
PANHANDLE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD PLAN

Program Years 2025-2028

Prepared on behalf of:



A proud partner of the **americanjobcenter** network

and



An Equal Opportunity Employer/Program

Panhandle Workforce Development Board Plan

Program Years 2025–2028

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Part 1: Board Vision and Strategies	5
A. Vision and Goals	6
B. Board Strategies	7
C. High-Performing Board	11
Part 2. Economic and Workforce Analysis.....	12
A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis	12
PWDB In-Demand Industries.....	26
PWDB In-Demand Occupations	26
PWDB Target Occupations	26
B. Labor Force Analysis and Trends	26
C. Workforce Development Analysis	31
Part 3: Core Programs.....	35
A. Workforce Development System	35
B. Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access	36
Part 4: One-Stop Service Delivery.....	37
A. One-Stop Service Delivery System	37
B. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination	45
C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services	46
D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management	47
E. Third Party Partnership in SNAP Employment and Training Programs	43
Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities	49
A. Rapid Response Activity Coordination	49
B. Youth Activities and Services	50
C. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs	52
D. Child Care and Early Learning	53
E. Transportation and Other Support Services	55
F. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy (AEL)	56
Part 6: Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Services.....	58
A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training	58
B. Service Priority	59

Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts	61
A. Fiscal Agent	61
B. Sub-Grants and Contracts	61
Part 8: Performance.....	61
A. Board Performance Targets.....	61
Part 9: Training and Services	62
A. Individual Training Accounts	62
B. ITA Limitations.....	63
Part 10: Apprenticeship	63
A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs.....	63
B. ApprenticeshipTexas.....	64
Part 11: Public Comment	64
Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements – Local Board Plan Requirements for Alignment to the Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan	65
System Goals and Objectives	65
1. Employers Goal – Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs.....	65
2. Learners Goal – Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship	67
3. Partners Goal – Alignment to Support Career Pathways	68
4. Policy and Planning Goal – Relevant Data Sets	68
Strategic Opportunities	69
1. Employer Engagement	69
2. Improving Outcomes for Texans with Barriers to Employment.....	72
3. Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions.....	73

Introduction

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §108 [20 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §679.500–580], each Local Workforce Development Board is required to develop and submit, to the State, a comprehensive four-year Board plan that identifies and describes policies and procedures as well as local activities which align with the following:

- [Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2024–2031](#), which sets the overarching direction for the Texas workforce system. Boards must demonstrate how their strategies and initiatives contribute to the plan’s vision of creating a world-class workforce system that positions Texas as a global economic leader.
- [Texas Workforce Commission \(TWC\) 2023–2027 Strategic Plan](#), which outlines TWC’s specific goals and strategies from now until 2027. Boards must demonstrate how their plans support TWC’s objectives, such as fostering economic growth, providing exceptional customer service, and maximizing efficiency and effectiveness.
- [WIOA Combined State Plan Program Years 2024–2027](#), which details how Texas will implement WIOA to achieve its workforce development goals. Boards must demonstrate how their plan supports the strategies identified in the WIOA Combined State Plan.
- [Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2021 to 2026](#), which outlines Texas’ strategies for improving adult education and literacy services. Boards must describe how they will coordinate with adult education providers and integrate these services into their workforce development efforts.
- [Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan 2023–2025](#), which focuses on strengthening the child care workforce in Texas. Boards must demonstrate how they will support the recruitment, training, and retention of high-quality child care professionals in their regions.

The Panhandle Workforce Development Board (PWDB) is a business-led group, the majority of which is comprised of employers from the private sector, as well as representatives from community-based organizations, labor, child care workforce, economic development, secondary and post-secondary education, adult and continuing education, literacy, vocational rehabilitation, public employment services, and the State department of human services. The PWDB is appointed by local elected officials, and oversees workforce program services provided in the 26-county region of the Texas Panhandle. The PWDB and its partners together implement the Board Plan, which directs local entities in their efforts to build a labor force that sustains local communities and supports a positive economic climate.

In March of 2021, the PWDB’s Workforce Solutions Panhandle (WSP) operations, after delivering workforce development services in downtown Amarillo for decades, were fully integrated with TWC’s Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services staff, and relocated to the current Certified Full-Service facility located at 3120 Eddy Street in Amarillo.

In April of 2022, WSP operations in Borger also relocated to the current Full-Service facility located at 1028-B Megert Center.

Services in Hereford continue to be available from the WSP office located on the Amarillo College Hereford campus at 1115 W. 15th Street.

WSP provides services to employers and job seekers in Dallam, Sherman, Hanford, Ochiltree,

Lipscomb, Hartley, Moore, Hutchinson, Roberts, Hemphill, Oldham, Potter, Carson, Gray, Wheeler, Deaf Smith, Randall, Armstrong, Donley, Collingsworth, Parmer, Castro, Swisher, Briscoe, Hall, and Childress counties. Services are made available to customers virtually and also through the WSP Mobile Workforce Development Services Unit, scheduled for at least two days per week in communities throughout these counties, including Canyon, Childress, Clarendon, Claude, Dimmitt, Dumas, Fritch, Memphis, Pampa, Perryton, Stinnett, Tulia, and White Deer.

Part 1: Board Vision and Strategies

A. Vision and Goals

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(E); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(5)

The strategic vision of the PWDB is to establish and enhance a workforce delivery system that serves the needs of area employers, job seekers, and constituents with efficient and effective services by promoting collaboration among stakeholders, creating partnerships with other community organizations, and focusing on workforce issues. The PWDB also supports regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency that will guide the development and provision of services.

The Texas Panhandle is experiencing growth across a diverse range of industries, with Transportation and Warehousing, Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, Agriculture, and Utilities leading the way. These growth trends highlight our region's evolving economy and the increasing demand for both traditional and specialized skills. Understanding these growth areas is essential for aligning workforce development programs, attracting new businesses, and ensuring the Panhandle's continued economic vitality. By focusing on these expanding sectors, as well as forecasting other emerging industries, the region can capitalize on emerging opportunities and build a strong foundation for future prosperity.

The population of the Texas Panhandle Workforce Development Area stands at approximately 437,281 residents, spread across the 26 counties that make up our region. While characterized by its expansive rural landscapes, the Panhandle also includes vibrant communities—from the metropolitan hub of Amarillo to smaller towns and rural centers—that play a critical role in driving the region's economy and culture.

Our region has experienced steady population growth in recent years, reflecting its economic diversity and opportunities. Between 2020 and 2024, the Panhandle's population increased by 1.75%, adding nearly 6,848 new residents. Looking ahead, projections show that growth will continue, with an estimated 2.6% increase between 2024 and 2028. This would bring approximately 11,483 additional residents to the area, further strengthening the workforce and expanding local communities.

Population changes, however, vary across the 26 counties in the Panhandle. Amarillo, the largest city in the region and an anchor for employment, education, and healthcare, is expected to see the most significant growth. Smaller towns and rural areas, which are integral to the Panhandle's agricultural and energy sectors, may experience slower growth or population stabilization as they remain tied to industries that are more consistent in size and scope.

While the Panhandle's population growth is modest compared to larger metropolitan areas in Texas, it reflects the region's ability to remain a stable and attractive place to live. Affordable housing, a strong job market, and accessible amenities make the area well-suited for families, professionals, and retirees alike. These factors continue to support the Panhandle as a desirable location for both current residents and those seeking new opportunities.

As the population in our region grows, it will be important to ensure that workforce development initiatives, infrastructure, and public services evolve to meet the changing needs of residents. The

PWDB, through WSP, is committed to working with employers, educators, and community leaders to prepare for this continued growth. By investing in the skills and potential of our workforce, we can help our region remain competitive, resilient, and ready for the future.

The PWDB's goals for preparing an educated and skill workforce include (1) meeting local employers' demand for skilled workers with an educated, highly skilled, and well-qualified labor force; (2) creating new employment opportunities by motivating skilled workers to remain in or return to the Panhandle Region; supporting a regional workforce system where individuals are empowered to embark on career pathways leading to increased educational, occupational, and adult literacy skill levels, attainment of recognized credentials, employment with self-sufficiency earnings, and employment security, while meeting the immediate and future skills needs of employers, and (4) increasing the number of customers engaged in career services and short-term training that leads to employment in high-wage, in-demand occupations.

- The PWDB's goals align with TWC in three important areas including, but not limited to, the provision of:
 - Early education services in supporting early education services, such as by providing professional development opportunities for child care providers, through Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Quality Improvement Activities Grants to the PWDB from TWC;
 - Services for youth by directing services for students to available training and career path options, such as with onsite support at public middle and high schools, though WSP's Education Outreach Specialist (EOS) Services provided include career guidance, career preparation, and workforce information to students through interactive presentations/workshops; and
 - Services for individuals with barriers to employment as defined by WIOA §3(24) by continuing to develop and implement effective strategies for employment placement and retention of veterans, such as -targeted Job Fairs; individuals with disabilities, through WSP's Student Hireability Navigator and other collaboration with TWC Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff collocated with WSP; individuals who have exhausted unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, through access to an array of WSP resources and services, such as intensive reemployment assistance delivered through the Reemployment Services Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) federal grant program; dislocated workers, the underemployed, and high-risk population groups, who have the opportunity for enrollment in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) or other programs; as well as disconnected youth and adults who have barriers to employment, including Foster Youth through the Amarillo Foster Youth Transition Center at Buckner Children and Family Services; and those individuals who are basic skills deficient, who may be referred to literacy programs, adult basic education, GED, and adult educational cooperatives, as appropriate.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires TWC to include statistical WIOA Performance Assessment Models (PAMs) in setting Performance Measures targets for each Workforce Board Area (WDA). Developing statistical models is a cyclical, flexible series of steps to build, refine, test and implement changes to improve the process of creating more efficient strategies. Data must be sourced, collected, aggregated, and processed; and then a model must be fit to the data, and evaluated. WIOA requires models used for setting targets to include two categories of factors that impact performance: individual characteristics and economic indicators. Individual characteristics include features such as demographic variables, like race, and individual

level WIOA specific characteristics, like how long an individual was in a program. A minimal viable model under WIOA would be a single individual characteristic, such as age, and a single economic indicator, such as unemployment rate. Individual characteristics are aggregated at the WDA and quarter level. Each value for these features is expressed as a rate.

Economic indicators include features from Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) and Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). These economic indicator features are not available at the individual level. Instead, they provide WDA level unemployment rate, percent of the population for the WDA employed in various industries, and median wage for the WDA. No model will ever perfectly capture all aspects of the target variable. While developing PAMs, the goal is to create models that produce more reliable and accurate predictions than the previous approach.

PAMs include two additional features: WDA population density and disaster grant count. WDA level population density helps account for differences between WDAs in several ways. WDAs with higher population density tend to have higher percentages of non-white and non-Hispanic populations. WDAs with lower population density skew slightly older and serve fewer customers. The disaster grant count feature is based on the number of actively funded economic and natural disaster grants by the WDA by quarter. Together, population density and disaster grant count help account for aspects of performance that are not captured by individual characteristics or economic indicators.

To find predicted performance for targets, partially complete customer datasets are run through the models. The model outputs predict performance by the WDA. This predicted performance serves as a base for setting proposed targets.

