

Texas Workforce Commission

Program Year 2021

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 in the global economy.

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 173 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. As of June 30, 2022, 18 Boards had completed integration of VR services within their local workforce development areas (workforce areas), and VR services had colocated in 97 Workforce Solutions Offices in all 28 of the state's workforce areas. TWC expects to complete the remaining 23 office integrations by Fiscal Year 2025 (FY'25).

COVID-19 Recovery

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. Within a month, more than 1 million Texans had filed for unemployment, exceeding the 750,000 total claims filed in 2019. TWC continues to play a significant role in supporting the state's recovery from the impacts of COVID-19. The agency is confident in its ability to succeed due to the state's strong resources, which include employers, workers, and diverse industry sectors. TWC is committed to ensuring that a readied and skilled workforce is available and will continue to design innovative initiatives to address the middle skills gap, health care staffing shortages, and other workforce challenges related to the pandemic.

As Texas recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and businesses reopen, Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims have dropped significantly over the last year. Table 1 allows for a fuller understanding of how UI claims changed over the past three program years.

UI Claimant Statistics for PY'19–PY'21

	Individuals Filing for UI	Individuals with an Initial UI Payment	Individuals Receiving UI Benefits
PY'19	2,993,885	2,219,689	2,631,575
PY'20	2,915,979	2,477,989	3,272,188
PY'21	914,595	540,346	1,010,325

Table 1: Relevant statistics regarding UI claimants for PY'19–PY'21

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 June 30, 2020, DOLETA approved the following three Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) waivers for Texas for PY'20 and PY'21 (July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2022).

Use of Individual Training Accounts for In-School Youth

This waiver removes the requirement under the WIOA rule at 20 CFR §681.550 that limits the use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for youth participants to out-of-school youth (OSY) ages 16 to 24. This allows TWC to extend the use of ITAs to in-school youth (ISY), thus permitting Boards to serve ISY in the workforce area while maintaining priority of service for OSY. Boards exercising this waiver have used ITAs to fund training for ISY enrolled in programs such as welding, nursing, HVAC, and business management. In PY'20, 30 percent of ISY enrolled in postsecondary training programs used ITAs to fund training. Boards view this waiver as an excellent opportunity to promote apprenticeship programs and the application of pre-apprenticeship standards, with a focus on nontraditional industries and occupations. The state submitted a renewal request for this waiver with its WIOA Combined State Plan Two-Year Modification for PY'20–PY'23, and the waiver request was conditionally approved through June 30, 2022.

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. Through the application of this waiver, TWC will increase the integration of services to customers, evaluate Boards more effectively—promoting accountability—and provide Boards with flexibility in implementing Workforce Solutions Offices services. This waiver provides TWC with continued administrative relief that will remove barriers to coenrollment and promote a more integrated case management system across multiple programs. 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 through June 30, 2022.

Reallocation of Local Funds

Addressing the provisions of WIOA §128(c)(3) and §133(c) and 20 CFR §683.140 regarding reallocation of WIOA funds among local areas, this waiver grants TWC flexibility in redistributing funds to workforce areas with the greatest need. 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 through June 30, 2022.

Measuring Success

Evaluations

The Texas workforce system's success depends on effectively serving its customer groups, engaging its employees (including TWC, Boards, and other workforce partners), and understanding its data. TWC's Information Innovation & Insight (I|3) Division leverages relevant data and transforms it into actionable information to advance the workforce system's overall efficiency and value.

TWC relies on a variety of analytical and statistical techniques to conduct evaluations, including quasi-experimental techniques and randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Although not as conclusive as RCTs, TWC frequently uses quasi-experimental study designs because they balance rigor with the ability to implement process changes and new initiatives quickly. Additionally, TWC is exploring how machine learning can identify strengths and weaknesses in its programs and suggest enhancements.

To translate evaluation results into systemic improvements and to measure success, TWC takes a business transformation approach that combines Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) (a blend of Six Sigma, Lean, and the Theory of Constraints) with pragmatic, interdisciplinary approaches.

TWC collaborates with Boards, partners, and academic researchers on evaluations as well as participates in federal studies such as the Workforce Investment Act Gold Standard Study. TWC proactively engages with the Secretaries of Labor and Education on studies that further 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 avenue to coordinate work and share results between the states and the departments. TWC also plays an active role in the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) community and shares results and best practices with other community members.

