

Texas Workforce Commission Response to House Higher Education Committee Formal Request for Information

101 E. 15th Street, Room 665
Austin, Texas 78778
512-463-1802

1. How can the state meet the goals of 60x30TX?

Texas' Higher Education Strategic plan for 2015-2030, 60x30TX, set lofty but critical goals for our state to foster the educated, skilled workforce needed to continue our state's economic success through the provision of valuable opportunities to Texas families and communities in the rewarding and ever-changing demand occupations in Texas businesses. From the plan's issuance, TWC recognized our crucial role in each of the plan's broad goals, along with the importance of collaboration towards those goals with our Tri-Agency partners, THECB and TEA.

TWC contributes to the goal of increasing the percent of working age Texans with degrees and certificates in numerous ways and continues to add programs and pilots, with a current focus on providing fast-paced training to large swaths of individuals who can benefit from upskilling to connect to one of the many in-demand middle-skill jobs in our state, especially those individuals disconnected from the workforce due to the economic impacts of COVID-19. For example, in June 2020, TWC launched the Statewide Skills Initiative to make 5,000 online courses available for free to all unemployment benefit recipients in the state. Through this initiative, TWC has outreached 1.6 million individuals, more than 27,000 of whom have begun training, and 13,780 have completed a short-term training that will help them connect more strongly to the Texas economy. Through programs offered directly from TWC and through partnership with our 28 Local Workforce Development Boards, TWC provides training and upskilling resources that help launch Texans on the educational path towards a 60x30TX completion. Many of the training opportunities available through our programs can lead to a certificate or degree, and many others lead to industry-based credentials that also contribute significantly to the state's long-term education and workforce needs.

In a typical year, TWC and our partners provide upskilling/training to approximately 27,000 through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker programs, over 69,000 through the Adult Education and Family Literacy (AEL) Program, 6,800 through Apprenticeship, and more than 16,700 workers through the Skills Development Fund. TWC's breadth and diversity of programs allow us to support Texans education in every phase of their lives, from early education through our Child Care program, to career exploration and STEM education for middle schoolers, to internship promotion and dual credit for high schoolers, to apprenticeship and the myriad of other upskilling opportunities that can benefit working age Texans in any phase of their career. Thanks to our Workforce Board partners, TWC maintains a strong connection to and focus on the needs of our diverse employers, so each of these programs can be individually tailored for the regions around the state that have distinct industries and education and workforce needs. Through these programs and initiatives, and many more, TWC play a critical role in the 60x30TX completion and marketable skills goals, while also contributing resources to the completion and student debt goals that are critical to the state's continued economic success. TWC has adapted many of our programs in response to COVID-19, such as by increasing flexibility for child care families and providers, streamlining and expanding access to the Skills Development Fund program, and supporting Workforce Board ability to provide virtual, drive-up, and other innovative service models to meet safety protocols while maintaining service levels. TWC will

continue to adapt and innovative our programs, while also collaborating with our agency partners and other stakeholders to adapt to the needs of Texas and reach the 60x30TX goals.

2. How has the pandemic impacted our state's workforce needs?

The state has seen a significant number of layoffs as a result of the COVID-19 disaster, with over 4.8 million claims for unemployment insurance since the week of March 14, 2020. As employers needed assistance initiating furloughs or layoffs, Workforce staff assisted by providing Rapid Response services, which included assistance with job search, resume writing, and job coaching for the affected workers. At the height of the pandemic, all 11 major industries suffered series-high over-the-month job declines, such as Retail Trade, Leisure and Hospitality, Air Transportation, and Other Services. A broad array of industries was impacted with early and ongoing layoffs. Leisure and Hospitality shed over half a million jobs in April alone. The industry added back over 60 percent of those positions in May and June but declined again by 28,000 positions in July. Many other industries followed similar movements, rebounding partially in May and June before dipping less drastically in July. Mining and Logging, Construction, and Manufacturing all declined over the month in July.

While many were laying off, other employers needed additional workers to meet increased demands. Examples of industries that expanded initially were those operating in Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities which added 7,100 jobs from May to July, and Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores have added 52,100 jobs during that time. Also, Nondurable Goods Manufacturing, including Food Manufacturing, has consistently increased monthly since April. Some manufacturers also transitioned to production of new product lines in demand for COVID-19 response such as hand sanitizer, masks, or paper products. Information technology and healthcare occupations are among those that continue to show current strong demand. These occupations include Software Developer, Computer Support Specialist, Network Engineer, Registered Nurse, Licensed Practical Nurse, and Health Technician or Technologist.

