

# Texas Workforce Commission

Program Year 2018 Workforce Innovation and  
Opportunity Act Annual Report, Titles I and III

## **Texas Workforce Commission Program Year 2018 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Annual Report, Titles I and III**

### **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**

Texas has historically 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 that address the needs of each region of the state. TWC, Boards, and other workforce system partners continue to refine and improve Texas' integrated structure to continue operating 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, 2019, 11 of 28 Boards had completed integration of VR services within their local workforce development areas (workforce areas), and VR services had collocated in 65 Workforce Solutions Offices in 24 of the state's 28 workforce areas.

### **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Waivers**

Through the years, 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, which has allowed TWC and Boards 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 PYs 2018 and 2019 (July 1, 2018, through June 30, 2020):

#### *Out-of-School Youth Expenditure Requirement*

Waives the requirement under WIOA §129(a)(4) and 20 CFR §681.410 that the state and local workforce areas spend not less than 75 percent of youth funds to provide services to out-of-school youth. Reduces expenditure requirement to not less than 50 percent, giving the state and local workforce areas flexibility to direct more funds to in-school youth as necessary to meet local and statewide conditions.

#### *Use of Individual Training Accounts for In-School Youth*

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 out-of-school youth ages 16 to 24. This waiver allows TWC to extend the use of ITAs to in-school youth, thus permitting Boards to effectively serve in-school youth in the workforce area while maintaining priority of service for out-of-school youth.

#### *Local Performance Accountability Flexibility*

A limited waiver from WIOA §116(c) pertaining to local performance accountability measures for Subtitle B, allowing TWC greater flexibility when contracting performance measures with the Boards to allow TWC to promote further integration of services within Workforce Solutions Offices. TWC chose not to implement the flexibility allowed by this waiver.

#### *Eligible Training Provider Performance Reports*

Waives WIOA §116(d)(4) and 20 CFR §677.230(a)(5) in order 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.

#### *Reallocation of Local Funds*

Waives the provisions of WIOA §128(c)(3) and §133(c) and 20 CFR §683.140 regarding reallocation of WIOA funds among local areas, granting TWC flexibility in redistributing funds among workforce areas.

### **Hurricane Harvey–Related Waivers**

Hurricane Harvey struck the Texas coast on August 25, 2017. Storm surge, widespread catastrophic flooding, and destructive winds devastated coastal communities, the city of Houston, and surrounding areas in southeastern Texas. TWC sought federal waiver opportunities following this natural disaster.

On October 11, 2017, DOLETA approved TWC’s WIOA waiver requests to help the agency and Boards respond to the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Although the waivers were not in effect for the entire 2017 program year and only for the first quarter of PY’18, TWC has provided a summary of the six hurricane-related waivers:

#### *Flexibility with WIOA Local Formula Funds*

This waiver allowed Boards in disaster-affected workforce areas to use up to 100 percent of their available local adult, dislocated worker, and youth formula funds to provide certain statewide activities. Specifically, the waiver allowed Boards to:

- use adult and dislocated worker formula funds for employment and training activities; and
- use youth formula funds to support the development of alternative, evidence-based programs and other programs that enhance the choices available to eligible youth, which encourages youth to reenter and complete secondary education, enroll in postsecondary education and advanced training, progress through a career pathway, and enter unsubsidized employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

### *Capitalization of Small Businesses with National Dislocated Worker Grant Funds*

This waiver set aside the prohibition on the use of funds for capitalization of businesses at WIOA §181(e) to allow use of National Dislocated Worker Grant funds to capitalize small businesses that were affected by Hurricane Harvey, with up to \$5,000 per affected business.

### *Flexibility with WIOA Out-of-School Youth Expenditure Requirement*

This waiver reduced the requirement to spend 75 percent of youth formula funds on workforce activities for out-of-school youth to 50 percent in disaster-impacted workforce areas so that those Boards could meet the needs of in-school youth affected by the hurricane.

### *Youth Follow-Up Services*

This waiver allowed staff in hurricane-affected workforce areas the flexibility not to provide follow-up services for youth participants if such participants could not be located or contacted due to the hurricane.

### *Required WIOA Youth Program Elements*

WIOA §129(c)(2) requires Boards to offer 14 program elements to youth participants. This waiver set aside that requirement and allowed disaster-impacted workforce areas to focus on the youth services or program elements that disaster-affected youth needed the most.