- PWDB goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A) include collaboration with workforce system partners to align, leverage, and combine local communities' workforce resources by:
 - ✓ Identifying and effectively serving local employers' skill needs and hiring expectations;
 - ✓ Meeting job seekers' employment needs for placement, retention, and earnings;
 - ✓ Leveraging resources with education partners to address skill gaps including adult literacy skills deficiencies;
 - ✓ Outreaching and re-engaging Out-of-School Youth and Older Youth in work-based training;
 - ✓ Increasing short-term occupational training opportunities leading to attaining recognized credentials; and
 - ✓ Assisting students to successfully complete training which results in measurable skills gains, recognized credentials, entered employment, retention, and earnings.

B. Board Strategies

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(F); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(6)

The PWDB's strategy to work with entities carrying out the core programs and with required partners to align resources available to the Panhandle Workforce Development Area (PWDA), and to achieve the vision and goals, includes developing and actively supporting dynamic industry partnerships. By aligning and sharing resources through existing collaborations, such as the Board's Business Advisory Committee, comprised of Board and non-Board members, private sector employers, area college representatives, PWDB staff, and WSP staff, the PWDB is assisted in designing and delivering services based on business and industry needs, thus enhancing employer engagement.

- Continued collaboration with required partners in local business and education, and with local community organizations, will enhance the PWDB’s workforce system capacity for delivering effective employment and training services, while meeting required performance. Successfully aligning resources and responding to expected shortages of workers in skilled trades and technical occupations due to the skills gap created by employee turnover, combined with the increasing demand for a highly-technically skilled workforce, are essential. WSP Career Services utilize LinkedIn, the business and employment-focused social media platform that works through websites and mobile apps, to connect with employers and potential job seekers. This platform has proven effective in allowing job seekers to apply directly with companies.
- The PWDB continues to engage a Student HireAbility Navigator to fulfil the stated purpose of this position “To improve access to employment and training services and increase employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities”. The Panhandle’s Student HireAbility Navigator is fully involved in serving as a resource in the PWDA by “supporting, expanding, and enhancing the provision of pre-employment transition services that are provided by VR”, co-located in the WSP office in Amarillo. Through active participation in numerous relevant local committee meetings, attending local job fairs and transitional fairs, reaching more employers and service providers as well as educators, the Navigator continually identifies and reaches out to crucial partners who have shared goals and objectives to bring to the table. The Navigator promotes the Texas HireAbility Campaign at meetings with educators, employers and community partners to increase the awareness of the benefits of hiring people with disabilities as well as increasing access to pre-employment transition services.
- Work continues to encourage and support local partners to pursue skills development grant opportunities to apply for and obtain grants such as TWC’s Jobs and Education for Texas (JET), and the High Demand Job Training (HDJT) grants. HDJT’s \$150,000 annual Grant Application opportunities have provided, to-date, nearly \$1.2 million which were matched by the EDCs, for the PWDA. The PWDB plans to continue requesting these WIOA Activities funds which have supplemented Career & Technology Education (CTE) training programs throughout the PWDA.
- Identifying and developing effective career pathways, creating data-driven career choices that align with demand, and delivering appropriate workforce services for Adults, Youth, and Dislocated Workers under WIOA, are critical to achieving the PWDB’s workforce goals and objectives. Utilizing resources such as CareerOneStop.com, a U.S Department of Labor (DOL) tool which pulls datasets from DOL’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Employment and Training Administration (ETA), which includes its trademark Occupational Information Network (O*NET), the PWDB is building career pathway “roadmaps” for occupations on its Target Occupations List. Where training gaps exist, options such as Local Activity Fund, Wagner-Peyser grants available through the Governor’s office, and TWC Skills Development Fund (SDF) Grant projects, may be pursued to fund curriculum development that initiates instructional availability.
- To promote Apprenticeship programs between regional businesses, Independent School Districts (ISDs) and community colleges, the PWDB maintains Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the Independent Electrical Contractors (IEC) of the Texas Panhandle, the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 404, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local 665, the West Texas Electrical Joint Apprenticeship & Training Committee (JATC) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 602. These MOUs formalize the responsibilities of the parties to:

- ✓ Provide information on apprenticeship and training opportunities to PRPC and WSP;
 - ✓ Make employers and individuals seeking training aware of WSP resources and services and provide appropriate referrals.
 - ✓ Market the apprenticeship programs to businesses in the PWDA as a means to recruit and train qualified workers;
 - ✓ Refer WSP customers to the apprenticeship programs;
 - ✓ Provide workforce center space to the apprenticeship providers for use in interviewing, testing and conducting informational meetings associated with apprenticeship and training opportunities; and
 - ✓ Provide automated links to apprenticeship-related websites through WSP public-use computers.
- Amarillo College (AC) is the PWDA’s Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Service Provider, which helps adult students gain the basic skills needed to succeed in the workforce, earn a high school equivalency, or enter college or career training. AC is developing a new digital customer referral tool, MyOneFlow, to enhance the collaboration with the PWDB and WSP, in performing intake, determining program eligibility, assisting with enrollment in classes, coordinating supportive services as needed, and facilitating the process of connecting customers in order to provide English language, math, reading, and writing instruction to help students acquire the skills needed to succeed in the workforce, earn a high school equivalency, or enter college or career training.
 - In alignment with the Jobs for Veterans Act, the PWDB and WSP provide priority service to veterans and spouses of certain veterans for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services in any job training program directly funded, in whole or in part, by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

WSP continues to identify gaps in service to veterans and advance strategies to enhance their education and employment opportunities to ensure seamless transition into the workforce.

The PWDB and WSP also utilize Wagner-Peyser Employment Services (ES) funding to support:

- ✓ TWC’s Panhandle Region Hiring Red, White & You! Annual Job Fairs in partnership with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). The 2024 Hiring Red, White & You! Job Fair was hosted on 11/7/2024 at the WSP office in Amarillo, featuring 34 participating employers, including AFLAC Insurance, Amarillo Police Department, BSA Health System, Children’s Orchard Academy Early Education and Preschool, First Student Inc. Transportation Services, JBS Meat Packing & Processing, U.S. Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration, (NNSA), Northwest Texas Healthcare System, Pantex Plant, Phillips 66 Energy, SAS Retail Services, Sodexo Food Services & Facilities Management, and United Supermarkets. As part of the event, each employer was asked to complete a survey aimed at helping the WSP Business Services Unit evaluate the effectiveness of their services. The survey covered aspects such as the event's quality, the number of job seekers with whom each employer engaged, and provided an opportunity for employers to share their feedback and suggestions. WSP was able to enter 84 job postings from participating employers into TWC’s Job Matching Platform, WorkInTexas.com. The event had strong attendance, with 371 job seekers, including 73 veterans.
- ✓ TWC’s Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP). The Veterans Resource Coordinator for the program is provided access to the WSP facility in Amarillo and coordinates with the

Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and WSP's Business Services Unit on the Governor's Texas Operation: Welcome Home - Transitioning Texas Troops and TWC's We Hire Vets campaigns. The Coordinator maintains relationships with veteran services organizations including Family Support Services of Amarillo's Veterans Resource Center, StarCare Specialty Health System's VetStar Veteran Services, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion Post 54, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Panhandle Regional Veterans Treatment Court (PRVTC), and the Roan-Creek Marine Corp League, connecting veterans with the resources and tools needed to lead productive lives and enjoy the benefits of the society they have served.

- Foster youth are a priority population. TWC funds transition centers serving both current and former youth. The centers address critical life barriers facing youth who have or will soon age out of the foster care system. They provide access to education, employment training and services, life skills classes, mentoring opportunities, and appropriate support services. WSP and the PWDB continue to develop and nurture successful partnerships with the Amarillo Foster Youth Transition Center, at Buckner Children and Family Services, to improve and enhance the collaborative process of connecting with foster youth and provide comprehensive workforce services, including career exploration and occupational training or work-based training. Discussions continue with Amarillo Children's Home and the Turn Center, the only private, non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization in the federal Medically Underserved Area (MUA) of the 26-county Texas Panhandle, to create pathways that support Foster Youth who often have developmental delays or undiagnosed disabilities transition from school into employment preparation and training.
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) provides training and employment services to low-income job seekers age 55 and older to assist them in securing unsubsidized employment in the public and private sectors. Program participants earn while they learn, gaining competitive job skills and refining existing skills through paid, part-time, on-the-job training assignments at non-profit organizations and government agencies. During training, participants earn minimum wage and provide valuable community services. Utilizing designated office space in WSP in Amarillo, Motivation Education & Training, Inc. (MET), serving as the Sponsor Agency for the Senior Service America (SSAI), and as the Panhandle's SCSEP grantee, provides training, counseling, employment assistance, and paid, part-time community service assignments designed to move older workers into unsubsidized employment, which ensures that job seekers identified by WSP, are likely to benefit from services.
- Motivation, Education and Training, Inc. (MET), referenced above, also serves as the Panhandle region's National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) contractor, which includes mutual referrals for services, coordination of the delivery career and intensive services co-enrollment of individuals eligible for WIOA and NFJP who would benefit from the services of both programs. Partnering activities, with WSP, include joint case management and employment planning, and joint staff training.
- The WSP Director engages in the local No Limits/No Excuses (NL/NE) program initiative, Panhandle Community Partnership, with more than 26 community partners dedicated to "Making pathways to post-secondary credentials and living wage employment accessible for all individuals". Working with business and industry, the chief aims of Panhandle Community Partnership are to connect curriculum and training, create internships, and develop partnerships with education, community, and employers, to provide living wage jobs that will keep talent in

the PWDA.

- Through collaboration with the Texas Panhandle Rural Alliance, a group of vital partners from different sectors, who strive to create a common agenda, and to apply the concept of “collective impact” as an effective approach for solving specific community social problems, effective private and public partnerships are being utilized for many endeavors including increasing and improving workforce development in the PWDA.
- Panhandle Community Services (PCS) continues their partnership with the PWDB and WSP, to enhance employment services to their customers. PCS identifies customers who need assistance with workforce services to obtain full-time employment or complete short-term training leading to self-sufficiency and makes referrals to WSP, to begin the process of determining an individual’s career pathway. PCS’s work-based services include subsidized work experience arrangements and referrals, when appropriate, to WSP, for short-term training. The partners collaborate on the provision of supportive services to referred customers who are eligible to participate in these activities, and job search assistance is provided when customers are job-ready.