Adult Education and Literacy

Two years ago, TWC participated in a new national reporting system for the adult education 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). TWC evaluated the impact that different intake and onboarding mechanisms that AEL grant recipients used had on variables such as length of participation. The final report was issued during PY'20 and was used to develop curriculum for a session at TWC's AEL summer institute for AEL providers, which was held in August 2021. More recently, in August 2022, TWC proposed developing a machine-learning model to predict the likelihood that an AEL student receives a measurable skill gain (MSG) within a particular program year. TWC anticipates that the model will provide deeper insight into the interaction between demographic characteristics and TWC services, thereby helping to identify factors that the agency can influence to increase the ratio of MSGs to total AEL participants as a measure of program effectiveness and engagement.

Vocational Rehabilitation

TWC is engaged in several ongoing evaluations of its VR program. One project nearing completion involves a quasi-experimental evaluation of TWC's Project SEARCH's impact on individuals with developmental disabilities. Project SEARCH provides participants with on-the-job experience via three 10- to 12-week paid internships in competitive integrated employment settings. The goal is to obtain and retain permanent employment. Common local employers involved in Project SEARCH include hospitals, law firms, and supply chain industries, which offer diverse internships in areas such as office administration, data entry, assembly/packaging, and housekeeping and food preparation. TWC reviewed a sample of 904 individuals divided evenly into Project SEARCH and a VR program comparison group and determined that Project SEARCH participants have an 87.39 percent successful employment rate compared to 60.40 percent for other participants of the same demographic in the VR program. Based on a chi-square test, the result is significant, with greater than 95 percent confidence ($p < 0.001$). TWC also found that Project SEARCH participants enjoyed a greater employment retention rate during Q2–Q4 post-exit than their comparison group peers, with 95 percent confidence (70.35% versus 63.27%, $p = 0.0238$). TWC did not discover any significant impact on Q2 post-exit earnings. This study meets CLEAR's standard for moderate evidence of causality.

Another project still in development involves building a machine-learning model to identify VR participants who, six months into their cases, appear to be headed for an unsuccessful closure. The goal is to find commonalities that can be targeted with an intervention to change an unsuccessful case trajectory into a successful one. The VR program is developing the intervention, which will be tested using an RCT experimental design to identify cases at risk of unsuccessful outcomes and randomly assign them to receive the intervention. This approach will enable staff to determine whether the intervention has a causal impact on program outcomes. Although this work is being conducted within the VR program, the results likely will be applicable to WIOA core partner programs and other partner programs.

Workforce Development

TWC's Workforce Development Division and I|3 are collaborating on several evaluations for DOL-funded programs. The first study evaluates a new service that would be funded by WIOA dislocated worker (DW) statewide funding and that involves specialized job-coaching and related resources. The planned evaluation will involve the random selection of Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) claimants for access to such services and will serve as a WIOA DW evaluation. The divisions also are conducting a study that encompasses a quasi-experimental design to address the impact of the RESEA program on benefits usage and return to work. This study will meet CLEAR's standard for moderate causality.

I|3 dedicates substantial analytical and evaluation resources to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse within Texas' UI system by developing predictive 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 by sharing best practices and contributing to the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), NASWA's Integrity Data Hub (IDH), and associated workgroups.

Performance Accountability System

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 supplements WIOA statutory measures in order to address inconsistencies between the statutory measures and what it considers the statutory vision. For example, although 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 constitutes a significant success, even if the workforce system is not funding the individual's education or training. Therefore, TWC's supplemental WIOA-based measures also identify either employment or educational enrollment in post-exit quarters.

Texas also supplemented the statutory employment/enrollment Q4 measures with a Q2–Q4 employment or enrollment retention measure. The measures build as follows:

1. Employed or 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 or Enrolled Q2–Q4 Post-Exit: Of those employed or enrolled in Q2, what percent were also employed or enrolled in both Q3 and Q4?