### *Use of Individual Training Accounts for In-School Youth*

WIOA limits the use of ITAs for youth to out-of-school youth. This waiver allowed disaster-impacted workforce areas and those workforce areas serving youth from disaster-impacted areas to provide ITAs to in-school youth ages 16 to 21.

## **Effectiveness in Serving Employers**

TWC raised serious concerns about all three measures that DOL and the US Department of Education (ED) have chosen to pilot in response to information-collection requests published by the departments to obtain input on the proposals; however, TWC continues to report all three measures to ensure that DOL and ED have more complete data to use in evaluating the measures and, ideally, developing improvements.

## **Evaluations**

TWC is the Texas state agency responsible for all six core WIOA programs and other state- and federally funded workforce programs.

Ultimately, the three most important resources available to the 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 that data to advance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the system. DOI has primary responsibility for conducting and coordinating evaluations of the Texas workforce system.

Although TWC uses a variety of statistical techniques to conduct evaluations, it uses primarily quasi-experimental evaluation techniques rather than random assignment trials. While less academic in approach than random assignment trials, quasi-experimental evaluation balances evaluation rigor with the ability to implement process changes or new initiatives quickly.

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 exploring other options for evaluation. TWC recently applied to DOL for a Technical Assistance Opportunity: Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort, with a team comprised of staff from multiple workforce programs, local representatives and DOI. Additionally, a team from Texas including two staff in the TWC Workforce Division were 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 local Boards, other partners, and academic researchers on system evaluations and has participated in numerous federal studies such as the Workforce Innovation Act Gold Standard Study. TWC will look for opportunities to cooperate with the Secretaries of Labor and Education on studies that complement and enhance the research priorities of TWC and its Boards and partners. In addition, TWC believes that the webinars and regional calls that DOL and ED hold provide an excellent avenue for coordinating such work and sharing results between the states and the departments. TWC anticipates being particularly active within the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) community and sharing results and best practices with other community members.

Most recently, TWC applied and was accepted to participate in a new National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) Evaluation Learning Community. This 15-month project will bring together research and evaluation experts from many states to develop and conduct high-value evaluation projects for adult education and literacy (AEL). Because TWC has integrated all operational evaluation resources inside DOI, TWC will be able to leverage what it learns through the project to areas beyond AEL.

TWC’s Business Insight Generator (BIG) data warehousing system will support advanced reporting, analytics, and high-quality evaluations that will meet moderate and high causal evidence as described on the CLEAR website. The system will streamline standard reporting to improve efficiency and will provide more resources for analysis and evaluation work. The system also will allow TWC to better connect data relating to participants, services, and outcomes across programs, which will enable TWC to monitor at the highest level (systemwide) as well as the program level (WIOA Titles I-IV and beyond), the characteristic level (that is, subpopulations across all programs), or a combination thereof (individuals in a program who meet specific conditions). TWC’s recently approved Workforce Data Quality Initiative grant application will accelerate system development and bring the system’s capabilities online much sooner than would have been possible without the funding.

Over the past several years, many of TWC’s analytic resources have been heavily focused on WIOA implementation activities, such as conducting an updated Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and developing Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) and RSA-911 logic and testing as well as supporting the implementation and rollout of TWC’s new WorkInTexas.com labor exchange system. Over the next four to five years, TWC plans to replace or significantly modify nearly every enterprise-level information technology (IT) system.

These systems must provide high-quality data that can support the levels of evaluation that WIOA requires. TWC will expend significant effort on ensuring that its IT modernization pays off both in the short run by serving customers and in the long run by yielding information about which efforts work under which conditions.

Continuous improvement and “doing more with less” are constant refrains in government, and now, statistical technique, computing power, and high-quality data can deliver on these goals. TWC is already using machine learning and artificial intelligence to detect and prevent fraud in its system and looks forward to applying these techniques to service delivery.

In recent years, service delivery has been defined and designed according to the objectives of evidence-based practices, but that model has not been ambitious enough. We are not going to find one model that works for everyone. One-model service delivery might work if we served a highly homogeneous population—one that has the same challenges, same needs, same goals, same resources, and same experiences. However, that is not the case: our customers are highly heterogeneous. But heterogeneity does not mean that there are not also distinct groups of customers whose similarities outnumber their differences.

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

Through this approach, TWC hopes to implement a system such that when a job seeker registers for services and provides background and goal information, the system can make recommendations to the job seeker regarding self-service and to staff for how to best engage and serve the individual. This approach is not intended to remove local flexibility or to disregard staff experience, but rather to support staff by providing better evidence-based options, based on the more precise data that will be obtained by our evaluation of our market basket analysis, to help plan an approach likely to lead to customer success. This approach would also help new staff become effective more quickly.