C. High-Performing Board

References: WIOA §108(b)(18); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(17)

The PWDB continues refining ongoing “Best Practices” to remain a high-performing Board, consistent with the factors developed by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC). Board staff work closely with the WSP Contractor on a proactive basis to pinpoint performance shortfalls and develop effective strategies to improve performance in targeted measures. These efforts including implementing strategies to increase program spending by appropriate and allowable methods, including:

- Proactive analysis and implementation of state and federal rules and regulations;
- Complete review/update of current Board policies compliant with WIOA requirements;
- Development and implementation of clear, concise, and substantive new local policies;
- Provision of guidance for achieving state mandated program performance standards;
- Development of media directed opportunities for job seekers to access workforce services;
- Enhancement of the WSP website and development of more effective user interfaces;
- Development and implementation of innovative and productive ways to utilize the mobile workforce units and expand workforce services to rural customers;
- Maximization of opportunities through VR Services integration to provide the complete package to job seekers who have disabilities, and eliminate barriers to employment;
- Development and implementation of creative plans to engage disconnected youth, remove barriers to employment, and produce successful career pathways;
- Increase in short term work-based training opportunities leading to employment;
- Continuation of improvement of business services team capabilities to assess employers’ skill needs and match capable workers with job openings;
- Engagement with local business leaders on a personal level to pinpoint employment needs;
- Reinvigoration of alliances with educators, economic developers and community partners to further mutual goals including developing apprenticeship initiatives;
- Further cultivation of partnerships and collaborations with local colleges and universities, and pool resources for occupational skills training opportunities;
- Collaboration with existing programs and funds to provide increased Adult Education and

Literacy (AEL) skills;

- Encouragement, creation, and support of labor market driven decisions for developing skills training and addressing labor force challenges;
- Strengthening of PWDB monitoring oversight focus to identify and address high risk areas;
- Sustainment of efforts to effectively place veterans, individuals with disabilities, and high-risk population groups in employment and to retain employment;
- Identification of emerging In-Demand Industries and Occupations, and Target Occupations in local job markets;
- Continuation of maintaining and improving two-way open lines of communication with WSP management and staff;
- Provision of active support to WSP management and staff including technical assistance, training, and guidance and clarification for PWDB policies;
- Communication to foster creative approaches to existing challenges and encourage inventive, unique ideas;
- Deliverance of WSP staff training that is timely, current, and relevant; and
- Obtainment of training for PWDB staff to fill in program management and knowledge gaps.

In accordance with 40 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §802.62, monitoring activities should ensure that programs achieve intended results, resources are efficiently and effectively used for authorized purposes, and resources are protected from waste, fraud, and abuse.

The PWDB continues to ensure that the TWC Subrecipient Monitoring Division of Fraud Deterrence and Compliance Monitoring is able to place reliance in the Panhandle's Fiscal and Program (WIOA, Child Care, and NCP) functions through a subcontracted external Fiscal Monitor and an internal Program Monitor, and has re-certified the monitoring functions for the Board.

A benefit of the internal Program Monitor not being outsourced is that, in addition to overseeing the specified attributes shared by TWC, this PWDB staff is able to extend the oversight to encompass more in-depth review of additional WSP actions, and is able to provide Technical Assistance on a continuous basis, which provides for proactive and not reactive, faster resolution of issues.

Part 2. Economic and Workforce Analysis

A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(A); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(1); WIOA §108(b)(1)(B); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(2); TWC Workforce Development (WD) Letter 24-20, Change 1

The Texas Panhandle economy is a dynamic and diverse system, contributing significantly to the overall economic strength of the state. With a Gross Regional Product (GRP) of \$34.3 billion, our region represents a vital part of Texas's \$2.6 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP), accounting for approximately 1.33% of the state's economic output. This contribution is particularly significant given our area's population of 437,281 residents, representing about 1.4% of the state's population and a labor force of 216,778. The Panhandle's economy is supported by 225,797 jobs, showcasing our region's strong employment base and economic activity. Our cost-of-living index stands at 101.1, slightly above the national average, reflecting the balance between affordability and quality of life that our region offers. Furthermore, the Panhandle engages in robust international trade, with \$40.4 billion in imports and \$48.1 billion in exports, demonstrating our connectivity to global markets and the competitiveness of our industries.

The Panhandle's GRP is underpinned by several key industries, each playing a crucial role in shaping our economic landscape. Agriculture remains a cornerstone of the region's economy. Our area is a national leader in cattle feedlots and beef production, supplying a substantial portion of the nation's fed beef. Beyond livestock, the Texas Panhandle is also a top producer of cotton, sorghum, dairy, and various other crops, solidifying its importance to both state and national agricultural markets. The economic impact of agriculture extends beyond the farm gate, with significant activity in food and agricultural processing, which adds value to raw commodities and creates additional employment opportunities.

Energy is another major driver of the Panhandle economy. While our region has a long history of oil and gas production, we have also become a leader in renewable energy. With over 2,400 wind turbines in operation and increasing investments in solar power, the Panhandle is at the forefront of Texas's transition to a more diversified and sustainable energy portfolio. This dual strength in traditional and renewable energy sources makes our region a key player in meeting the state's and nation's energy demands.

Manufacturing and defense are also critical components of the Panhandle's economic profile. The Pantex Plant, a major national security facility, and Bell Helicopter's assembly plant in Amarillo are significant employers and contributors to high-value manufacturing. These industries bring advanced technology and skilled jobs to our region, enhancing our economic competitiveness and strategic importance within the national economy.

A multitude of healthcare providers, facilities, and agencies offer broad range of medical services and continue to serve as a major source of employment in the region. Continuing efforts to identify and collaborate with these entities on innovative and successful skills development initiatives, such as a Skills Development Fund Grant Partnership with TWC and two Amarillo hospitals, which increased training for incumbent worker skills, are producing a highly qualified and well-compensated workforce to administer care to patients throughout a multi-state region.

Consistently low unemployment in the PWDB compared to other regions in Texas and declining rural populations affect much of the 26 counties in the Texas Panhandle, and require significant efforts in business practices to ensure that employers, job seekers and students in rural communities have access to needed workforce services, despite the lack of a constant, or limited physical presence.

Increased food production, processing, and meat packing facilities offer opportunities for jobs involving industrial mechanical repair. A large immigrant population primarily employed in the meat processing sector of this industry presents unique challenges to provide basic literacy services, including English as a Second Language (ESL), that offer opportunities for increased wage-earning potential.

PWDB staff and WSP Business Services staff gather information on local labor market developments and formulate recommendations on industries and occupations on which to focus workforce resources. Small, medium and large employers, economic developers, chamber of commerce representatives, educators, local elected officials, and other interested parties and stakeholders have input.

The WSP Business Services Unit specialized division is tailored to meet employer's workforce needs. The WSP Business Service Representatives (BSRs) work with employers and offer customized business consulting services, such as addressing human resource challenges and identifying the skills sets needed by industry. Workforce and Labor Market Information (LMI) is

essential to the Texas Panhandle's economy, providing for the efficient operation of labor markets by supplying quality labor market intelligence. Accurate, objective, relevant, timely, and accessible workforce and LMI is critical for:

- Building a skilled workforce that spurs business competitiveness and economic growth;
- Strengthening career pathways and guiding skill attainment for good jobs, economic opportunity, and career growth;
- Understanding the rapidly changing nature of work and how it impacts the workforce and the area's economy; and
- Spending workforce training and education funds effectively.

PWDB In-Demand Industries

The PWDA's In-Demand Industries align with the Texas Target Industry Clusters developed for the Governor's Texas Industry Cluster Initiative. The objective of this Initiative is to focus the allocation of resources on key industry clusters identified to be engines of job creation and economic development. "Industry cluster" means a concentration of businesses and industries in a geographic region that are interconnected by the markets they serve, the products they produce, their suppliers, the trade associations to which their employees belong, and the educational institutions from which their employees or prospective employees receive training. The Texas Target Industry Clusters are:

- 1) Advanced Manufacturing
- 2) Aerospace, Aviation and Defense
- 3) Biotechnology and Life Sciences
- 4) Energy
- 5) Information Technology
- 6) Petroleum Refining and Chemical Products
- 7) Corporate Services
- 8) Creative Industry

The PWDB's In-Demand Industries are expected to have sustained growth in the next three to five years. Employers in these industries need workers with skills that support that continued growth. WSP will provide services to employers by taking into consideration the occupations offering high wages and/or substantial career opportunities, industries losing workers (declining), economic development efforts, size, and those businesses without sufficient human resources staff. Employers in industries with declining employment may need services, including, but not limited to, the provision of information that could help employers with reducing staff hours but retaining workers; retooling and retraining assistance through coordination with economic development and training entities; and consultation in advance of layoffs, to promote the transition of workers into other employment.

The following list of the PWDB's In-Demand Industries has been derived from TWC's Texas Labor Market Data Tool at <https://texaslmi.com> of PWDA industries that:

- Have a substantial current or potential impact (including jobs that lead to employment opportunities that provide both economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement) on the state, regional, or local economy and that contribute to the growth or stability of other supporting businesses or to the growth of other industry sectors; or
- Currently have or are projected to have a substantial number of open positions (including

positions that lead to economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement) great enough to have a significant impact on the state, regional, or local economy.

Industry Code	In-Demand Industry	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage	Associated PWDA Target Occupation(s)	Governor's Industry Cluster
6111	Elementary and Secondary Schools	14,353	\$ 883	(1) Elementary, (2) Middle, and (3) Secondary School, and (4) Special Ed Teachers	
3116	Animal Slaughtering and Processing	12,589	\$ 1,116	Production Workers	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
1121	Cattle Ranching and Farming	8,721	\$ 916	Business Operations Specialists	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
6221	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	8,217	\$ 1,233	(1) Registered Nurses, and (2) Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
9221	Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities	4,148	\$ 1,298	(1) Firefighting and Prevention Workers, (2) Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	
6211	Offices of Physicians	3,649	\$ 1,801	(1) Medical Records Specialists, and (2) Phlebotomists	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
2371	Utility System Construction	2,142	\$ 1,570	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	Energy
8111	Automotive Repair and Maintenance	2,140	\$ 889	Automotive (1) Body, and (2) Service Technicians and Mechanics	
6231	Nursing Care Facilities (Skilled Nursing Facilities)	2,127	\$ 803	(1) Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses, and (2) Nursing Assistants	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
4841	General Freight Trucking	2,101	\$ 1,403	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	
5617	Services to Buildings and Dwellings	1,955	\$ 688	(1) Carpenters, (2) Electricians, and (3) Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	
5412	Accounting, Tax Preparation, Bookkeeping, and Payroll Services	1,867	\$ 1,280	(1) Accountants, Auditors and (2) Bookkeeping Clerks	Corporate Services
4842	Specialized Freight Trucking	1,792	\$ 1,303	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	
6216	Home Health Care Services	1,788	\$ 998	(1) Medical Assistants, and (2) Respiratory Therapists	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
2111	Oil and Gas Extraction	1,674	\$ 2,083	Petroleum Pump System Operators, Refinery Operators, and Gaugers	Petroleum Refining and Chemical Products
2131	Support Activities for Mining	1,618	\$ 1,396	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing
2211	Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution	1,457	\$ 2,127	(1) Electro-Mechanical, Mechatronics and (2) Wind Turbine Service Technologists, Technicians	Energy

Industry Code	In-Demand Industry	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage	Associated PWDA Target Occupation(s)	Governor's Industry Cluster
3251	Basic Chemical Manufacturing	1,089	\$ 2,065	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians	Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing
6213	Offices of Other Health Practitioners	1,065	\$ 974	Health Technologists and Technicians	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
3331	Agriculture, Construction, and Mining Machinery Manufacturing	993	\$ 1,266	Control and Valve Installers and Repairers	Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing
6244	Child Care Services	977	\$ 459	Childcare Workers	
5416	Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services	973	\$ 1,289	Information Security Analysts	Information and Computer Technology
5419	Other Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	936	\$ 1,146	(1) Project Management Specialists, and (2) Computer User Support Specialists	Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing
3241	Petroleum and Coal Products Manufacturing	888	\$ 1,925	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	Petroleum Refining and Chemical Products
5413	Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services	879	\$ 2,002	Drafters, Engineering Technicians, and Mapping Technicians	Advanced Technologies and Manufacturing
5411	Legal Services	837	\$ 1,535	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	Corporate Services
8113	Commercial and Industrial Machinery and Equipment	831	\$ 1,333	(1) Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians, and (2) Machinists	Aerospace and Defense
6214	Outpatient Care Centers	785	\$ 1,169	(1) Pharmacy Technicians, and (2) Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
2383	Building Finishing Contractors	703	\$ 1,096	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	
2361	Residential Building Construction	685	\$ 1,044	(1) Carpenters, (2) Electricians, and (3) Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	
3111	Animal Food Manufacturing	679	\$ 963	Production Workers	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
6219	Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	616	\$ 1,337	(1) Emergency Medical Technicians, and (2) Paramedics	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
6233	Continuing Care Retirement Communities and Assisted Living Facilities for the Elderly	590	\$ 731	Physical Therapist Assistants	Biotechnology and Life Sciences
5415	Computer Systems Design and Related Services	547	\$ 1,761	Network and Computer Systems Administrators	Information and Computer Technology
6232	Residential Intellectual, Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities	547	\$ 520	Psychiatric Technicians	Biotechnology and Life Sciences

PWDB In-Demand Occupations

The PWDB's In-Demand Occupations are occupations that currently have or are projected to have a substantial number of open positions (including positions that lead to economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement) great enough to have a significant impact on the state, regional, or local economy. The PWDB's list of In-Demand Occupations show those occupations which meet the following criteria: TWC projects 10 or more annual openings.