Target Setting

WIOA provides for a two-stage performance target process. DOL develops a statistical model based on the presumed case mix and economic conditions for the performance periods and cohorts. Each state then negotiates a set of initial targets based on these assumptions and other factors. At the end of the year, DOL reapplies the statistical model. For the current reporting year, TWC exceeded 90 percent of the originally negotiated targets across all programs, although the departments have yet to make their year-end adjustments.

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Together with job seekers and employees, Texas employers are primary TWC customers in the Texas workforce system. Measuring the success of services provided to employers is important for the state's economic success, and TWC continues to be concerned about the three measures that DOL and ED chose to pilot in response to the information collection requests that the departments published to obtain input on the proposals. Nevertheless, the agency has continued to report all three measures to ensure that DOL and ED have complete data for evaluating the measures and, ideally, developing improvements.

TWC takes the following four-pronged approach to validating data:

1. TWC's case management system uses data validation codes to ensure consistent data collection. In this system, field values must meet the required Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL).
2. TWC's Subrecipient Monitoring department (SRM) conducts data validation testing for all Boards and AEL grant recipients. Beginning in September 2022, in coordination with

the Business Support Section of TWC's Division of Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring, SRM developed a dedicated database to capture testing results while allowing TWC to generate testing outcomes by workforce area.

3. I|3 performs error-checking audits designed to conform with DOL reporting requirements.
4. TWC's case management system uses internal data integrity (DINT) functions that allow local system partners to make corrections to data entries while enabling TWC to validate and approve the corrections 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 that time, any changes to previous quarter entries require validation and approval by TWC's Workforce Automation department.

Following the governor's COVID-19 disaster proclamation, SRM implemented remote data validation audits. In FY'22, I|3 conducted data validation for the 28 Boards, including validation for 16 AEL grant recipients. I|3 will continue to conduct data validation for FY'23.

Activities Provided with Funds Reserved by the Governor

TWC uses governor's reserve statewide funding in conjunction with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (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 (IHEs), community-based organizations (CBOs), 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

The College Credit for Heroes (CCH) program maximizes college credits awarded to veterans and service members for their military training and experience in order to expedite their transition into the Texas workforce. The program's goal is to eliminate obstacles to attain licensing, certification, accreditation, and degrees awarded at state and national levels so veterans may transition more quickly from college classrooms to the workforce.

Texas institutions value student veterans on their campuses and work on their behalf to award academic credit for their military experience, education, and training. In November 2019, TWC partnered with CCH institutions in Texas to create a cohesive CCH network. In February 2020, TWC announced a new CCH Capacity Building Program grant designed to help Texas institutions develop or improve an integrated system for evaluating military transcripts.

CCH grants are divided into two types: Acceleration Curricula (from 2011 through 2018) and Capacity Building (from 2019 to present). Throughout the life of the program, 43 CCH grants have been awarded to 18 Texas colleges and universities, resulting in the creation of 91 acceleration curricula courses in fields such as emergency medical services, surgical technology, respiratory therapy, health information technology, nursing, cybersecurity, information technology, advanced manufacturing, and logistics.

CCH Phase 8 Capacity Building Program

CCH Phase 8 Capacity Building Program is a two-year grant that allows IHEs to develop or improve their military evaluation processes through the use of a fully integrated system to identify and track student veterans participating in the CCH program. In 2020, TWC issued a Request for Applications from eligible applicants and awarded \$757,271 to four IHEs for the CCH Phase 8 Capacity Building Grant. The grant's first 12-month period was dedicated to planning. The second 12-month period is dedicated to the implementation of a pilot program.

The program's primary goals are as follows:

1. Develop and document a pilot military transcript evaluation process that ensures that academic credit will be awarded consistently to all veterans and service members.

2. Develop a sustainable tracking system for students participating in the program that accurately gauges the benefits that students receive and confirm that processes and policies are being implemented consistently across the institution.
3. Recruit program champions from students, alumni, and faculty members who are participating or have participated in the CCH program to act as advocates and resources regarding the program.
4. Integrate CCH program information into veteran or active-duty service member resources.

