

## Planning Guidelines Q&A

**1. In reading WD Letter 30-05 it appears that there is a different focus on targeted occupations than in the past. Can you explain this?**

Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) have targeted occupations for the past five planning cycles and have been afforded flexibility to apply local wisdom. The Boards are still required to provide Workforce Investment Act (WIA) classroom training in occupations determined to be in demand, but the Boards are no longer required to submit a targeted occupations list for state review. Although the targeting process and the tools available are essentially unchanged from the past, emphasis has shifted from the development of the targeted occupations list to establishing productive relationships with local employers, employer-led organizations, and associations of employers. The Board's role is to ensure that the local workforce system is responsive to the needs of employers. Therefore, Boards must work directly with employers to identify their specific needs and to develop and fund training programs that meet those needs. The only way to effectively accomplish this objective is to engage employers in identifying and validating the skills and training being provided to workers.

Employers speak in terms of skills rather than occupations. Although difficult, the Boards must look at skills, particularly transferable skills, in order to engage local employers and respond to their needs. There will continue to be more emphasis on individual employer contact and validation of unique skill sets to match employers' workforce needs. These actions will strengthen the employer-driven system.

**2. How can we access a copy of the planning guidelines in Word format?**

The WD Letter is available on the Texas Workforce Commission Web site at <http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/wdletters/wdletters.html> in both PDF and Word format. The attachments are available only in PDF; however, if a large number of requests are received, TWC will consider converting the attachments to Word format and posting them on the Web site as well.

**3. How can we access the resource documents mentioned in the conference call?**

The resource documents are available on TWC's Web site at: [http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board\\_plan/classroom\\_highdemand.pdf](http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board_plan/classroom_highdemand.pdf).

**4. Where do we find the requested performance statistics for Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) Objectives Part 2?**

Performance information provided in response to Part 2 of the Texas Workforce Investment Council's (TWIC) long-term objectives (LTOs) is based upon cumulative Board performance from Program Year 2004 (PY'04), as applicable to the 2005 system and program LTOs listed on the matrix in Appendix 1.

**5. When will the 2002 to 2012 Texas Employment Projections for our Board areas be published, and will they be loaded into SOCRATES?**

Industry projections for each local workforce development area have been e-mailed to the Boards. The regional projections will be uploaded into TRACER within the next two weeks but will not be uploaded into SOCRATES at this time.

**6. Are there any “Best Practice” limits on the Number of Targeted Industries or limits on the Number of Targeted Occupations?**

There is no limitation on the number of industries and occupations a Board may consider. TWC will review plans to ensure that a labor market analysis was used to identify occupations and transferable skills, and that the Board has verified this information with local partners, including employers. Because the new focus on skills at the occupational level is such a large undertaking, Boards may wish to concentrate their efforts on fewer occupations, as few as one or two. Remember, the targeted occupations list applies only to WIA-funded classroom training. Boards may provide other training options, such as on-the-job training and customized training funded through WIA Statewide and WIA Local Activities Funds, for any demand occupation, as well as for those occupations the Board has identified on its targeted occupations list. Boards do not have to provide a targeted occupations list with their plan; however, they should have a list of occupations for which they will expend WIA funds for classroom training, available for review by state monitors.

**7. How does this new approach in targeting industries affect the Training Provider Certification System (TPCS)?**

The Eligible Training Provider Certification System (ETPS) will be reviewed to determine overall impact and necessary revisions based upon the new state and national priorities as outlined in the WIA State Plan and the Board Plan Modification Guidelines. Until this review is complete, training providers should be certified in accordance with the existing system requirements. Providers must provide classroom training within the targeted occupations, which included occupations on the PY’04 targeted occupations list and any occupations the Boards identify through the 2005–2006 planning process.

**8. Will skill training that the colleges may develop need to be approved through that system?**

Skill training developed by a college needs to be approved through ETPS. Once college curricula are approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, ETPS can approve the curricula in a shorter period of time.

**9. Will TWC be meeting with training providers and/or providing information to them regarding this change in philosophy, which may significantly impact them?**

ETPS will be reviewed to determine overall impact and necessary revisions based upon the new state and national priorities as outlined in the WIA State Plan and Board Plan Modification Guidelines. At that time, training for providers may be developed if deemed necessary.

