to meet future industry demands.

Local Success Stories

The Texas workforce system is strong and effective because of dedicated Board members, Workforce Solutions staff, and workforce partners who work hard to improve employment, education, and economic outcomes for the people they serve within their local communities. It is through their collective efforts that the Texas workforce system succeeds. Here are just a few of the many local success stories from around the state:

Empowered Women Empower Women

Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend (Coastal Bend) recognized the value of increasing the number of female entrepreneurs and businesswomen in the Coastal Bend workforce area. This year Coastal Bend hosted the Women Empowered Summit virtually, with the goal of motivating and inspiring attendees and enriching their professional lives. Sessions focused on money, business development, and branding. The event offered crucial support as businesses struggled to recover following the economic downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Helping Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Earn Recognized College Credit

Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast (Gulf Coast) created a program to help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) earn recognized college credit. The University of Houston–Downtown (UHD) and the Housing, Entrepreneurship And Readiness Training (H.E.A.R.T.) Program, operated by EPIC, Inc., developed a three-semester certification curriculum that included an internship as well as coursework focusing on career and life skill development. The program brought in 71 students, who were paid a minimum of \$10 an hour by the university and the employers.

Connecting Communities through Technology and Resources

Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas (Heart of Texas) worked with rural residents and lower-income families who faced challenges to accessing information, resources, and services that limit their ability to find and retain employment. This partnership provided public access points for job seekers to services that were critical for meeting workforce needs and supporting economic development in the workforce area, resulting in a successful solution to the problem.

Expanding Rural Service Delivery

Workforce Solutions Northeast Texas (Northeast Texas) collaborated with five area libraries to expand service delivery to rural parts of its workforce area. The libraries hosted career and employment sessions for area job seekers, and Workforce Solutions staff members administered the workshops, provided information on WorkInTexas.com and on job searches, résumé writing, interviewing skills, and other workforce services. This initiative allowed Northeast Texas to strengthen rural service delivery and establish new partnerships with local libraries.

Soft Skills to Enhance Employability

Workforce Solutions Cameron (Cameron) initially launched soft skills workshops to enhance the employability skills and marketability of job seekers. Over time, the job readiness workshops have expanded to local school districts, colleges, community-based organizations, and AEL providers in Cameron County. These workshops allow workers to better meet employers' job expectations, thus strengthening their possibilities for advancement and long-term job retention.

Innovative Approach to Training Benefits Child Care Professionals and Industry

Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas (West Central Texas) recognized that the extended length of time to complete Child Development Associate (CDA) classes at a local community college resulted in low course completion rates and even lower certification rates. West Central Texas worked with institutions to teach the CDA program as stand-alone classes taken individually for professional development or collectively to fulfill CDA requirements. This approach allowed teachers to start CDA classes immediately upon hire or drop from the program if necessary and return when able without repeating the entire program.

Discovering New Frontiers

Workforce Solutions Borderplex (Borderplex) partnered with El Paso Independent School District to host JOBCON, an annual career fair that provides high school students the opportunity to hear directly from professionals in desirable fields. This event helped students explore careers and network for opportunities in their own community. Because many rural students have the skills, interests, and values that employers often look for in new hires, an event that focuses on and highlights these assets further creates a sense of community and regional pride within rural areas. This year the event reached more than 3,000 students.

Elevating Economic and Human Potential through Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Gulf Coast made registered apprenticeship (RA) programs a focal point of its mission to elevate the economic and human potential of its workforce area by fulfilling the diverse needs of the

businesses and individuals served. Gulf Coast staff members engaged with more than 60 employers and organized or participated in numerous conferences that highlighted RA opportunities. Through the first quarter of 2019, Gulf Coast's efforts resulted in 20 new, expanded, or pending RA programs. To date, the programs have placed 335 individuals from disadvantaged groups into RA programs.

South Plains High-Demand Job Training Project

For the past five years, Workforce Solutions South Plains (South Plains) and the Large Business Collaborative, a coalition of economic development corporations and organizations in the region, have worked to provide guidance and monetary support to high school CTE programs and high demand jobs in the 49 independent school districts within the 15 counties served by South Plains. Together they created the South Plains High Demand Job Training Project, which provides high school CTE programs with high-value equipment such as welders, automotive lifts, and health-care simulators with the intention of encouraging CTE participants to go into high-demand careers in the workforce area. Since 2015, the project has contributed \$2,213,668 in equipment to 35 high schools in the South Plains. As a result, more than 4,000 students have been trained and have received recognized industry certifications and college credit. The project is seen as an asset to the community, as it has contributed to the local economy by training the future workforce to fill local high-growth, high-paying jobs.