Credit Evaluation

The majority of schools in CCH's growing network rely on localized evaluation and credit programs. IHEs participating in CCH have partnered with the American Council on Education (ACE) and are using the ACE online guide to evaluate military courses for academic credit. The guide lists recommended credit units in academic disciplines as well as required learning outcomes, topics of instruction, and related competencies. Exhibits within the ACE guide support credit recommendations for different subject areas and provide specific guidance to registrars, deans, and other school officials seeking ways to apply military courses to their institutions' degree requirements. Additionally, IHEs continue to rely on local policies and processes for the evaluation and awarding of credit. During these evaluations, IHEs use innovative methods—such as prior learning assessments (PLAs), credit by exam, and interviews—to measure depth of knowledge and skills and award credit accordingly.

TWC and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board are working together to identify resources that could be used to develop a web page that lists the course equivalencies that are available for veterans and service members. Academic programs submitted to meet legislative requirements also would be listed, and CCH partnering institutions would be able to add or modify equivalencies and applicable academic programs to the site. The goal is to provide service members and veterans with a web page that allows them to compare multiple institutions and determine their best option for enrolling in a postsecondary degree program.

Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative

The Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative is designed to outreach hard-to-serve veterans who are not currently being served through Workforce Solutions Offices. The project seeks to address employment barriers faced by hard-to-serve veterans and reintegrate hard-to-serve veterans into meaningful employment.

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. American GI Forum was awarded the contract and implemented the program in San Antonio, Houston, the Dallas/Fort Worth metro area, and El Paso.

Under the guidance of a case manager, the program helps veterans address employment barriers and access resources to overcome barriers. Veterans benefit from a range of services that may include assessments, job development and job placement, and case management, as well as 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.

In the most recent grant period, the Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative provided 369 veterans with assessment services, and of the 338 veterans placed into employment, 205 earn an average wage of \$16.91 per hour.

Veterans Network

The Veterans Network initiative provides funds to CBOs to develop networks of entities whose missions include providing services and support to veterans. Referral and service information shared among network partners—including CBOs, the Texas Veterans Commission, and other veteran-centric organizations—allows for the coordination of services over large areas of the state, regardless of the community in which veterans seek services. In FY'20, TWC awarded two grants totaling \$4 million to Alamo Area Development Corporation (AADC) and Combined Arms, which demonstrated organizational experience in providing coordinated veterans' services. Grants issued in 2020 have a performance period ending in 2023.

Veterans Network Program Results

Outcome Measures From April 2020 through June 2022	Combined Arms Combined Yearly Targets	Combined Arms Combined Results	AADC Combined Yearly Targets	AADC Combined Results
Total Number of Organizations in Network	300	223	210	202
Number of Network Building Events	1,300	701	20	368
Number of Network Training/Workshops Held	120	131	8	65
Number of Network Organizations with Referral System Installed	300	223	210	202
Number of Referrals Made in the Referral System	245,000	44,565	5,100	12,952
Number of Unduplicated Veterans Served Using the Referral System	70,000	27,886	4,800	5,884

Table 2: Program results from the Veterans Network initiative from April 2020 to June 2022

Youth Initiatives

Texas Science and Engineering Fair

Sponsored by TWC, ExxonMobil, and other partners and hosted by Texas A&M University, the Texas Science and Engineering Fair (TXSEF) is an annual event in which participating middle and high school students display their projects and compete in 21 different project categories. Awards are given for first through third place in each category, with two grand prizes and one Best-of-Show winner in both the junior and senior divisions. Top finishers from the high school division also are awarded a scholarship to attend the prestigious Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy. Top competitors in the junior division advance to the national Broadcom Masters competition. Additionally, some of the winning senior division entries go on to compete in the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). Texas has produced many ISEF winners and has a proud history of success for its participants.

Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy

The Governor's Science and Technology Champions Academy is a weeklong, hands-on residential summer camp that helps students explore the practical applications of STEM endeavors and exposes students to exciting career options that involve high-tech skills. This camp supports the development of Texas' future workforce by focusing on the advanced skills required for high-demand careers within target industries and is designed to inspire students to pursue STEM-related college degrees and careers in Texas. Top finishers from the high school division of the TXSEF are awarded scholarships to cover the entire cost of the program.

Other Selected Initiatives

Military Family Support Program

TWC recognizes that military spouses are an important part of their communities, yet military spouses often have limited employment, education, and training opportunities because of 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. Services include job search assistance, skills assessment, labor market information and help with résumé writing and interviewing skills, as well as support training in in-demand occupations.

