

1 **Staff Responses to Commission Work Session Discussion Paper**
2 **A Workforce Strategy for Rural Texas**

3 **Commission Recommendations**

4 As part of TWC’s framework for strategically improving our mission-driven economic support
5 efforts, the Commission should adopt a Rural Workforce Strategy with an initial focus on the
6 following:

- 7 1. Appoint a Rural Workforce working group to focus on rural workforce needs.
 - 8 a. The working group should be made up of representatives from: rural businesses,
9 community colleges serving rural communities, and regional economic development
10 corporations serving rural communities, such as Texas Midwest Community Network,
11 The High Ground of Texas, Texas Rural Funders, and Texas Forest Country
12 Partnership.
 - 13 b. The working group should meet at least twice per year, or as needed, at meetings hosted
14 by TWC’s Outreach and Employer Initiatives, in consultation with the Workforce
15 Development Division.
- 16 2. Convene a rural summit in the Fall of 2023 to further assess the situation and begin to
17 develop long term solutions.
- 18 3. Establish a new program from WIOA statewide reserve funds to provide funding to
19 Workforce Development Boards to use for Training Labs, short-term, turnkey training
20 opportunities in partnership with local governments and community colleges or other
21 approved training providers. This program would require each of the three entities (LWDB,
22 training provider and local unit of government) to contribute something of value to the
23 project. These funds would be limited to use in municipalities with a population of less than
24 25,000 or in the unincorporated areas of any county of less than 200,000.
- 25 4. Provide priority scoring for Upskill Texas applications in municipalities with a population
26 of less than 25,000 or in the unincorporated areas of any county of less than 200,000.
- 27 5. Increase available funding for the High Demand Job training program, eliminate the per-
28 board award cap, and allow training in any field on the Board’s or TWC’s in-demand jobs
29 list for applications in municipalities with a population of less than 25,000 or in the
30 unincorporated areas of any county of less than 200,000.
- 31 6. Establish a fund to pay for costs associated with credentials issued as a result of CTE
32 coursework.
- 33 7. Establish and increase outreach efforts for these rural initiatives.

34 **Staff Responses**

- 35 1. **Outreach and Employer Initiatives Response to Rural Workforce working group:**
36 Staff will identify, outreach, and recruit experts to participate in the Rural Workforce
37 Working Group. Once established, the staff will coordinate meetings, agendas, meeting
38 minutes, recommendations, and action items. Estimated Cost: absorbed.
- 39 2. **Outreach and Employer Initiatives Response to Rural Summit:** OEI staff, in
40 collaboration with Conference Planning, will organize a statewide summit to gather
41 rural workforce stakeholders and experts to highlight pressing challenges facing rural
42 workforce development and identify practical solutions to address the challenges. Staff

1 recommends a conference in the winter to allow time for planning. Cost: \$45,000 plus a
2 registration fee or a sponsorship to cover food and beverage costs, if offered.

3 Additionally, staff recommends commissioning a targeted study to identify rural
4 workforce needs, requirements, challenges, barriers, and opportunities and presenting
5 the findings at the summit. The research could also inform future outreach strategies.
6 Cost: \$100,000.

- 7 3. **Workforce Development Response to Training Labs:** Staff recommends funding a
8 program that helps Boards develop training labs in rural communities that focus on local
9 employer needs and provide training to potential workers. Boards will operate these
10 training labs by partnering with county or municipal governments and community
11 colleges or technical schools and defray costs by identifying relevant contributions for
12 each partner.

13 Eligible community partners must submit an application to the Boards in order to
14 determine whether they are qualified to provide training services to individuals in rural
15 communities. Ideally, trainings will help participants earn industry-endorsed and -
16 recognized certifications for industries on a local or statewide target occupation list. The
17 program will offer an established curricula that is composed of classes and training for
18 various programs that lead to an assessment and testing. Applicants must provide proof
19 that trainings will occur in municipalities with populations of less than 25,000 or the
20 unincorporated areas of any county with a population of less than 200,000.

21 In addition to providing rural community Training Labs, the initiative will allow
22 communities and municipalities that meet the definition of rural to use program funds to
23 cover training providers' costs associated with exams, credentials, and licenses for
24 individuals who have recently completed training.

25 *Staff Recommendation:* TWC can make \$1 million in WIOA statewide funding
26 available by application to boards who will identify training and city or municipality
27 partners, providing training in the local community as described.

- 28 4. **Outreach and Employer Initiatives Response to Priority scoring for Upskill Texas**
29 **applications:** Staff recommends evaluating the results of the current funding round before
30 determining how to move forward with the Upskill Texas program.

31 Priority scoring necessitates publishing a Request for Applications (RFA) as the means of
32 soliciting program applications, although unique program parameters could be considered
33 for rural applications (e.g., a different max/min request, smaller employers, etc.). If
34 additional funds are allocated to Upskill Texas, staff recommends keeping it as an open
35 application program, rather than an RFA and exploring unique parameters for projects
36 benefitting rural employers.

- 37 5. **Outreach and Employer Initiatives Response to Increased funding for HDJT and TIP:**
38 Currently, the High Demand Job Training (HDJT) and the Texas Industry Partnership (TIP)
39 funding pool is combined at \$2,000,000. If approved, the funding pool for both programs

1 will increase; however, the staff will only apply the rural preferences outlined in the
2 proposal to the HDJT applications only.

3
4 6. **Workforce Development Response to costs associated with credentials issued as a**
5 **result of CTE coursework:** This commission request has been addressed as a response to
6 the Middle Skills Gap Discussion Paper.

7 7. **Outreach and Employer Initiatives Response to outreach efforts for rural initiatives:**
8 **Communications and Campaigns and Creative Content Activities:**

9 *Option 1: \$50,000*

- 10 • Develop a Rural Communications Plan (in house)
- 11 • Design and distribute online toolkit of downloadable resources (in house)
- 12 • Design and develop email campaign promoting services to EDCs, Chambers of
13 Commerce, and Employers (in house)
- 14 • Pitch deskside briefings with rural media to establish regional team members and
15 other Texas Workforce Solutions spokespersons as ‘go to’ resources when
16 covering workforce topics: hiring, labor market information, employment law,
17 skills training, grant opportunities, etc. (in house)
- 18 • Design and execute a small paid media campaign promoting specific workforce
19 services (outreach vendor)

20
21 *Option 2: \$150,000*

- 22 • All activities listed above plus:
- 23 • Add the paid media campaign for additional weeks and markets (outreach
24 vendor)

25
26 *Option 3: \$250,000*

- 27 • All activities listed above plus:
- 28 • Extend the paid media campaign for additional weeks and markets (outreach
29 vendor)

30 **Note:** *Paid media costs will vary by market and time of year.*