In April 2020, the Commission approved \$28 million in funds to support local workforce staff in expanding services during COVID-19 response. The Commission approved four key actions to support COVID-19 response including funds to hire 100 staff for UI claims processing, virtual service provision to customers and employers, and any other mission critical work. AEL funds also support distance learning and related remote education services including mobile messaging applications and supplies necessary to support expansion of distance learning and also increase the call volume for a student math assistance call center to help students receive critical virtual math support to pass the high school equivalency test. To date, over 20,000 students have received distance learning services; WIOA initiative funds assist Boards in providing Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion activities with a focus on training. To date, over 33,000 customers have received training and other virtual services; Last, a streamlined Skills Development Funds model was developed to support training in high demand occupations with priority given to training in the healthcare, manufacturing, and IT sectors retooling business processes in direct response to needs identified by COVID-19. To date, over 2,100 Texans have received needed training. In addition, in June 2020, the Skills Enhancement Initiative was approved by the Commission and provides more than 5,000 virtual courses at no cost for UI claimants in Texas.

3. Is there legislative action that could help expand work-based learning?

TWC has not encountered legislative barriers to providing work-based learning opportunities. The agency will continue to review all programs to determine if more flexibility is needed. If any are identified, recommendations will be brought to the legislature.

TWC has long supported work-based learning. A primary example is TWC's continued support for local apprenticeship programs. TWC has invested approximately \$58 million in training over 114,000 apprentices. In FY'20, TWC supported the training of over 6,800 apprentices and continues to emphasize the program.

In addition, since 2017, TWC and Tri-Agency partners have hosted the Texas Internship Challenge, which the objective of Texas Internship Initiative is to create and execute internship models that will demonstrate effective work-based learning experiences that prepare high school, community and technical college students for employment in high-demand middle-skill STEM occupations in the state. To date, over 6,200 individuals and nearly 500 employers have participated.

In 2018, TWC established the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program which provides students with disabilities, aged 14-22, work readiness training and paid work experience. SEAL is a partnership between TWC, Local Workforce Development Boards, Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and employers across the state. To date, more than 6,800 students with disabilities have received paid work experience and work readiness training through SEAL at more than 1,300 worksites.

4. Do current community college district boundaries align with the needs of the communities they serve? If not, how should they be altered and why will those changes improve educational opportunities for Texans?

TWC's experience has been that community colleges work collaboratively to ensure that local needs are met. When a college is unable to meet a need, they reach out to a neighboring college to see if that need can be met. When colleges cross into another college service area, they let that college know that they are providing training, usually at the request of a local business. Collaboration has been key in ensuring local needs are met.

Many of our community college districts have fostered strong partnerships with workforce through their Local Workforce Boards, and those partnerships better serve community needs. In addition, those partnerships open discussions that may influence consideration of district boundaries.

5. What is the current capability to handle an influx of Texans seeking re-training or upskilling opportunities through state programs?

TWC continually adapts to the changing needs of Texas and has increased capacity and retooled its training programs for individuals seeking re-training and upskilling. TWC has accomplished this through a number of initiatives.

In June 2020, TWC authorized up to \$5.8 million for the Skills Enhancement Initiative to offer rapid skills enhancement opportunities to Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants, preparing them to reconnect to the workforce in valuable opportunities made available by Texas employers. This new program provides access to 5,000 free online courses through the Metrix online learning platform.

In April 2020, the Commission approved funding for the AEL Professional Development network to develop virtual learning resources for remote learning. A team of AEL subject matter experts surveyed more than 900 AEL field staff to determine the topics and focus of videos. A similar team of lesson planners has begun work on these efforts, with the first videos expected to be completed late fall 2020.

In July 2020, TWC utilized \$9.4 million in grant funding from the Department of Labor to support the expansion of registered apprenticeship programs in Texas and increase the number of registered apprentices in Texas by 4,821. This funding has been used to meet increased demand for apprenticeship programs in healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, automotive repair and other field, and programs focusing on women, veterans, persons with disabilities.