The Military Family Support Program (MFSP) has been funded for three years, with an allocation of \$1 million per fiscal year. Eight Texas military installations currently have memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with their respective Boards to participate in the program. During PY'21, 708 military spouses were outreached, and 479 were registered in TWC's case management system. The MFSP has connected more than 875 military spouses to local business leaders, peers, and career development support programs.

Military Family Support Program Highlights

Program Outcomes	2019	2020	2021	Total
Number of Military Spouses Outreached	350	397	708	1,455
Number of Military Spouses Assisted in the MFSP/ Registered in WorkInTexas.com	230	337	479	1,046
Number of Military Spouses Receiving Credentials	38	9	100	147
Number of Employers Targeted to Hire Military Spouses	156	28	147	331
Number of Military Spouses Hired	74	17	51	142

Table 3: Program outcomes for the past three program years

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the MFSP and continues to have a major impact on military base operations. In the fall of 2021, military installations began hosting a limited number of community events such as job fairs, résumé preparation classes, and newcomer welcome briefings. However, it was not until the spring of 2022 that military installations started hosting regular, in-person events and job fairs.

The MFSP has seen several success stories, including the following:

- A military spouse undergoing training gained employment in the nursing profession, earning \$23.16 an hour.
- An employer created an internship opportunity that allowed a military spouse to complete a 200-hour social work program and led to her earning a license as a social worker.

- A military spouse worked with a Military Family Support Liaison and obtained employment as a legal assistant, with a starting salary of \$52,000 a year.

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'21, TWC awarded grants totaling \$898,099 to nine Boards. Funds provided through these grants were used to enhance training, support services, and skills assessments and to expand capacity by purchasing necessary equipment and supplies. These grants have improved immediate training opportunities for 657 participants and will continue to serve Texans and help them fill future in-demand jobs.

Building and Construction Trades

Grants provided under this initiative support workforce development training to prepare participants for industry-based certifications and employment in building and construction trade (BCT) occupations. This program provides training for occupations that align with one or more of the specialty trades identified by the North American Industry Classification System and one or more high-demand occupations in the BCT sector, including carpenters, plumbers, pipefitters, welders, masons, and electricians. In 2021, the BCT program piloted Texas' new evidence-based grant making approach, and it is also piloting a new outcomes-based payment model, which TWC hopes to further improve in the 2023 program.

Innovative Academies

This program establishes a relationship between TWC and the Texas Education Agency regarding the coordination and development of the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) and Industry Cluster Innovative Academy (ICIA) programs. Funds support innovative partnerships among schools, employers, and colleges to provide opportunities for students to acquire skills, certifications, and credentials in high-demand occupations in key industry clusters while allowing them to earn college credit toward an associate's degree or an articulated agreement toward a bachelor's degree. During the PY'21–PY'23 period of performance, this initiative funded 35 P-TECH/ICIA planning grants.

Ending the Middle Skills Gap

On June 30, 2021, TWC's three-member Commission earmarked funding for a comprehensive statewide strategy to end the middle skills gap in Texas. Due to technological advances in the workplace, employment demand has dramatically increased for individuals with middle skills, defined as workers with some education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree. Numerous initiatives have been proposed and approved for implementation focusing on career information, preparedness, connection, and progression activities to help put more Texas workers on a path to a career in a rewarding middle skills job.

TWC's initiatives to end the middle skills gap in Texas include the following:

- TWC partnered with Metrix Learning™, an online learning management system that helps job seekers upgrade their skills to secure employment. Metrix Learning™ provided certifications for approximately 1,250 individuals at a cost of \$1 million, which included access to all training content, practice tests, practice labs, and test vouchers for all participants. Metrix Learning™ also provided \$100,000 in program services to TWC and the 28 Boards, including case management support, mentoring services by phone and email, monthly progress reports, and a bimonthly review.
- TWC earmarked \$2 million to provide WIOA programs of less than three months in duration to parents receiving Child Care Services program subsidies. Specifically designed for parents who are in an initial three-month job search period, this initiative helps child care customers become employed before this period of child care services ends.
- TWC instituted a statewide career and education outreach initiative that raises awareness about occupations requiring more than a high school degree but less than a four-year degree. This youth-focused awareness campaign promotes middle skills occupations and career pathways and directs Texans to the tools and programs available to receive training and obtain the certifications required to enter those occupations.