- 10. It appears that this new focus on high demand jobs would likely mean lower wage jobs in our region. We are concerned that we will not be able to meet the proposed performance measures and wonder if it's too late to re-negotiate with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) on targets that take into account this change. Will we be able to negotiate lower targets on performance measures? On the conference call, there was a mention that measures could be negotiated as they related to trade-affected assistance, but it wasn't clear that measures could be re-negotiated for other programs.**

It is unclear why focusing classroom training on high-demand jobs would necessarily result in lower earnings. The Board can expand their high demand, high growth occupations to include those occupations that have lower actual demand and growth but higher wages. The workforce pipeline includes job seekers at all skill levels, from entry level to high level. High-wage occupations that have lower actual demand and growth may be more appropriate for highly skilled job seekers, such as dislocated workers, trade-affected workers, and incumbent workers. Some job seekers may be more appropriately placed in low-skill jobs initially, but only if the Board continues to work with the customer with the goal of achieving steady upward mobility over time and, ultimately, self-sufficient earnings. The Board must establish and maintain this pipeline of skilled workers, a broad continuum of skills training, and employment opportunities for customers.

Additionally, training provided through WIA Statewide Activities and WIA Local Activities Funds are not subject to WIA performance targets. This provides Boards the flexibility to focus on new and emerging occupations and those that may not have wage levels sufficient to meet WIA performance targets.

TWC does not anticipate that the refocus on skills will reduce our ability to meet individual measures. The timeframe for changing U.S. Department of Labor performance targets has passed for this program year.

- 11. In looking at the TWIC matrix, we are confused by the requirement related to the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) exiters remaining employed as being an area that Boards must address. Is this correct?**

Yes. All LTOs marked with an "R" (required) in the TWIC matrix identify the Boards as "Accountable Participants" in the *Destination 2010* Strategic Action Plans, available at <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/twic/mandate/view>.

The rationale behind this LTO is that "the vocational rehabilitation process can be extensive and rigorous; therefore, the system must ensure that persons completing services

are trained for significant employment opportunities that currently exist in the local labor market.”

We understand that the Boards have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission that addresses the workforce services delivered to this population.

**12. We don't believe that our current plan adequately addresses this area, so it would need to be modified. On last week's call, however, it was stated that no other modification would be allowed at this time. Will modifications be allowed to ensure compliance with the TWIC requirements?**

There is no need to modify. The TWIC matrix is designed to recognize that the Board plan may not specifically include information that addresses each required LTO from *Destination 2010*.

There are two options for addressing each of the required objectives:

1. Note the page number(s) from the Board's plan that aligns with and addresses the objective.
2. If there is no specific information in the Board's plan that aligns with and addresses the objective, provide explanatory text to demonstrate the connection of local planned activities to the LTO and state how the Board plans to address the LTO in the program year covered by the plan.

So, for CU5.0, Boards should enter explanatory text in the matrix that demonstrates how they will address this objective.

**13. In terms of the MOUs, what is the need for a MOU between the Boards and TWC when there is already a contract in place. How would an MOU differ from the contract? Why can't we incorporate the MOU's into the contract?**

Boards do not need to have an MOU with an entity with which it also has a contractual agreement, provided the contract includes the following six required components:

- 1) The name of the Board and the partner entity or entities executing the contract
- 2) A description of the services to be provided
- 3) An explanation of how services and operating costs of the system will be funded
- 4) The method of referral
- 5) The duration and process for amending the contract
- 6) Any other requirements of interest to the parties signing the contract

**14. What is the specific difference between a career ladder and a career lattice?**

In the past, workers climbed career ladders by moving upward within a company, increasing their level of responsibility and income with each move. Today, there are

fewer career ladders within organizations. Workers often have to make moves among companies and positions, often horizontally instead of vertically, to create their own career paths. Because these paths look more like garden lattices than ladders, the term career lattice is used to describe the lateral moves workers make to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities. A lateral move may not increase earnings initially, but it sets the worker on a path that may lead to increased earnings in the future. Each worker's career lattice, and the career planning that goes into creating such a lattice, is very individualized in today's economy. (Source: *Pathways to Personal Independence*, Labor Market and Career Information Department)

**15. What if we don't have enough time to fully 'verify' the skills employers are requesting by the 7/25 deadline; can we discuss what we plan to do in the upcoming year with regard to discussions with employers?**

Yes. In this case, the Board should include a description of the process it will use to engage employers and other local partners to verify and validate the identified skills. A description of the methods used for employer validation, and the value added to the labor market analysis and the planning process, should be included in the Board's plan modification submission.