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	3,052
11-0000	Management Occupations	2,800
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support Occupations	2,645
41-0000	Sales and Related Occupations	2,475
35-3000	Food and Beverage Serving Workers	2,049
11-9000	Other Management Occupations	1,999
53-7000	Material Moving Workers	1,953
51-0000	Production Occupations	1,795
11-9013	Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	1,683
45-2093	Farmworkers, Farm, Ranch, and Aquacultural Animals	1,471
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	1,096
47-0000	Construction and Extraction Occupations	1,026
31-0000	Healthcare Support Occupations	873
51-3000	Food Processing Workers	792
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	779
53-7065	Stockers and Order Fillers	735
53-7062	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	669
39-0000	Personal Care and Service Occupations	668
47-2000	Construction Trades Workers	647
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations Occupations	607
49-9000	Other Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	591
11-1000	Top Executives	582
11-1021	General and Operations Managers	565
31-1100	Home Health & Personal Care Aides & Nursing Assts, Orderlies & Psych Aides	552
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers *	530
43-9000	Other Office and Administrative Support Workers	507
25-2000	Preschool, Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Special Education Teachers	486
43-3000	Financial Clerks	421
43-9061	Office Clerks, General	414
21-0000	Community and Social Service Occupations	403
29-1000	Healthcare Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners	400
13-1000	Business Operations Specialists *	389
43-4051	Customer Service Representatives	381

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
43-6000	Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	379
51-3022	Meat, Poultry, and Fish Cutters and Trimmers	373
29-2000	Health Technologists and Technicians	372
49-3000	Vehicle and Mobile Equipment Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	337
31-1120	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	336
43-5000	Material Recording, Scheduling, Dispatching, and Distributing Workers	320
35-2014	Cooks, Restaurant	312
51-3023	Slaughterers and Meat Packers	293
35-1012	First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	286
41-1000	Supervisors of Sales Workers	271
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	270
43-6014	Secretaries & Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, & Executive	269
43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks *	262
41-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	245
25-9045	Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary	238
47-2061	Construction Laborers	226
29-1141	Registered Nurses *	221
31-1131	Nursing Assistants *	211
51-4000	Metal Workers and Plastic Workers	205
25-3000	Other Teachers and Instructors	198
41-3000	Sales Representatives, Services	198
43-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	196
43-1000	Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	196
43-4171	Receptionists and Information Clerks	193
33-3000	Law Enforcement Workers	186
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education *	179
37-3000	Grounds Maintenance Workers	171
39-9011	Childcare Workers *	165
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	161
37-3011	Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers	161
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering Occupations	157
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical Occupations	155
49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics *	141
25-3031	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term	139
51-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	138
51-1000	Supervisors of Production Workers	138
25-1000	Postsecondary Teachers	128
41-4000	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing	128
39-2000	Animal Care and Service Workers	127
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors *	124
47-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	124

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
47-1000	Supervisors of Construction and Extraction Workers	124
35-2012	Cooks, Institution and Cafeteria	119
47-5000	Extraction Workers	115
51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers *	115
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education *	114
53-7051	Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators	110
31-9092	Medical Assistants *	107
53-1000	Supervisors of Transportation and Material Moving Workers	106
47-2111	Electricians *	104
39-2021	Animal Caretakers	103
41-3091	Sales Reps of Services, Ex Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services & Travel	103
53-3051	Bus Drivers, School	102
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses *	98
43-5071	Shipping, Receiving, and Inventory Clerks	98
49-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	97
49-1000	Supervisors of Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers	97
47-4000	Other Construction and Related Workers	92
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education *	90
33-3012	Correctional Officers and Jailers	88
51-2000	Assemblers and Fabricators	86
33-3051	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers *	86
43-6013	Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	80
17-2000	Engineers	79
11-2000	Advertising, Marketing, Promotions, Public Relations, and Sales Managers	73
43-4081	Hotel, Motel, and Resort Desk Clerks	72
49-2000	Electrical and Electronic Equipment Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers *	70
47-2152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters *	69
17-3000	Drafters, Engineering Technicians, and Mapping Technicians *	68
47-2073	Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	68
51-8000	Plant and System Operators	68
43-5061	Production, Planning, and Expediting Clerks	67
37-1000	Supervisors of Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Workers	67
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics *	66
51-9061	Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers	66
41-3021	Insurance Sales Agents	65
31-9091	Dental Assistants	64
19-4000	Life, Physical, and Social Science Technicians	64
41-2022	Parts Salespersons	64
53-3031	Driver/Sales Workers	62
23-0000	Legal Occupations	62
53-4000	Rail Transportation Workers	59

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
13-1071	Human Resources Specialists	57
51-9111	Packaging and Filling Machine Operators and Tenders	57
29-2052	Pharmacy Technicians *	57
13-1082	Project Management Specialists *	55
43-3021	Billing and Posting Clerks	54
43-3071	Tellers	54
53-7073	Wellhead Pumpers	54
43-9021	Data Entry Keyers	52
49-3031	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists *	51
11-9021	Construction Managers	51
11-9199	Managers, All Other	51
11-2022	Sales Managers	51
45-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Workers	50
11-9111	Medical and Health Services Managers	50
31-2000	Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapist Assistants and Aides	50
13-1199	Business Operations Specialists, All Other	49
47-3000	Helpers, Construction Trades	49
11-3031	Financial Managers	48
51-3021	Butchers and Meat Cutters	47
49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers *	46
51-6011	Laundry and Dry-Cleaning Workers	46
49-3093	Tire Repairers and Changers	46
37-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Housekeeping and Janitorial Workers	42
19-5000	Occupational Health and Safety Specialists and Technicians	42
47-5071	Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	42
45-2091	Agricultural Equipment Operators	41
21-1093	Social and Human Service Assistants	41
23-2000	Legal Support Workers	40
27-3000	Media and Communication Workers	40
15-1232	Computer User Support Specialists *	39
33-1000	Supervisors of Protective Service Workers	39
47-2031	Carpenters *	38
51-3011	Bakers	37
11-9051	Food Service Managers	37
51-9023	Mixing and Blending Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	37
19-5011	Occupational Health and Safety Specialists	37
53-7081	Refuse and Recyclable Material Collectors	37
29-2056	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians	37
13-1020	Buyers and Purchasing Agents	36
49-9098	Helpers--Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers	36
25-2011	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	36

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
43-5032	Dispatchers, Except Police, Fire, and Ambulance	35
43-5052	Postal Service Mail Carriers	35
13-1161	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	34
51-4041	Machinists *	33
39-1000	Supervisors of Personal Care and Service Workers	33
21-1021	Child, Family, and School Social Workers	32
51-9124	Coating, Painting, and Spraying Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	31
41-9022	Real Estate Sales Agents	31
47-2051	Cement Masons and Concrete Finishers	30
35-1011	Chefs and Head Cooks	30
49-9051	Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers	30
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants *	30
15-1252	Software Developers	30
43-4031	Court, Municipal, and License Clerks	28
21-1012	Educational, Guidance, and Career Counselors and Advisors	28
29-2042	Emergency Medical Technicians *	28
13-2072	Loan Officers	28
49-3041	Farm Equipment Mechanics and Service Technicians	27
25-4000	Librarians, Curators, and Archivists	27
29-1171	Nurse Practitioners	27
47-2141	Painters, Construction and Maintenance	27
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants *	27
37-1012	Supervisors of Landscaping, Lawn Service & Groundskeeping Workers	27
33-2000	Firefighting and Prevention Workers *	26
51-8093	Petroleum Pump System Operators, Refinery Operators, and Gaugers *	24
49-3021	Automotive Body and Related Repairers *	23
13-1041	Compliance Officers	23
43-6011	Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants	23
43-4199	Information and Record Clerks, All Other	23
43-9041	Insurance Claims and Policy Processing Clerks	23
23-1000	Lawyers, Judges, and Related Workers	23
53-7063	Machine Feeders and Offbearers	23
31-9097	Phlebotomists *	23
41-3031	Securities, Commodities, and Financial Services Sales Agents	23
47-5013	Service Unit Operators, Oil and Gas	23
49-9052	Telecommunications Line Installers and Repairers	23
31-9099	Healthcare Support Workers, All Other	22
53-4011	Locomotive Engineers	22
13-1111	Management Analysts	22
49-3042	Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics, Except Engines	22
51-9199	Production Workers, All Other *	22

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
49-2022	Telecommunications Equipment Installers & Repairers, Exc. Line Installers	22
29-2010	Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians *	21
11-3051	Industrial Production Managers	21
49-9099	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers, All Other	21
25-9044	Teaching Assistants, Postsecondary	21
13-1031	Claims Adjusters, Examiners, and Investigators	20
11-3021	Computer and Information Systems Managers	20
51-9161	Computer Numerically Controlled Tool Operators	20
51-4031	Cutting, Punching & Press Machine Setters, Operators & Tenders, Metal & Plastic	20
47-3013	Helpers--Electricians	20
49-9043	Maintenance Workers, Machinery	20
27-4000	Media and Communication Equipment Workers	20
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians *	20
43-5111	Weighers, Measurers, Checkers, and Samplers, Recordkeeping	20
49-9012	Control and Valve Installers and Repairers, Except Mechanical Door *	19
13-1051	Cost Estimators	19
39-1022	First-Line Supervisors of Personal Service Workers	19
51-3092	Food Batchmakers	19
47-3015	Helpers--Pipelayers, Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	19
27-3031	Public Relations Specialists	19
21-1018	Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors	19
31-9096	Veterinary Assistants and Laboratory Animal Caretakers	19
53-6031	Automotive and Watercraft Service Attendants	18
51-9011	Chemical Equipment Operators and Tenders	18
17-2051	Civil Engineers	18
51-9193	Cooling and Freezing Equipment Operators and Tenders	18
47-4041	Hazardous Materials Removal Workers	18
23-1011	Lawyers	18
29-2072	Medical Records Specialists *	18
25-2052	Special Education Teachers, Kindergarten and Elementary School *	18
11-3071	Transportation, Storage, and Distribution Managers	18
51-8031	Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant and System Operators	18
33-1011	First-Line Supervisors of Correctional Officers	17
47-4051	Highway Maintenance Workers	17
29-1071	Physician Assistants	17
29-1127	Speech-Language Pathologists	17
49-9081	Wind Turbine Service Technicians *	17
11-3012	Administrative Services Managers	16
15-1244	Network and Computer Systems Administrators *	16
29-1051	Pharmacists	16
53-3053	Shuttle Drivers and Chauffeurs	16

Occupational Code	Occupation Title	Annual Openings
25-2032	Career/Technical Education Teachers, Secondary School	15
15-1299	Computer Occupations, All Other	15
47-4011	Construction and Building Inspectors	15
29-1292	Dental Hygienists	15
43-4061	Eligibility Interviewers, Government Programs	15
47-5022	Excavating and Loading Machine and Dragline Operators, Surface Mining	15
21-1022	Healthcare Social Workers	15
25-4022	Librarians and Media Collections Specialists	15
25-3099	Teachers and Instructors, All Other	15
15-1211	Computer Systems Analysts	14
29-2043	Paramedics *	13
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists *	13
49-3011	Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians *	11
29-2099	Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other *	11
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians *	10
17-3024	Electro-Mechanical and Mechatronics Technologists and Technicians (Robotics) *	10
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians (Nanotechnology) *	10
15-1212	Information Security Analysts *	10
29-2053	Psychiatric Technicians *	10

* Also designated as a PWDA Target Occupation.