TWC is refining its previous investment in Jobs Y'all, a website which targets Texans ages 14–24 and offers relevant messaging, images, and career exploration tools. Although the website will continue to feature TWC's career tools, it will transition to emphasize middle skills occupations and career pathways and add landing pages for youth with disabilities and foster youth in order to direct them to services. New content such as social media animations, PSAs, and career videos will be developed to promote occupations and drive traffic to Texas Career Check, Texas Reality Check, Texas Internship Challenge, Texas HireAbility/StartMyVR, and MyTXCareer.com. To meet Texans where they are, this initiative is being promoted online through email, social media channels, and other platforms and in person at school, career exploration and job hiring events, and local Workforce Solutions Offices.

Career Transitioning Services

On September 21, 2021, as part of a comprehensive statewide strategy to close the middle skills gap in Texas, TWC entered into a contract with Korn Ferry, a global organizational consulting firm, to provide one-on-one Career Transitioning Services (CTS) to individuals whose careers have been affected by the pandemic. CTS helps individuals identify, prepare for, and obtain a job through assessments and coaching. Services include skills and traits assessments, job search guidance, résumé drafting support, interview preparation, skills development, reskilling, and upskilling.

Cybersecurity Initiative

Grants totaling \$2 million were made available to Boards through the Cybersecurity Initiative. Vital to TWC's day-to-day operations, this initiative ensures that the agency maintains an effective data security protocol supported by a rigorous security structure.

Rapid Response

TWC, Boards, and Workforce Solutions Offices offer many services to help businesses and workers manage the effects of layoffs and plant closures, including those that result from natural disasters, increased competition from foreign companies, and other causes. TWC uses early warning indicators within its enterprise data warehouse to identify employers that might benefit from rapid response (RR) activities and specific short-term compensation services. RR is a proactive strategy designed to respond quickly to layoffs and plant closures through the provision of immediate on-site and/or virtual assistance with reemployment services and UI information, as well as group seminars to address stress and financial management issues. Some Boards have used mobile units to offer these services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact the RR program. During PY'21, TWC offered RR services to 14,433 dislocated workers and 236 employers impacted by a layoff or closure. Employees were provided with information on UI, job search, and available workforce services, including the WIOA and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs. Employers received technology and personal protective equipment to keep their employees working, short-term compensation through the UI program, and customized training to ensure that companies can operate safely.

RR services help workforce area employers, workers, and communities manage reductions in force. To ensure that Texas is poised to meet the needs of local employers, RR services are funded through the Boards' WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth formula programs. The funding stream allows for a prompt rebound from layoffs, as funds are readily and locally available. Texas has also reserved RR funds at the state level for Boards that demonstrate a need for additional assistance.

TWC and Boards use multiple resources to craft layoff aversion solutions. Past employment solutions include the development of incumbent worker programs which help address employer training needs and avert or mitigate layoffs. RR-funded training focuses on skills attainment activities. Upon layoff notification, transition efforts are implemented to help dislocated workers engage in employment or training services that facilitate a quick return to work. Layoff notices, including those submitted in compliance with the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act and Trade Act petitions, are received at the state level and forwarded to Boards by the next business day.

Boards and providers are also responsible for outreach to employers. Board or Workforce Solutions Office staff may use feasibility studies to assess both the needs of and options for at-risk companies in order to offer employment and training activities that address risk factors. Following the initial contact with the employer and worker representatives, an on-site employee information orientation may be conducted on company time. The orientation typically offers an overview of available services and additional activities that may be conducted on-site, including workshops or seminars on the psychology of job loss/stress management; debt/financial management and, specifically, negotiations for debt-payment arrangements; job search skills; and labor market information. The orientation may also provide information about UI and, if appropriate, the Trade Adjustment Assistance program.

Workforce Solutions Offices are encouraged to engage RR staff in the activities of TWC's Business Service Unit (BSU). RR staff within the BSU has access to team resources that help match worker skill sets with company hiring requirements. TWC and the Boards set the stage to assist businesses with future staffing needs by maintaining positive relationships throughout the layoff process. To this end, outreach efforts highlight both the services available to at-risk employers and the services available once business improves.