TWC increased its server capacity to WorkInTexas.com to accommodate the increased traffic to the job matching site. Additionally, TWC has contracted with two third-party call centers to assist claimants with their registrations, resumes, and how to conduct job searches in WorkInTexas.

6. What is needed in order to identify and address gaps in existing data collection methods?

TWC and its Tri-Agency Taskforce co-members recently created a “Texas Data Workgroup” to focus on issues related to data sharing, data gaps, and ensuring that the agencies, stakeholders, and elected officials have the data necessary to produce informed, evidence-based analysis to be used to implement policy and statutory changes as appropriate to improve education and workforce preparedness of Texans. The workgroup will make recommendations to the Tri-Agency Taskforce Commissioners regarding changes they could make or recommend reducing data gaps. When this work is complete, the Tri-Agency Commissioners will provide their recommendations to the Governor and the legislature.

7. What improvements could be made to alleviate ‘summer melt’ and to facilitate streamlined student advising?

Innovative methods of student engagement help to educate students on programs of study that provide a clear path toward a future career. Work-based learning programs such as internships and apprenticeships enable students to stay engaged in both academic and work-based activities beyond the academic calendar and to stay connected with instructors, advisors, and mentors who provide motivation and encourage forward progress and completion of programs. For example, TWC’s Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program provides students with disabilities, aged 14-22, work readiness training and paid work experience that links education with paid work experiences.

TWC funds, trains, and supports Workforce Career and Technical Education Specialists hired by local Workforce Boards and co-located in ISDs in seven designated regions of the state. Workforce Specialists assist and direct youth in grades 6-12 toward high growth, high demand occupations; opportunities and training in middle-skills jobs; apprenticeship training programs; internships; community and technical colleges; and occupations experiencing existing or projected workforce shortages.

8. What changes, if any, are needed to align data collection between the THECB, TWC and TEA in order to collect consistent metrics?

TWC works with Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) and the Tri-Agency partners to identify key metrics for measuring success reported annually. The agencies continue to partner in sharing data related to participation in and outcomes of education programs in K-12, higher ed, and occupational training.

The Tri-Agency Taskforce's Texas Data Workgroup is discussing the following possibilities to enhance matching and sharing data between the agencies and sharing deidentified data with stakeholders and the public:

1. Extend use of the PEIMS student identifier to facilitate data matching beyond the childcare program, such as for WIOA Youth served by TWC, and enhance monitoring of dropout recovery efforts by identifying when a high school dropout is pursuing their High School Equivalency through TWC's AEL program.
2. Expand the allowable uses of data between the agencies.
3. Develop consolidated Tri-Agency, stakeholder/public-facing data tools that answer common questions about Texas education and workforce development including the ability for users to filter the data on a combination of demographic and geographic characteristics as well as time periods.

The workgroup began this summer and continues to work on the above-listed items. When this work is complete, the Tri-Agency Commissioners will provide their recommendations to the Governor and the legislature.

9. Does the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges affect their capacity to meet the goals of 60x30TX?

TWC contributes to the overall capacity of the state to provide degrees and certificates through several programs in which TWC partners with community colleges. The Skills Development Fund fosters collaboration between employers and community colleges for customized training. The College Credit for Heroes program provides Texas' service men and women with college credit for military education, training, and experience, and helps them identify career pathways to follow upon leaving military service. Since the program's inception, the program has issued 25,000 initial transcripts, and TWC has also recently awarded grants to support capacity building within community colleges and universities to more fully support veterans. In addition, while approximately 69,000 participants benefit from basic literacy and math AEL services each year, TWC also provides integrated education and training models, which include workforce training at a local community college. In FY 19 almost 7,000 AEL participants received workforce and training through the Accelerate Texas and other integrated models.

10. How has the overall financial status of small and rural community colleges been affected since COVID-19? How does that affect their ability to carry out normal operations?

While there are many factors that may affect the financial status of community colleges, TWC's commitment to partnering with them has remained consistent. Upskilling workers remains a primary goal, with TWC and its partners outreaching individuals who need workforce services, including occupational training. TWC continues to connect learners with community colleges through programs such as Skills Development Fund, AEL, WIOA, and many statewide initiatives.