PWDB Target Occupations

The PWDB's Target Occupations must be occupations that:

- Have or are projected to have a substantial number of openings (due to job growth rather than job turnover) to have a significant impact on the state, regional, or local economy; and
- Result in wages that meet a Board's self-sufficiency requirements or have been identified by the Board as a career pathway to an occupation that leads to self-sufficient wages.

Occupations designated as "Target" must meet specific criteria established by the PWDB including:

- 1) Requires additional education beyond High School and offer training completion within a two- to three-year timeframe;
- 2) Provides an average entry level hourly wage of \$15 or more, unless designated as an occupation in a career pathway; and
- 3) TWC projects 10 or more total annual job openings.

Occupational Code	Target Occupation	Annual Openings	Hourly Entry Wage
13-2011	Accountants and Auditors	124	\$23.34
49-3011	Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians	11	\$18.00
49-3021	Automotive Body and Related Repairers	23	\$15.73
49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics **	141	\$14.65
43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks **	262	\$14.64
49-3031	Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	51	\$17.91

Occupational Code	Target Occupation	Annual Openings	Hourly Entry Wage
13-1000	Business Operations Specialists	389	\$21.35
47-2031	Carpenters	38	\$17.41
39-9011	Childcare Workers **	165	\$9.54
29-2010	Clinical Laboratory Technologists and Technicians	21	\$17.99
15-1232	Computer User Support Specialists	39	\$16.37
49-9012	Control and Valve Installers and Repairers, Except Mechanical Door	19	\$15.88
17-3000	Drafters, Engineering Technicians, and Mapping Technicians	68	\$17.77
17-3023	Electrical and Electronic Engineering Technologists and Technicians	10	\$25.00
47-2111	Electricians	104	\$17.29
17-3024	Electro-Mechanical and Mechatronics Technologists and Technicians (Robotics)	Emerging	\$19.00
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	179	N/A
29-2042	Emergency Medical Technicians **	28	\$13.43
33-2000	Firefighting and Prevention Workers	26	\$19.20
29-2000	Health Technologists and Technicians	372	\$17.37
49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers	46	\$16.33
53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	530	\$17.58
17-3026	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians (Nanotechnology)	Emerging	\$19.00
49-9041	Industrial Machinery Mechanics	66	\$19.63
15-1212	Information Security Analysts	10	\$31.83
29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	98	\$20.84
51-4041	Machinists	33	\$19.31
31-9092	Medical Assistants **	107	\$13.91
29-2072	Medical Records Specialists	18	\$15.88
25-2022	Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	90	N/A
15-1244	Network and Computer Systems Administrators	16	\$28.93
31-1131	Nursing Assistants	211	\$13.04
23-2011	Paralegals and Legal Assistants	30	\$18.52
29-2043	Paramedics	13	\$19.96
51-8093	Petroleum Pump System Operators, Refinery Operators, and Gaugers	24	N/A
29-2052	Pharmacy Technicians	57	\$15.71
31-9097	Phlebotomists **	23	\$14.42
31-2021	Physical Therapist Assistants	27	\$24.17
47-2152	Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	69	\$16.50
33-3051	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	86	\$23.65
51-9199	Production Workers, All Other	22	\$12.66
13-1082	Project Management Specialists	55	\$23.68
29-2053	Psychiatric Technicians	10	\$14.84
29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	20	\$23.87
29-1141	Registered Nurses	221	\$30.09
29-1126	Respiratory Therapists	13	\$26.90
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education	114	N/A
25-2052	Special Education Teachers, Kindergarten and Elementary School	18	N/A
51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	115	\$17.20
49-9081	Wind Turbine Service Technicians	17	\$23.47

** Occupation identified as a Career Pathway.

The employment needs of employers in the Panhandle region are subject to the so-called “brain drain” that many other regions experience, with the added challenge of the varying pay scales customary in other states and other parts of Texas. Regional unemployment levels have consistently remained among the lowest in the State, presenting unique challenges to companies in recruiting and hiring qualified workers. The PWDB is committed to and is actively engaged in creating greater employer engagement first through accurately identifying and pinpointing local employers’ specific workforce needs. By soliciting and compiling results from employer surveys and input from community partners, combined with TWC Labor Market and Career Information (LMCI) data resources, critical elements are brought together to obtain an accurate picture. Secondly, using this information to educate and train a “right-skilled” workforce, including incumbent workers, includes funding employer-specific training to bring worker skills up to the level needed by area employers.

Through customized training initiatives, such as the Skills Development Grant Partnership, training opportunities for incumbent workers have increased, and are producing a more highly qualified and well-compensated workforce. In August of 2023 through November of 2024, the PWDB and WSP executed a Skills Development Fund (SDF) project with Plains Dairy, a leading provider of high-quality milk and dairy products in the region. The company is dedicated to producing milk from local farmers and distributing it to customers in the area. They have a state-of-the-art processing facility that allows them to turn raw milk into a variety of products, including milk, cheese, butter, and ice cream. The PWDB invested in measurable skills development to train approximately 100 employees of Plains Dairy, utilizing a customized Safe Quality Food (SQF) food safety and quality management system that provided guidelines for the production, processing, packaging, and distribution of food products.

The PWDB further pursues employer engagement through facilitating completion of Panhandle occupational and industrial-based certification profiles for the identification and validation of industry-based certifications that will allow students to pursue the credentials that will lead to valuable careers.

The WSP Business Services team utilizes monthly surveys and engages local employers to report on technology and employment trends in their industries, skill shortages, and recruiting challenges, and solicits suggestions for services that could help address labor force needs. Economic development organizations, school districts, elected officials, and the public are solicited to share ideas and provide input as well.

Information is also gleaned from labor market assessments conducted by the AEDC to determine the needs of Amarillo employers, along with information obtained from independent school districts (ISDs), postsecondary institutions, adult education providers, and other workforce partner organizations.

To identify demographic, industrial and employment trends and potential skill shortages, data is pulled from multiple sources, including TWC LMCI tools, and additional resources from other providers, such as Help Wanted Online.

Assessment of employers’ needs is also conducted through the involvement of WSP staff with businesses, collaborative activities with community colleges and local organizations, and input received from employers and community leaders. WSP staff share their front-line experience working with employers, job seekers and students to add practical, current and “real-life” information.

Employer engagement is the key to meeting the myriad of Panhandle regional workforce needs. Identifying appropriate operational strategies that lead to attainment of the Panhandle’s goals involves

examining gaps in skills and services in the local labor market. To understand these challenges, PWDB staff conducts analyses of local, state and national data identifying demographic, industrial and employment trends, and potential skill shortages, using a variety of economic tools provided by TWC, other State agencies, and federal and local resources.

The WSP Business Services team continues to develop solutions that successfully address local labor force challenges such as assessment of employers' skill needs, implementation of low-cost, effective and timely methods that match capable workers with job openings, and collaboration with educators, economic developers and community partners.

Monitoring local and regional job openings in the Panhandle using such tools as WorkInTexas.com, MyTXCareer.com, AmarilloHelpWanted.com, and the Amarillo Globe-News classified listings, confirms that a majority of Panhandle employers continue to seek qualified individuals in the Specialized Freight Trucking and Transportation-related Industries with Commercial Truck Drivers (CDL); and in the Healthcare-related Industries, which remain on the Panhandle's In-Demand Industries and Target Occupations. The region's training providers keep CDL classes full of students, many of whom are hired as soon as they complete the training. Workforce Solutions Panhandle staff develop career pathways in the healthcare field to match customers' skills along the entire spectrum of the regional employers' needs, from the Target Occupations such as Medical Assistants to Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses, and Medical & Clinical Laboratory Technicians. The region's two major hospitals, as well as multiple Outpatient Care Centers and Home Health Care Services providers, also hire these students as soon as they complete their training.

Replacing retiring workers in skilled trades, despite fewer young adults seeking entry into long-term apprenticeship programs in technical occupations remains a challenge. Aligning resources and focusing on "right-skilling" will not only replace workers, but will ensure the replacement workers have the enhanced technical skills to meet the unique requirements created by the increasing demands of an exceptionally complex and specialized business environment.

B. Labor Force Analysis and Trends

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(C); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(3)

The Texas Panhandle's economy is characterized by a diverse range of industries, each contributing significantly to the region's overall prosperity.

- **Manufacturing:** With 27,421 jobs and a GRP contribution of over \$5.5 billion, manufacturing is a major economic driver. The sector has experienced significant growth since 2018, adding over 2,000 jobs and boasting high average earnings per worker.
- **Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting:** This sector, deeply rooted in the Panhandle's heritage, remains a significant employer with 22,442 jobs. It has seen substantial 13% job growth since 2018, adding 2,634 jobs.
- **Retail Trade:** Employing 22,613 people, retail trade is a crucial sector, providing goods to residents and contributing close to \$2 billion to the region's GRP.
- **Healthcare and Social Assistance:** This sector is also substantial, with 19,807 jobs. While it has experienced a slight decline since 2018, it provides essential services to the region's population.
- **Transportation and Warehousing:** This sector has experienced strong growth at 23%, adding 1,690 jobs since 2018, reflecting the Panhandle's strategic location and role in logistics and supply chain management. The presence of major highways and rail lines, combined with the growth of

e-commerce, likely contributes to this trend.