TWC’s evidence-based ambitions do not apply only to serving participants and reportable individuals; we are also looking at ways to more effectively serve employers. We are working to identify employers that might benefit from outreach and education regarding short-term unemployment insurance (UI) compensation as a way to help the employer retain its skilled labor force during a period of temporary financial difficulty.

TWC also has invested heavily in providing professional development to teachers in the AEL program. DOI will be working with TWC’s AEL program staff to determine whether TWC can measure the effectiveness of professional development by looking at student engagement and outcomes before and after teachers participate in professional development. It is not yet clear whether TWC will have enough students to evaluate before and after their teachers receive

professional development. However, eventually, TWC expects to have enough data for this project, so even if the project is delayed, TWC's initial analysis and planning should prove useful.

TWC also has several evaluation projects planned for the VR program. The VR program operates several specialized programs that serve specific groups of customers. DOI is working with the VR Division to evaluate some of the specialized programs, including the following:

- Project Search—a program that uses a rotation of internships to improve competitive employment in an integrated setting for youth who have intellectual disabilities
- Project Hire—a program that helps individuals with developmental disabilities to complete postsecondary education
- Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center—a residential VR training facility that serves adults who are legally blind by helping them learn alternative techniques to prepare for, find, and retain employment and/or attend postsecondary education, and/or live independently in the community

Additionally, 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.

DOI is also looking for ways to leverage the national WIOA regression models to help with program evaluation. The models can show the effect of numerous factors on program performance. TWC envisions building off the models to test the effect of various services.

Finally, DOI uses its analytic resources to help prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in the UI system by developing the 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.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

TWC's mission statement serves as the common denominator by which the agency's provision of customer service is evaluated and measured. TWC provides innovative workforce solutions to a large population of employers, job seekers, workers, and communities.

To ensure that the Texas workforce system continually provides the highest level of service to all customers, TWC and the Boards conduct ongoing research and evaluations to identify best practices and find ways to improve service delivery. To meet the customer satisfaction requirement defined at WIOA §107(c)(2)(B), each Board uses consumer satisfaction surveys to collect random responses from all customers. Boards use survey results to revise standards and develop initiatives that will benefit all customers.

Because customer satisfaction is a priority for TWC, the Boards, and other statewide partners, TWC and the Boards will continue using customer service surveys to look for opportunities to improve service delivery.

## **Performance Accountability System**

While true WIOA performance accountability has been delayed at the national level as DOL and ED wait 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.

TWC has supplemented the WIOA statutory measures to address certain inconsistencies between the measures and the statutory vision. WIOA emphasizes the importance of career pathways, yet WIOA’s measures recognize only 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 credit 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 had something to do with that result, it is just as likely that it did not.

Therefore, Texas has replaced supplemented the statutory Employment (and Employment/Enrollment) Q4 measures with a measure that accounts for those 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 in all three quarters 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?

Texas uses the WIOA Credential Rate. Additionally, TWC uses WIOA and WIOA-based measures for Boards and AEL grantees as well as at the state level.

With one exception, TWC met or exceeded the PY’18 performance targets that the agency negotiated with DOL for WIOA Title I and Title III Wagner-Peyser programs. Additionally, TWC met or exceeded its state-based performance outcome measures for these programs. This suggests that TWC’s strong working relationship with Boards continues to promote a high-quality system. TWC missed the target for WIOA Dislocated Worker Employed Q2 Post-Exit. TWC achieved 72.1 percent versus a target of 81.1 percent (88.9 percent of target). In evaluating the reason for this failure, TWC determined that the cause was related to the Gulf Coast Workforce Development Board significantly increasing enrollment in the dislocated worker program after Hurricane Harvey rather than through a National Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG) and those served being largely dissimilar to the typical WIOA Dislocated Worker participant.