National Dislocated Worker Grants

TWC was awarded over \$39 million in National Dislocated Worker Grants (NDWGs) to provide COVID-19 disaster relief services in Texas. These funds have been used to help local health departments with jobs related to virus response and to support food banks and other humanitarian endeavors. NDWG funds aid in the delivery of career services, training, and support services, including transportation and supplies, to help facilitate a successful return to work. As of August 2022, these grants have served more than 3,918 Texans, with 1,056 participants placed in temporary disaster relief employment and 1,533 participants enrolled in training.

TWC received two additional disaster NDWGs in response to Hurricane Laura and the winter storms of February 2021. Totaling \$5,620,612, these NDWGs support cleanup and recovery efforts. The grants currently serve 327 Texans, including 152 participants who have been placed in temporary disaster relief employment and 92 participants who are enrolled in training.

On December 1, 2021, TWC received a grant to address the needs of transitioning military service members and their spouses from Fort Hood, a US Army base in Central Texas. The grant award totals \$8,032,410, of which TWC received an initial installment of \$2,677,470. This NDWG provides training and support services to help these populations in their return to civilian life. As of August 2022, 530 individuals have been enrolled, with 254 of them receiving training or participating in apprenticeships.

Customer Satisfaction

In September 2021, by order of the TWC Executive Director, the Customer Care Division was created to improve services to a customer base that includes every Texan and every Texas business. Leading efforts to transform how TWC interacts with all its customers, the division comprises three departments: Governmental Relations, Customer Relations, and Customer Experience. The division's desired outcomes are that customers become aware of a clear and direct pathway into the agency for the services they seek; customers have knowledge of other services offered by the workforce system; and service delivery is centered on customers and designed around the customer's needs.

Customer Care is responsible for TWC's public-facing website, which will undergo a complete redesign to modernize the agency's online presence and improve how customers engage with the agency online. The redesign includes an updated look, enhanced search and navigation, and improved design and content strategies that make accessing information as effortless as possible.

Customer Care is also charged with developing a single point-of-entry (or Main Door) to the agency through a suite of cloud-based technologies, such as artificial intelligence-enabled chat bots, live chat, SMS texting, self-service portals, and customer relationship management software. These channels will offer the customer a seamless experience and provide a comprehensive picture of customer journeys across agency and Board services.

In early 2022, the division led a workgroup composed of TWC staff and Board representatives to ensure that the processes and technology systems that TWC and Boards use are customer-centered, using the following strategies:

- Engage system customers to provide insights, guidance, and feedback on processes and technologies that should be removed, streamlined, or redesigned to improve customer experience, value, and results.
- Establish an ongoing feedback loop process to hear from customers on a regular basis to ensure that system and process design and enhancement are meeting their needs.

The workgroup surveyed the 28 Boards to gather information on the following:

- Current processes and technology used
- Pain points related to handoffs from Workforce Solutions Offices to TWC
- The need for better tools to track customer engagement
- Ideas to improve processes for customer handoffs to and from TWC and Workforce Solutions Offices
- Contact information to be used when facilitating handoffs from Customer Relations to Workforce Solutions Offices
- The development of a streamlined process for handoffs of customers to and from Workforce Solutions Offices and follow-up mechanisms to ensure that customer needs were met

Promising Practices, Lessons Learned, and Success Stories

State Success Stories

Texas Industry Partnership

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

In PY'21, TWC awarded grants totaling \$568,537 to six Boards. Funds provided through these grants were used to enhance training, support services, and skills assessments and to expand capacity by purchasing necessary equipment and supplies. The grants have improved immediate training opportunities for 1,499 participants and will continue to serve Texans and help them fill future in-demand jobs.

Local Success Stories

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

A single mother who recently moved into a new home was looking for employment. After a television station ran a news story on the individual, Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast contacted her, helped her improve her WorkInTexas.com account and LinkedIn profile, and provided one-on-one coaching on job interviewing and on leveraging her transferable skills. The Workforce Solutions Office's assistance led to two successful interviews, and she is employed as an executive assistant in marketing.