- **Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services:** This sector is growing at a rate of 19%, adding 1,115 jobs and indicating an increase in demand for specialized skills and knowledge-based services in the region. This growth may be linked to advancements in technology, innovation in various industries, and the need for specialized expertise in areas like engineering, research, and consulting.
- **Utilities:** Showing a growth of 18%, adding 306 jobs, this sector's expansion is likely tied to population growth and increasing energy demands in our region, including investments in renewable energy sources.
- **Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction:** Although this sector has experienced a decline in employment since 2018, it remains significant due to its high earnings per worker and substantial contribution to the GRP.
- **Construction:** This sector has added jobs, likely fueled by population growth and development projects in our region.
- **Accommodation and Food Services:** This sector saw a 10% growth, adding 1,703 jobs. This growth is likely linked to increases in tourism, business travel, and local demand, supporting the need for more restaurants, hotels, and related services.
- **Other Notable Growth Areas:** Information (5% growth); Management of Companies and Enterprises (4% growth); Real Estate and Rental and Leasing (3% growth); Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (3% growth); and Educational Services (2% growth).

The Texas Panhandle is experiencing a surge of new businesses setting up shop, alongside expansions of existing companies. This growth spans various sectors, bringing new opportunities and further diversifying the region's economy.

Chemical Vapor Metal Refinery (CVMR) is developing a large-scale rare-earth mineral refinery in Amarillo, a groundbreaking project for the United States. Scheduled to break ground in December 2024, the \$1.5 billion facility will cover 540 acres and encompass 500,000 square feet. It will utilize vapor metallurgy technology to refine 36 different metals, including nickel, cobalt, and lithium, which are critical for industries like aerospace, automotive, and electronics. This will be the first refinery of its kind in the U.S., focusing on refining critical minerals and rare-earth elements. The project is expected to create approximately 1,000 jobs, with an annual payroll exceeding \$100 million. Local incentives include \$20 million over 10 years for job creation and a 100% tax abatement for the same period.

Plant AS, also known as Plant Agricultural Systems (PLANT-AS), is developing a \$510 million Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) facility in Amarillo. This ambitious project will span 400 acres and include 9 million square feet of advanced hydroponic production facilities, designed to grow leafy greens and vine crops. The facility is set to break ground between December 2024 and January 2025 and is projected to create over 700 jobs with an annual payroll of \$35 million as it scales up over the next seven years.

Aspen Woods Group LLC, in partnership with The Rob Rockefeller Standard Carbon LLC, is developing a state-of-the-art solar manufacturing facility in Stratford, Texas. This groundbreaking project will position Stratford as a key player in the global renewable energy market. The facility, located off Highway 287 northwest of Stratford, will span 170 acres and produce advanced solar products, including EV chargers, solar panels, and portable battery solutions.

The \$750 million project is expected to create over 700 jobs, offering significant economic benefits to the region. Construction will be rolled out in phases to ensure Stratford's infrastructure can support the facility's operations. This initiative reflects a major investment in renewable energy innovation and highlights Stratford's central location and robust transportation infrastructure as strategic advantages.

Producer Owned Beef is a newly formed, producer-owned beef processing company. The company will construct a state-of-the-art processing plant in the Panhandle. They anticipate the creation of nearly 1,600 new jobs, with an annual payroll of approximately \$125 million.

Albers Aerospace is an aerospace manufacturing company that produces a variety of components and systems for both commercial and defense applications. Their capabilities may include precision machining, composite manufacturing, and system integration. They anticipate hiring 350 new employees at their Panhandle facility.

Garrett Container Systems manufactures a wide range of specialized containers for various industries, with a strong focus on defense and government applications. They produce ruggedized containers for shipping, storage, and transport of sensitive equipment. The company is expected to add 50 new jobs in the Panhandle.

Ecolomondo is a Canadian-based company that has developed a Thermal Decomposition Process (TDP) for recovering valuable resources from end-of-life tires. Their new facility in the Panhandle will use this technology to process waste tires and create recycled Carbon Black, oil, gas, and steel. The company plans to add 65 employees with their new facility.

Buc-ee's is a Texas-based chain of travel centers known for its large size, numerous fueling stations, clean restrooms, and wide selection of food, drinks, and merchandise. Each new Buc-ee's location typically creates around 175-250 jobs, spanning retail, food service, and management positions. Their Amarillo location has added 200 jobs for the area.

Bass Pro Shops is a major retailer specializing in outdoor recreation gear, including hunting, fishing, camping, and boating equipment. They also offer a wide selection of apparel, footwear, and home goods related to the outdoors. A new Bass Pro Shops typically creates between 115-300 jobs, encompassing retail, customer service, and management roles. Their new store in Amarillo will be 100,000 sqft.

Bell, a Textron Inc. company, is a leading manufacturer of commercial and military helicopters. Their Amarillo Assembly Center is a significant part of their operations, responsible for final assembly, completion, and delivery of various helicopter models. The ongoing expansion is expected to add at 400 jobs.

The Pantex Plant, located northeast of Amarillo, is the nation's primary facility for the final assembly, disassembly, and maintenance of nuclear weapons. A new contractor, PanTeXas Deterrence (PXD), will be taking over operations. PXD is a joint venture led by BWX Technologies, Inc. (BWXT) and includes Fluor, SOC, A Day & Zimmermann Company, and the Texas A&M University System. The plant plays a crucial role in the U.S. nuclear security enterprise, and the transition to PXD is anticipated to impact staffing and operations. Pantex Plant has recently become the Texas Panhandle's largest employer with over 4,600 staff.

Austin Hose is a supplier of industrial hoses, fittings, and related products, serving a wide range of industries, including oil and gas, construction, and agriculture. They offer a variety of hose types, couplings, and accessories, as well as custom hose assembly services. The expansion will add 20 new

jobs in 2025, and is expected to grow beyond.

Cacique Foods is one of the largest Hispanic foods companies in the U.S., specializing in Mexican-style cheeses, creams, chorizos, and dips. Their new 200,000 sqft facility in Amarillo is expected to create around 200 new jobs. Notably, the company initially had two shifts but has moved to three due to the success of the Amarillo plant. They will also be adding two new product lines in 2025, further increasing the number of employees.

International Aerospace Coatings (IAC) provides aircraft painting, interior refurbishment, and graphics services to the aviation industry. Their expansion in the Panhandle will increase their capacity to serve the growing aerospace sector, potentially creating jobs for skilled painters, technicians, and support staff. The expansion will cover 80,000 sq. ft. and add 75 jobs.

Soluna Computing develops and operates modular data centers powered by renewable energy. Their Silverton location is a 100-megawatt data center with 50 megawatts live and 50 megawatts under construction, connected to a wind farm with loads of excess energy. Soluna broke ground on September 3, 2024, on a 50MW expansion of this cryptomining data center site in the Texas Panhandle, known as Project Dorothy. The company also announced the groundbreaking of its Dorothy 2 project in Texas on August 28, 2024. The energization of Project Dorothy 2 is expected in Q1 2025.

Keystone Towers, a manufacturer of wind turbine towers, is expanding its operations in Pampa. This expansion will increase their production capacity, creating jobs in manufacturing, welding, and related fields.

The size and scale of the Panhandle region, with its 26 counties encompassing 26,000 square miles, present obvious geographic limitations. The rural areas with the most need for workers have the smallest labor force. The regional downturn in oil and gas production have impacted the rural areas the most, with substantial layoffs and few new jobs to replace those lost. Skills in this industry are often not transferrable to other industries, and many former oil field workers are reluctant to take a lower paying job and hold out in hopes that production will ramp up again in more areas.

The population of individuals with barriers to employment in the Panhandle region is sizable. Poverty levels are relatively high, as many families and individuals receive some type of public assistance, and teenage pregnancy rates have also remained high. A growing homeless population, including veterans and individuals with disabilities, adds to the strain on available resources and services, and presents its own unique set of challenges.

While most Panhandle workers who want to work are able to find jobs, underemployment remains an issue. The lowest paying jobs seem to have the most growth, due in part to the abundance of restaurants, eating establishments, and hotels/motels per capita. This impacts the increasing poverty numbers in the region due to the relatively lower wages paid in these occupations.

In addition to creating new employment opportunities, a key element in the Panhandle is motivating skilled workers to remain in or return to the Panhandle area. This can be achieved by developing and implementing a targeted approach to overcoming challenges inherent in virtual employment. Coordinating with system partners like the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce, AEDC, and local colleges to promote the economically and personally rewarding benefits of staying in or returning to Amarillo, is an effective approach.

Local labor market needs provide the core direction for Panhandle workforce investments. To understand the region's skill needs, PWDB and WSP staff combine a broad analysis of local, state and national data, with local information gained from employers' input and workforce professionals'

experience delivering services. Conducting market research and analysis, developing and implementing a regional business engagement plan, and creating and improving opportunities for developing and implementing skills development initiatives, especially among small employers, and employers in demand industry sectors and occupations, are priorities for the PWDB.

The extensive geography of the Texas Panhandle presents a daunting challenge to the delivery of vital workforce services to the populace, compounded by the existence of only one full-service rural WSP office in Borger and one itinerate location, on the campus of Amarillo College in Hereford. Rural communities continue to have the most need for workers, and yet have the smallest labor force.

The labor force is a critical indicator of economic health, representing the total number of individuals who are either employed or actively seeking employment within a specific region. It encompasses a wide range of skills and occupations, from highly specialized professionals to those in trade and technical fields. A robust labor force is essential for economic growth, as it reflects both the availability of skilled workers and the demand for their expertise. In the Texas Panhandle, our labor force is a cornerstone of our economic vitality, characterized by consistent growth, a low unemployment rate, and a diverse skill base.

As of October 2024, the Texas Panhandle's labor force stands at 216,364, up from 212,667 in 2023. This expansion of 3,697 workers demonstrates the region's ability to attract and retain talent, driven by the economic opportunities available across key industries. This growth in our labor force is a testament to the region's resilience and attractiveness to both job seekers and employers. Our area continues to offer a compelling combination of career prospects, affordability, and a high quality of life that draws individuals and families to the Panhandle.

One of the most significant indicators of the strength of our labor market is our region's consistently low unemployment rate. Averaging around 3%, the Texas Panhandle's unemployment rate is well below the state average of 4.0% and often among the lowest in Texas. This low rate reflects a strong demand for labor across various sectors, particularly in industries requiring specialized skills and training. The competition for skilled workers in our area highlights the importance of workforce development initiatives that aim to equip residents with the skills needed to succeed in a growing economy.

The diversity of the Texas Panhandle's labor force is another key strength. Our region benefits from a workforce with experience and expertise in a wide range of industries, including agriculture, energy, manufacturing, healthcare, and construction. This diversity not only supports the existing industry base but also makes our area attractive to new businesses looking to locate in a region with a readily available talent pool. From skilled tradespeople to highly educated professionals, the Panhandle's labor force is well-equipped to meet the evolving demands of the modern economy.

The continued growth and strength of the labor force in our region is essential for the long-term prosperity of the Texas Panhandle. Workforce Solutions Panhandle is committed to supporting this growth by connecting job seekers with employers, providing training and development opportunities, and collaborating with educational institutions to ensure that our workforce remains competitive. By investing in our people and their skills, we can ensure that the Texas Panhandle continues to thrive as a dynamic and prosperous region within the state of Texas.

The Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) serves as a vital barometer of a region's economic vitality, indicating the proportion of the working-age population currently employed or actively seeking employment. Analysis of recent LFPR data for the Texas Panhandle reveals a generally positive and encouraging trend.

The data indicates a consistent upward trend in the Texas Panhandle's LFPR, increasing from 64.87% in 2019 to 66.69% in September 2024. This sustained growth signifies a larger percentage of the region's population actively participating in the labor market.