TWC's common exit policy applies to Titles I and III and the Jobs for Veterans State Grant, Trade Adjustment Assistance, DWG, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Employment and Training, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TWC would like the option to apply this policy to Titles II and IV in the future when replacing the case management systems, if ED eventually allows this option. We believe such an option would promote better integration and coordination of service delivery across the DOL and ED programs, just as it has within DOL programs and with other federal programs.<sup>1</sup>

### **Activities Provided with Funds Reserved by the Governor**

TWC uses governor's reserve statewide funding, TANF, and Adult Education and Family Literacy Act State Leadership funding in conjunction with 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, discussed below, were undertaken in whole or in part with WIOA funds reserved by the governor:

- Veterans Initiatives
- Youth Initiatives
- Other Selected Initiatives

#### ***Veterans Initiatives***

*Hiring Red, White and You!* (HRWY)—The Texas Workforce Solutions Network hosts annual statewide job fairs in November across the state of Texas to connect Texas veterans and their spouses with Texas employers that value the experience, discipline, and other exceptional qualities inherent in a military background. The 2018 HRWY event drew more than 12,300 job seekers and more than 2,100 employers. Since its 2012 inception, HRWY has connected more than 84,153 job seekers, including 40,575 active-duty military and transitioning service members, veterans, and spouses, to 14,420 employers, with more than 2,000 same-day hires.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> When TWC suggested that states have this option when commenting on proposed WIOA rule §677.150, we were 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.

*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, Texas.

The Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative is designed to:

- outreach to 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 accessed to help veterans overcome challenges to employment. Veterans benefit from a range of services, which may include:

- 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 grant period March 1, 2018, through February 28, 2019, the project provided 816 veterans with assessment and case management services, with 258 of those being placed into employment. The current grant runs from March 1, 2019, through February 28, 2020.

### ***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 convey to students the array of opportunities available to them. More than 2,500 teachers have participated since 2015.

*Camp Code for Girls*—Camps offer hands-on coding experience for middle school girls. Participants learn innovative concepts and engage in challenging experiences in learning, problem solving, and analytical skills. Those activities simultaneously foster an interest in STEM-related careers, with a focus on computer science. In 2018, more than 1,000 girls received scholarships for camp attendance across the state.

*Foster Youth*—TWC provides grants to 18 Foster Youth Transition Centers that provide a comprehensive array of services and referrals to help transitioning foster youth overcome barriers. TWC hosted its first annual Foster Youth conference to support local delivery of integrated services for foster youth, to share perspectives and information from state and local

partners on their critical work and resources for foster youth, and to provide opportunities to build the network of partnerships among state and local organizations that serve foster youth.

*Governor's Challenge Camp*—The Governor's Science and Technology Champions' Academy provides a STEM-related one-week residential summer camp for students in grades 9–12.

*Texas Science Careers Consortium (Texas Science and Engineering Fair)*—This science and engineering fair is a competition for state middle school and high school science fair winners to showcase their research projects in STEM fields.

### ***Other Selected Initiatives***

*Small Business Initiatives*—TWC provides training and information to all Texans interested in entrepreneurship and starting or expanding a business or small business, including those run by veterans, minorities, and women.

*High Demand Job Training Program*—TWC supports collaborations between Boards and economic development corporations (EDCs) to provide high-demand occupational job training in local workforce areas. This program supports Boards partnering with local EDCs that use their local economic development sales taxes for high-demand job training. Boards collaborate with local EDCs and match their local economic development sales tax funds to jointly support the provision of such training.

*Building and Construction Trades*—Texas companies are creating significant opportunities for workers in high-demand construction and building trade occupations, including carpenters, plumbers, pipefitters, welders, masons, and electricians. Grants support workforce development training for Texas adults by preparing them for employment in high-demand occupations in the building and construction trades.

*Innovative Academies*—Funds support innovative partnerships between schools, employers, and colleges that provide new opportunities for students to acquire skills, certifications, and credentials in high-demand occupations in key industry clusters while allowing the students to earn college credit that results in an associate degree or an articulated agreement toward a bachelor's degree.

*Rapid Response*—TWC is identifying early warning indicators within the BIG data warehouse that will identify employers that might benefit from rapid response activities and specific short-time compensation services.

### **National Dislocated Worker Grants**

Since August 2017, following Hurricane Harvey, TWC has worked in close partnership with DOL and Boards affected by the hurricane to implement a \$35 million National Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG) to support Texas' rebuilding efforts. TWC has awarded \$31.7 million of the DWG funding to the Boards in disaster-affected workforce areas to subsidize wages for cleanup workers and to provide career and support services and training to dislocated workers. Seven Boards have enrolled more than 3,250 participants, placed more than 819 participants in jobs, provided career services to more than 2,817 participants, provided support services to 890 participants, and provided training services to 871 participants. DOL has approved up to \$1.4 million for Boards to purchase mobile units that can be used to assist in areas where a Workforce

Solutions Office is not easily accessible. The grant award also supports 12 community and technical colleges in affected workforce areas as the colleges build the capacity needed to provide immediate and short-term training to dislocated workers as well as apply allocated funds toward an upskilling project that will allow Boards to partner with local entities to address skills shortages and industry needs created by the disaster.