An individual who aged out of foster care was experiencing homelessness. The local Workforce Solutions Office enrolled him in an apprenticeship program. He is now employed as an iron worker, with a starting pay of \$17.00 per hour.

A customer who faced multiple barriers to employment applied for WIOA services, requesting assistance in automotive or diesel mechanic training and obtaining employment. By leveraging WIOA funding, Workforce Solutions Panhandle helped him with a work experience placement that allowed him to learn new job skills. At the end of the placement period, he was hired as a lube technician.

A 19-year-old applied for WIOA assistance in December 2021. A single man who lived with his parents, he previously worked at a lawn care business where he earned \$13.00 an hour. He completed emergency medical technician (EMT) training and was accepted into the firefighter academy, but he needed assistance paying for firefighter training. WIOA funding helped him with tuition, fees, books, supplies, and fuel cards. After graduating from the firefighter academy in May 2022 and successfully completing the firefighter and EMT state exams, he accepted a full-time job as a firefighter, earning \$40,000 per year.

A customer received support services and training assistance while participating in the WIOA Dislocated Worker and NDWG programs. After earning an Associate of Applied Science in Nursing, she successfully completed her NCLEX exam and obtained her RN license. She now works at a hospital as a registered nurse.

A young adult trying to navigate his career pathway sought guidance from Workforce Solutions Tarrant County. His career advisor helped him obtain his General Education Development (GED) credential and secure an internship. The internship led to a permanent job in a high-demand industry, a contractor position at Lockheed Martin.

A custodian at FedEx was earning \$15.10 per hour when he enrolled in the WIOA Adult program. He received assistance with training to earn his Commercial Driver's License (CDL), and within six months he was promoted to truck driver, earning \$22.61 per hour.

A mother of three enrolled in the WIOA Adult program at Workforce Solutions Texoma to receive training assistance and support services in order to reach her goal of a career in health care. With the help of Workforce Solutions Office staff, she obtained her LVN and RN licenses and now works at a local hospital, earning \$31.08 per hour.

A justice-involved 19-year-old OSY went to his local Workforce Solutions Office seeking training assistance to become an electrical line worker. Because of his age and lack of opportunity, his employment history consisted only of part-time work as a ranch hand. Workforce Solutions Northeast Texas helped him enroll in a CDL program. He attained his CDL and is now employed full-time as a line worker, making \$21.00 per hour.

Local Best Practices

Seamless Service Delivery

Workforce Solutions Cameron has successfully integrated most core partners into the one-stop system in order to provide seamless service to customers and has established a two-way referral system to align program services and outcomes. Although the AEL partner is the only core partner without a physical presence within the Workforce Solutions Offices, the Board continues to collaborate with AEL to leverage resources and provide AEL services to workforce participants to achieve their overarching goal of employment.

Two-Track Education

Leveraging TWC funding through the Brazos Valley Council of Governments, the Blinn College program provides free two-track education to local youth. One branch of the program offers English as a Second Language, and the other helps students earn their GED or High School Equivalency. The program also assists individuals who want to improve their basic reading, writing, and math skills, in addition to helping them with college preparation.

Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices

Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA) is committed to empowering employers and job seekers by identifying best practices in workforce development and offering programs and tools to leverage the existing knowledge and skills of workforce customers to set them on a pathway to career success. WSRCA's Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices are designed to

address this objective by visibly highlighting the dynamics of strategic career mobility and the importance of a skilled workforce.

Recognizing that career progression often takes place along a lattice model that incorporates lateral movement, rather than a fixed career ladder, WSRCA uses career lattices to help customers visualize a path for occupational mobility and focus attention on personal development. The upward movement on a lattice is a function of a worker's employment experience, in addition to other skills they can acquire through either formal or informal means. When combined with guidance and support from the WSRCA Talent Development team, career lattices can be used to lay out career goals, identify action steps, measure progress, and keep the individual heading in the right direction.

College and Career Day

Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande collaborated with Southwest Texas Junior College to host College and Career Day for the school districts in the local community. The main objective was to educate students about postsecondary opportunities that included vocational and career pathways. Students explored a range of career paths, networked with prospective employers, and practiced essential professional skills. Attended by more than 1,200 students, the event featured keynote speakers; informative breakout sessions on college admission, testing, financial aid, and student success centers; and labor market and career information.