The Labor Force Participation Rate trends in the Texas Panhandle present a positive outlook for the region's economic future. The data reflects a resilient recovery from the pandemic's economic impact and sustained growth in workforce participation.

The unemployment rate is a key measure of economic health, reflecting the balance between job availability and workforce participation. In the Texas Panhandle, trends over the past five years reveal a region that has remained resilient in the face of challenges, demonstrating consistent recovery and stability.

Compared to state and national averages, the Panhandle consistently maintains lower unemployment rates, highlighting the region's economic stability and its diverse mix of industries, including agriculture, energy, and manufacturing. While fluctuations are natural, the overall trend reflects a robust job market capable of adapting to challenges and sustaining workforce engagement.

C. Workforce Development Analysis

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(D); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(4)

Population

The population of the Texas Panhandle Workforce Development Area (WDA) stands at approximately 437,281 residents, spread across the 26 counties that make up our region. While characterized by its expansive rural landscapes, the Panhandle also includes vibrant communities—from the metropolitan hub of Amarillo to smaller towns and rural centers—that play a critical role in driving the region's economy and culture.

Our region has experienced steady population growth in recent years, reflecting its economic diversity and opportunities. Between 2020 and 2024, the Panhandle's population increased by 1.75%, adding nearly 6,848 new residents. Looking ahead, projections show that growth will continue, with an estimated 2.6% increase between 2024 and 2028. This would bring approximately 11,483 additional residents to the area, further strengthening the workforce and expanding local communities.

Population changes, however, vary across the 26 counties in the Panhandle. Amarillo, the largest city in the region and an anchor for employment, education, and healthcare, is expected to see the most significant growth. Smaller towns and rural areas, which are integral to the Panhandle's agricultural and energy sectors, may experience slower growth or population stabilization as they remain tied to industries that are more consistent in size and scope.

While the Panhandle's population growth is modest compared to larger metropolitan areas in Texas, it reflects the region's ability to remain a stable and attractive place to live. Affordable housing, a strong job market, and accessible amenities make the area well-suited for families, professionals, and retirees alike. These factors continue to support the Panhandle as a desirable location for both current residents and those seeking new opportunities.

As the population in our region grows, it will be important to ensure that workforce development initiatives, infrastructure, and public services evolve to meet the changing needs of residents. Workforce Solutions Panhandle is committed to working with employers, educators, and community leaders to prepare for this continued growth. By investing in the skills and potential of our workforce, we can help our region remain competitive, resilient, and ready for the future.

Between 2020 and 2030, the Panhandle WDA is projected to grow by 112,473 residents. Randall County is expected to experience the most significant percentage increase in population. Collingsworth, Gray, Hemphill, and Ochiltree counties are also projected to see notable growth. In contrast, Potter County is anticipated to decline in population, along with Castro, Deaf Smith, Parmer, Swisher, and Hutchinson counties, which are expected to experience the largest decreases. Overall, Randall County is projected to grow significantly southwest of Amarillo, while Potter County's population is expected to remain relatively stable over the next 25 years.

Millennials (Ages 25-39):

Our area is home to 87,470 millennials, closely aligned with the national average for a similarly sized area, which stands at 88,401. This group represents a vital segment of the workforce, bringing energy and innovation to the local economy.

Retirement Risk:

Retirement risk is notably low here, with 116,048 people aged 55 or older compared to a national average of 131,341 for an area of this size. This demographic trend suggests a stable workforce with fewer immediate retirement challenges.

Racial Diversity:

Our area boasts high racial diversity, with 204,118 racially diverse residents—well above the national average of 181,199. This diversity enriches the cultural and economic fabric of the community, fostering innovation and inclusion.

Veterans:

With 24,218 veterans, our area surpasses the national average of 22,182 for regions of similar size. This highlights a strong presence of individuals with valuable skills, discipline, and leadership experience gained through military service.

Population Age

The area's population is growing steadily, with an increase of 2,199 residents from 2023 to 2024, bringing the total to 437,281—a 1% growth overall.

Key observations:

- **Young Children:** The population of children under 5 years grew by 1%, now making up 6.67% of the total.
- **Working-Age Adults:** Adults aged 25 to 44 account for a significant portion of the population, with small but steady increases in the younger end of this range, supporting workforce stability.
- **Older Adults:** Residents aged 70 to 84 experienced the largest percentage growth, increasing by 3% to 4%, reflecting a trend toward an aging population.
- **Declines in Some Groups:** Slight decreases were seen in populations aged 5 to 14 and 55 to 64, each declining by 1%, though these shifts were minimal.

The Texas Panhandle has a solid representation of its workforce in the prime working-age group, from 25 to 54 years old, which plays a crucial role in sustaining the local economy. This group makes up about 33% of the area's total population and shows encouraging signs of stability and gradual growth.

- Young Professionals (25 to 29 years): This group grew by 375 people (1%) in 2024, signaling a steady flow of individuals entering the workforce.
- Mid-Career Stability (30 to 44 years): The population in this range remained consistent, reflecting a healthy balance of professional growth and retention in the region.
- Experienced Workers (45 to 49 years): This age group saw the largest increase within the range, growing by 505 people (2%).

Although there was a slight dip in the 50 to 54 group, declining by just 83 people (less than 1%), the overall trends indicate a strong and reliable workforce. The Texas Panhandle is well-positioned to meet current labor market needs and sustain long-term economic development.

The Texas Panhandle's educational landscape presents a complex picture, with both strengths and weaknesses. While a significant proportion of the population holds a high school diploma or equivalent, the region's lower-than-desired percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher poses a challenge for economic growth and development.

Key Statistics:

- o High school diploma or equivalent: 29.1% (Texas Panhandle), 30.4% (Texas), 33.4% (US)
- o Some college or associate's degree: 31.5% (Texas Panhandle), 32.1% (Texas), 34.6% (US)
- o Bachelor's degree or higher: 22.7% (Texas Panhandle), 28.4% (Texas), 34.6% (US)
- o Graduate degree or higher: 7.0% (Texas Panhandle), 10.3% (Texas), 13.1% (US)

The Texas Panhandle's educational attainment levels are generally lower than those of the state and nation. Our region's percentage of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher is 5.7 percentage points lower than the state average and 11.9 percentage points lower than the national average. Similarly, the region's percentage of individuals with a graduate degree or higher is 3.3 percentage points lower than the state average and 6.1 percentage points lower than the national average.

Commuting Data

Nearly 200,000 workers commute daily in the Panhandle, with 81% (162,043) driving alone—a testament to the region's expansive geography and limited public transit options. Carpooling, the second most common method, accounts for 11.1% of commutes (22,064 workers), reflecting efforts to economize and reduce the burden of long drives.

Public transit, however, remains underutilized, with only 0.27% of commuters (545 workers) relying on buses or similar services, a likely result of infrastructure challenges in this predominantly rural region. Similarly, just 1.75% (3,487 workers) bike or walk to work, likely in areas where residential and employment hubs are close together.

Remote work is becoming a notable feature of the Panhandle's commuting landscape, with 4.06% (8,077 workers) working from home. This reflects broader shifts toward workplace flexibility, which may continue to reshape commuting habits in the years ahead.

Travel Times

Commutes in the Panhandle are generally short. The average travel time is 18.98 minutes, and the median commute time is slightly shorter at 16.19 minutes. Most workers (23%, or 43,848) have commute times between 15 and 19 minutes, while 7.04% (13,416) enjoy very short commutes of under 5 minutes.

At the other end of the spectrum, 8.28% (15,791) face commutes longer than 45 minutes, often traveling from rural areas to employment centers. These figures highlight the diverse commuting experiences across the Panhandle, influenced by both geography and the distribution of job opportunities.

The strengths of workforce activities in the Panhandle region are the innovative employment and training opportunities developed through the creation of new partnerships with businesses and employers in emerging industries in the Panhandle, such as wind energy, manufacturing, and industrial production, through renewing alliances with existing entities including aviation and child care services, and with other local employers that have maintained a steady presence in the area job market. Additionally:

- Industry-Recognized Skills Certification Initiative Grant funds utilized through training workers at local community colleges for employment at a large food processing plant in the region;
- Collaboration between a major local employer with business locations throughout the region to provide management level training to incumbent workers and a local community college, offering opportunities for career growth and increased earning potential;
- Partnering with employers to fund basic truck driver instruction and licensure, followed by job placement with an experienced driver to complete required over-the-road training;
- The Panhandle has seen a significant increase in management jobs, with 6,623 positions added between 2018 and 2023. With an average of 258 unique job postings each month for these roles, it's clear that businesses across the region are expanding and actively seeking qualified leaders;
- The transportation and material moving sector remains a cornerstone of the Panhandle's economy. The addition of 2,909 jobs in this area emphasizes its importance, especially given our region's reliance on moving agricultural products, manufactured goods, and energy resources. The 191 average monthly job postings confirm that this sector continues to be a significant source of employment;
- Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations added 1,409 jobs, reflecting a clear need for more healthcare workers. The high number of unique monthly job postings (569) suggests that healthcare providers are constantly seeking to fill positions to meet the needs of the community. This sustained demand is likely connected to the Panhandle's population growth and demographic shifts;
- While office and administrative support roles are still the largest occupational group in the region (23,135 jobs), their numbers have decreased by 2,275 since 2018. Declines are likely due to increased automation and companies streamlining their operations. However, with 272 unique job postings each month, there's still considerable demand for these skills;
- The decline of 2,064 jobs in sales-related occupations suggests that this sector is undergoing changes. This could be due to a variety of factors, such as the continued growth of online shopping or shifts in how consumers make purchasing decisions;
- The addition of 1,183 production jobs signals steady growth in the region's manufacturing sector. This aligns with the Panhandle's focus on areas like food processing and machinery production;
- Collaboration and joint planning with VR Services and TWC continues providing a seamless approach for access to integrated workforce services, literacy education, vocational rehabilitation, and in-demand workplace skills that lead to self-sufficient employment and advancement for individuals with disabilities. Promoting partnerships with employers and system stakeholders will

overcome barriers to meeting workforce needs through creative use of technology and innovation;

- WSP continues identifying individual’s barriers to employment, including veterans and youth with disabilities, and prioritizing services provided to enhance skill levels, complete credentials, and increase earnings potential;
- WSP works to overcoming obstacles encountered in developing short term training opportunities, such as paid or unpaid work experience, internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based training options like On-the-Job-Training (OJT). Individuals may be reluctant to work without pay, despite the inherent opportunities available at the completion, and employers may be reluctant to take a chance on a relatively unskilled, untested worker, whether or not the training is subsidized, both of which must be addressed;
- Outreaching and engaging older, out-of-school youth, and re-connecting them with the local job market and employers, is an important focus. By fostering quality internships and skills development projects in Target Occupations, and encouraging and assisting area community colleges in the development of, and application for, Skills Development grants, including implementation, students will be connected with employers who offer self-sufficient wages, as well as effective mentoring to encourage continued participation.
- WSP staff continue to collaborate with VR staff to provide work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities through the Summer Earn and Learn (SEAL) program, and are providing participants with foundational employment skills and better preparing them for successful transition to postsecondary education and employment, and work. Developing opportunities for these students to continue gaining valuable work experience and soft skills through other avenues, builds their resumes as well as their employment tool box.
- WSP continues increasing collaboration with local AEL partners to consolidate intake, referral, and service strategies that focus on attaining necessary credentials, completing training, and entering employment with the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency; and
- Staff continues developing relevant career pathways based on data driven decisions that serve the needs of individuals in removing barriers to employment, attaining credentials, and enhancing skill levels and earning potential.