### **Promising Practices, Lessons Learned, and Success Stories**

#### *Governor's Summer Merit Program*

For summer 2018, TWC awarded 13 grants totaling \$992,526 through the Governor's Summer Merit Program to Texas universities and community colleges for summer youth camps that focus on STEM. The grants provided scholarships for 1,047 students, ages 14 to 21, to attend camps that helped prepare them for future high-skill, high-demand jobs.

The aim of the Governor's Summer Merit Program is to inspire Texas youth to pursue STEM-related careers. The camps introduced students to careers available in advanced technologies and manufacturing, aerospace and defense, biotechnology and life sciences, information and computer technology, and energy.

Several of the camps specifically targeted and encouraged young women and minorities to pursue education and careers in STEM fields.

Some students had opportunities to take field trips that gave them access to high-tech equipment, such as 3-D printers and electron telescopes, while others visited science and engineering facilities and had the opportunity to meet and speak with industry professionals.

#### *Camp Code*

In summer 2018, TWC awarded seven grants totaling \$593,356 for Camp Code to focus on increasing middle school girls' interest in computer coding and computer science through participation in summer camps. Camp Code offers hands-on coding experience that teaches students innovative concepts and provides experiences in learning, problem solving, and using analytical skills, while fostering an interest in STEM-related careers with a focus on computer science.

According to the US Census Bureau's 2017 American Community Survey, only 24 percent of employees in computer and mathematical occupations in Texas were women. The grants awarded to independent school districts, universities, and higher education institutions are designed to spark girls' interests in careers in computer programming from an early age and encourage young women to consider careers in these fields.

Creating summer camps that offer computer science projects that incorporate art and storytelling with robotics, video games, websites, and applications can also further interest students in the coding field. Coding education includes the most in-demand and popular computer science languages, such as Java, SQL, C++, Net, Perl, Ruby, and JavaScript.

Camp Code provided students with activities and lessons that encouraged their interest in high technology, including working in teams to use programming languages to build games, web pages, and robots.

### *Prepare Students with Disabilities for Employment*

Teenagers and young adults who want to jump-start their careers can benefit from Pathways to Careers, a TWC initiative to expand pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities. The career-focused services include work opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships, summer employment, and other job opportunities available throughout the school year.

The first Pathways to Careers program was Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL). In 2018 the program provided more than 2,400 students with disabilities with work readiness training and paid work experience. The 28 Boards and their respective Workforce Solutions Offices, in partnership with TWC VR staff, implemented the SEAL program and coordinated skills training and paid work experience.

The Boards identified business partners and paid the students' wages. Local VR offices assisted with recruiting students and providing case management services.

Workforce Solutions of the Coastal Bend Board (Coastal Bend) partnered with local VR staff to implement its SEAL program and developed work experience opportunities with more than 28 employers in the workforce area. The initiative of this Board helped to create the experience of success for the students. The mother of one 2018 SEAL Coastal Bend participant said, "What an amazing program for my child! With the day-to-day obstacles that our kids are having to face and the challenges of finding work, [it] can become too overwhelming for one parent to handle. We are grateful for this program, as it allows opportunities to change their lives and helps them ease into employment in which they gain essential tools and skills to enhance themselves as they are about to leave home and start their own journeys."

"[It's] great to be able to engage the participants about different skills and attributes that we have to offer them. The fact that we are a great college as well, we can motivate the youth to build careers and not just jobs that might be available to them," said a representative of Coastal Bend College, a 2018 SEAL participating worksite.

Other Pathways to Careers programs are being developed or are preparing to launch and expand upon Pre-ETS and career-related education for students with disabilities.

### *Texas Industry Partnership*

Through collaborations between Boards and private employers or 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'18, TWC awarded six grants totaling \$317,750 to six Boards. Funds provided through these grants were used to support training, support services, skills assessments, and cluster

analysis. These grants have improved immediate training opportunities for more than 100 students and will continue to serve additional individuals to meet future industry demands.

### ***Local Success Stories***

The Texas workforce system is strong and effective because of the dedicated Board members and Workforce Solutions staff and their 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. Coastal Bend hosted the Women Empowered Summit, where the sessions and overall experience empowered, motivated, and inspired attendees and enriched their professional lives. The event was crucial after businesses struggled to recover from the devastating effects of Hurricane Harvey.