**16. What information can the Governor's Office share with the Boards about industry clusters. I recall hearing something about Texas having a set of clusters - how did they compile the information and what can Boards glean from their work?**

Boards may obtain more information about the Governor's Industry Cluster Initiative by visiting:

[http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/initiatives/Industry\\_Cluster/Industry\\_Cluster\\_SP/view](http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/initiatives/Industry_Cluster/Industry_Cluster_SP/view)

Boards may demonstrate how they are supporting the economic development efforts of the Governor's Industry Cluster Initiative. In addition, Boards may analyze and identify their own local or regional industry clusters for workforce development efforts or initiatives involving business services operations. Boards have maximum flexibility in focusing on industry sectors, or groupings of industry sectors, to carry out a range of employer activities. While the classroom training list is not intended to be specifically reflective of such a cluster vision, it may be one element in an overall workforce development strategy that the Board has built around targeted industry clusters.

**17. Once this planning process is complete, what are we expected to do with the information? How is this information going to aid in "making better decisions about classroom training"? What other purpose will this plan serve, specifically for the business community and/or economic development?**

The strategic planning process is ongoing and should never reach completion. However, once Boards have analyzed the local labor market and identified high-growth, high-

demand occupations and transferable skills, they will verify this information with local employers to ensure that workforce services produce job seekers who possess the skills for immediate and future employment in the local labor market. The Boards, working in conjunction with employers and training providers, will then invest local training funds in programs that are responsive to the needs of local employers. The Board then will be able to evaluate which training programs actually produced workers who were immediately employable within the occupations for which they were trained. Boards will need to determine whether to continue to support programs or occupations that do not result in placements. TWC intends for the local plans to guide the expenditure of workforce funds, at a minimum. The local plan may also contribute to the development of marketing materials, economic development resources, and a guide for developing training programs within high-growth, high-demand occupations.

**18. I would feel more comfortable following some type of model that I can re-format into our own local design, what exists out there in the world of workforce development for me to review?**

There is an example of an environmental scan, or external assessment, on TWC's Web site. Appendix II of the 2005 Strategic Two-year State Plan for Workforce Investment is a statewide labor market analysis entitled "Economic and Labor Market Information." It can be accessed on TWC's Web site at:

[http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/wia/state\\_plan/state\\_plan.html](http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/wia/state_plan/state_plan.html)

"Identifying Classroom Training Opportunities in High-Growth, High-Demand Industries" provides a model of the labor market planning process. It is available on TWC's Web site at:

[http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board\\_plan/classroom\\_highdemand.pdf](http://www.twc.state.tx.us/boards/board_plan/classroom_highdemand.pdf)

The Board may also refer to the criteria used and steps to be followed for the labor market targeting approach, data gathering, and consensus building, which are laid out in Chapter 7 of "Connecting the Dots," a publication of the Labor Market and Career Information Department. The publication is available on the SOCRATES Planning and Resources page at:

<http://socrates.cdr.state.tx.us/iSocrates/Files/ConnectingTheDots.pdf>

**19. Do we need to conduct employer surveys to validate occupational skills data with local employers?**

No. In fact, an employer survey is the least recommended method of obtaining validation information because surveys do not directly engage local employers. The best method to validate the occupational needs of employers, as well as the skills within those occupations, is through on-going, one-on-one meetings with employers within the high-growth, high-demand industries being considered by the Board. Other methods may include:

- employer focus groups; and
- working with economic development entities and employer-led associations.

In order to collect factual and detailed information that truly validates your services in the eyes of local employers, Boards must directly and individually engage as many local employers as possible. Regular, one-on-one contact builds rapport, trust, and confidence. It assures employers that the Board is aware that each employer has specific needs to be addressed based upon their own business practices, concerns, and processes. *There is no better way for Boards to establish themselves and the local workforce system as the first place for workforce solutions.*