*Helping Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Earn Recognized College Credit*—Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast created a pilot program to help individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) earn recognized college credit. The University of Houston–Downtown (UHD) and the H.E.A.R.T. Program, operated by EPIC, Inc., developed a three-semester certification curriculum that included an internship as well as class time. Both UHD and employers paid 71 IDD students a minimum of \$10 per hour.

*Breaking Chains Job Fair: A Job Fair for Justice-Involved Individuals*—Workforce Solutions Cameron, through an innovative partnership with state, federal, and private agencies serving ex-offenders, created the Breaking Chains job fair. This successful collaboration provided job readiness training, soft skills workshops, and proper attire etiquette to participants prior to interviews and matched 25 companies with employees. This event allowed at least 30 ex-offenders to find gainful employment to support their families, and it established positive reintegration ties to the community.

*On-Time Grad Academy and Community Re-Entry Network Program*—Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast (Gulf Coast) worked with Houston Independent School District (ISD) and the City of Houston’s Community Re-Entry Network Program to provide career awareness and job readiness training to two groups—high school students at risk of dropping out and formerly incarcerated individuals. Houston ISD’s On-Time Grad Academy added a job-readiness training component to its existing dropout prevention program while the Community Re-Entry Network Program provided former inmates with job-readiness seminars to help them find meaningful work and support services to lower recidivism rates. Through May 2019, Gulf Coast staff served 105 customers and documented 53 hires.

*Dislocated Workers Get Much-Needed Help*—Coastal Bend offered hiring events and information sessions to individuals impacted by the January 2019 closure of the Kane Beef processing facility, which displaced 726 employees. Through strategic use of social and local media, Coastal Bend was able to connect with the affected workers, ranchers, and businesses.

STX Beef Company purchased the plant soon after, and 500 affected workers and 250 additional workers were hired and went back to work.

*Immediate Jobs for Laid-Off Workers*—Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas (North Central Texas) collaborated with Stanley Black & Decker to hire 30 individuals out of 41 who were laid off when another major employer closed. North Central Texas staff members were able to quickly devise a strategy with Stanley Black & Decker to assist the affected workers. This collaboration limited the number of individuals who needed to file for UI benefits.

*Connecting Military Spouses and Families with Jobs*—Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande partnered with the Del Rio Chamber of Commerce, the City of Del Rio, and Val Verde County to improve the employment of military spouses. The program focused on Laughlin Air Force Base, located in Del Rio, which is the US Air Force’s largest pilot training base. The program connected more than 105 military spouses and families to jobs at 50 local businesses in and around the City of Del Rio and Val Verde County.

*Hire Our Heroes*—Workforce Solutions of Central Texas (Central Texas) recognized the need for skills training for transitioning military and spouses. The goal was to maintain skilled workers, ensure economic success, and stabilize the local economy. Through Central Texas’ efforts, there was a 7 percent increase in exiting military members who were interested in staying local and a 94 percent entered-employment rate for registered customers.

*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 and was critical to meet workforce needs and support economic development in the workforce area. This challenge posed a problem for Heart of Texas that led to a successful solution.

*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, providing information on WorkInTexas.com, 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.

*40-Hour Soft Skills Job Readiness Curriculum*—Workforce Solutions Lower Rio Grande Valley developed a 40-hour job readiness curriculum endorsed by the local Society for Human Resource Management chapter to help develop workers’ soft skills. The curriculum, provided through the community college and school educators, focused on enhancing the communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and emotional intelligence of the participants. The South Texas College Continuing Education department awarded 7,805 participants a certificate of completion for completing the training.

*Soft Skills to Enhance Employability*—Workforce Solutions Cameron (Cameron) initially launched soft skills workshops to enhance the employability skills and marketability of job

seekers. Cameron expanded job readiness workshops by offering them to local school districts, colleges, community-based organizations, and the local AEL provider in Cameron County. These workshops allowed workers to better meet employers' job expectations, strengthening 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 perpetually resulted in a low rate of course completion and even lower certification rates. West Central Texas worked with institutions to teach a 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 partnered with El Paso Independent School District to host JOBCON, an annual career fair in which high school students hear directly from professionals in specific jobs. This event helped students develop and explore careers while networking to help them take advantage of the opportunities existing in their own community. Many rural students have the skills, interests, and values that employers often look for, so having an event that focuses and highlights these assets further creates a sense of community, pride, and regionalism within rural areas.