Part 3: Core Programs

A. Workforce Development System

References: WIOA §108(b)(2); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(1)

- **Required partner/programs included in the Workforce Development system are:**
 - ✓ WIOA adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs;
 - ✓ Wagner-Peyser Employment Service program;
 - ✓ Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) program;
 - ✓ Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program;
 - ✓ Unemployment Insurance (UI) program;
 - ✓ Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program;
 - ✓ Choices, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) employment and training program;
 - ✓ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training programs;
 - ✓ Subsidized Child Care programs;

- ✓ Apprenticeship programs (Texas Education Code, Chapter 133);
 - ✓ Veterans’ employment and training programs;
 - ✓ National and Community Service Act of 2007 program;
 - ✓ Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP); and
 - ✓ Non-Certificate Postsecondary Career and Technology Training programs.
- **Facilitating core programs and other workforce development programs to support alignment to provide services, including programs of study authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, that support the strategy identified in the State Plan under WIOA §102(b)(1)(E).** The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V), was signed into law on July 31, 2018. The act provides an increased focus on the academic achievement of career and technical education students and emphasizes alignment with state-level and local needs. The Panhandle’s workforce development system is comprised of the organizations and activities that assist job seekers with finding employment, help workers advance in their careers, provide access to occupational and educational training that leads to self-sufficient employment, improve basic literacy skills among youth and adults, and ensure a skilled workforce exists to support local industry and the local economy over time. This workforce system includes local organizations that serve the adults and youth who may need help preparing for and succeeding in the workforce. The PWDB will support the TWC State Plan strategy through continued and strong collaboration among WSP staff, local employers and industry, training providers and educational institutions, service and advocacy organizations, and other local organizations critical to supporting and delivering effective, integrated workforce services through the core programs.

The PWDB continues to partner with regional Economic Development Corporations (EDCs) to apply for High Demand Job Training grant funding to match the EDCs sales tax investments in a dollar-for dollar match, for WIOA-allowable, high demand job training activities which may include individual participant recruitment, skills assessment, job search skills improvement, job search, job referral, equipment and minor renovation of facilities used for program-related job training. While the PWDB has utilized its awarded grant funds mostly to purchase equipment for regional community colleges and Independent School Districts (ISDs), future applications are planned to include a combination of all the allowable activities to supplemented Career & Technology Education (CTE) training programs throughout the PWDA. This will include Dual-Credit and Career Technical Education Programs as aligning with TWC’s Strategic Planning which utilizes funding “to support, create and expand dual-credit and CTE programs that are highly technical in nature, address local demands for high-skill, in-demand and high-wage industries, and allow high school students to complete college credit hours. These programs respond to industry demands for skilled workers in technical fields, while helping high school students prepare for employment or education opportunities.”

B. Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access

References: WIOA §108(b)(3); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(2)

- **Expanding access to employment, training, education, and support services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment:** WSP Business Services and PWDB staff will continue to provide assistance to community colleges and businesses to obtain training resources to increase students’ and workers’ skills, and build educational capacity in the region, including the Skills Development and Self-Sufficiency Fund,

and other grant opportunities which expand capacity. Workforce resources pledged to such prospective projects includes labor market information, grant writing assistance, building employer consortia, assistance with eligible students' tuition, fees and materials costs, and job placement. To respond to continued employer input regarding deficiencies in the work-readiness/soft skills of job applicants and employees, additional work-readiness training options will be made available to job seekers and targeted populations through new tools to be provided in the WSP office in Amarillo and online on the updated WSP website. The PWDB and WSP continue to offer training using Online Learning Management Systems (OLMS), such as MATRIX LMS.

- **Facilitating the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs, including specific career pathways:** WSP case management staff are well-trained in assessing customer workforce needs and collaborating with customers to develop employment plans which meet the customers immediate and future needs. Staff work diligently to identify and develop effective career pathways which reflect realistic employment goals that can involve occupational training, as well as work-based training, designed to meet the prescribed objectives of the plan. Staff is made aware of sources for labor market and career information, and to look for every opportunity for co-enrollment and integrated case management to enhance desired outcomes. PWDB policy exists for exploring community partners and agencies which may assist in meeting the needs of customers for training and employment. The PWDB is collaborating with both Amarillo College and the Panhandle Community Partnership in the development of tools, such as a Career Maps website, to be available soon.
- **Improving access to activities leading to postsecondary credential or industry recognized credential:** The availability of short-term training options, that can lead to occupations in demand, is limited in the Panhandle. Working with postsecondary institutions to develop more training opportunities involves identifying training needs of employers, assisting colleges with grant applications to generate funding for curriculum development, and covering tuition expenses for eligible students. Integrated language, basic education and occupational skills training are also limited in the region. Most of the occupations that have been targeted for training require a relatively high level of basic education for successful completion of certificates and degrees. However, Amarillo College has piloted instructional programs for Limited-English speakers in the In-Demand Occupation of Certified Nurse Aide, and the Target Occupations of Machinist and Auto Mechanics.

Multiple projects have been completed utilizing High Demand Job Training (HDJT) grant funding, which matches to local economic development sales tax funding, on a dollar-for-dollar basis. The PWDB has facilitated the purchase of equipment for occupational training of students at the post-secondary level at Clarendon College's Childress, Clarendon, Pampa, and Shamrock Centers; and at Frank Phillips College's Rahl Campus in Dalhart, Allen Campus in Perryton, and its main campus in Borger. The PWDB has also facilitated the purchase of equipment for occupational training of students in Career & Technology Education (CTE) for the local Independent School Districts (ISDs) of Bushland, Canyon, Highland Park, and River Road; and for the Amarillo ISD's AmTech Career Academy.

Part 4: One-Stop Service Delivery

A. One-Stop Service Delivery System

References: WIOA §108(b)(6); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(5)

- **Customer Service and Satisfaction:** The PWDB understands that the workforce system must have the capacity to meet the needs of all current and future customers: employers, system program and service providers, and workers, wherever they are in their careers. Customers must be assured that wherever they enter the workforce system, there is a pathway through the system by instituting a “no-closed door” culture to ensure successful outcomes or referrals for customers of the workforce system programs and services. Any point of entry provides access to the full continuum of programs and services. The ability to accurately assess customer satisfaction with and across workforce system elements and translate this data into useful actions is essential to best meet the needs of workforce system customers. Two innovative products that the PWDB and WSP have recently deployed in the area of customer service:
 - ✓ WSP is incorporating Quick Response (QR) Code technology into its Customer Satisfaction Survey process. This technology allows customers to access the optic label provided on WSP printed and digital media and, in a streamlined, convenient, and confidential method, respond on their customer service experience.
 - ✓ The PWDB has purchased the digital communication management (DCM) software Granicus GovDelivery to enable WSP to build content to be shared with job seekers and connect/distribute through a number of different mediums, including email, Short Message Service (SMS)/text messages, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, and social media integration, including, but not limited to, a monthly newsletter.
- **Data-Driven Program Improvement:** The collection of key data, as well as the reporting and analysis of that data, in a consistent and useful manner, are essential in demonstrating outcomes, determining if changes are required or desired, and establishing benchmarks for future performance. The PWDB is committed to working with its partners to promote the building or modification of existing data systems to improve the flow of data, increase the relevance of data, and facilitate analysis that supports effective decision-making across the full spectrum of data users, to achieve effective and efficient programs, services, and outcomes.

The PWDB recognizes the efforts and the recommendations of the Regional Workforce Strategy Working Group representing the Workforce Solutions Alamo, Capital Area and Rural Capital Area. This group was formed to strengthen the alignment of regional workforce planning with economic development to create a data-driven, scalable model to maximize the capacity for Workforce Development Boards to meet the needs of employers in the State and reconnect Texans to the workforce in a way that supports long-term prosperity in urban, suburban, and rural communities. The PWDB is exploring and will support the strategies put forth in the Texas Talent and Economic Growth Pilot Project and Statewide Action Plan to strengthen the alignment between regional workforce planning and economic development.

- **Continuous Improvement and Innovation:** As identified in the Texas Workforce Investment Council’s strategic planning process, the PWDB will continue to identify opportunities and develop solutions for improving performance and outcomes that have cross-partner implications and hold significant strategic value to the overall success of the workforce system’s ability to meet its vision and mission.to
 - ✓ Facilitate effective and efficient transitions and enhance transition services;
 - ✓ Increase employment outcomes;
 - ✓ Expand partnerships with system stakeholders and promote collaboration and joint planning;
 - ✓ Incorporate/expand options for dual credit and/or licensure and certification;
 - ✓ Increase business and industry involvement;
 - ✓ Align programs and services;

- ✓ Share timely data and information;
- ✓ Promulgate promising practices and reduce duplication;
- ✓ Recruit and/or provide professional development;
- ✓ Ensure portable and transferrable options;
- ✓ Address skills shortages; and
- ✓ Institutionalize alternative service delivery methods.

The PWDB continues to endeavor to connect job seekers and other populations with barriers to employment to numerous career and training resources and opportunities to prepare them for entry or reentry into the workforce in high-growth industry sectors, and improve customer opportunities for growth. The PWDB and its partner agencies continue to cultivate emerging industries, support existing businesses and enhance the skills development of the workforce taking advantage of strategic opportunities provided by swift economic change.

In alignment with the TWC Strategic Plan, the PWDB continues to strive for improved access and efficiency, along with value-added services, to benefit customers of the workforce system. The PWDB recognizes that along with system partners, it is responsible for the delivery of twenty workforce education and training programs and related services, as well as education programs that support career preparation and advancement. The PWDB, WSP, and community partners continue to follow the principal of full integration of core programs, with a strategy of alignment, coordination, and integration of education, employment and training programs. The PWDB continues its objective of structuring collaboration of programs, initiatives and outcomes, to avoid duplication with strategic plans of partner agencies. The PWDB and its partners are committed to customer satisfaction, data-driven program improvement, and continuous improvement and innovation.

The PWDB continues to support TWC's goal, as stated in in 2021-2025 TWC Strategic Plan to prepare individuals for employment by supporting education and training that equips individuals with in-demand skills as identified by employers by:

- ✓ Continuing ongoing support of education programs for students that inform them and prepare them for high-skill, high-demand jobs through identification and allocation of available programs and resources;
 - ✓ Addressing the workforce training needs of employers by leveraging Skills Development Fund (SDF) grants; Texas Industry Partnership (TIP) program grants, which support collaborations between the Board and industry partners through the leveraging of matching contributions of cash or qualifying expenditures for occupation training focusing on the Texas Industry Cluster Initiative; and other available resources to support in-demand job training;
 - ✓ Continuing to support work-based learning opportunities through internships, mentorships, and job shadowing, and
 - ✓ Continue to coordinate and collaborate with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Education Agency to support and develop objectives for increasing the percentage of Texans with post-secondary degrees or certification.
- **Continuous Improvement of Eligible Providers:** The PWDB adopted local performance requirements for the determination of initial eligibility of Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) program applications per TWC's annual publication of state performance standards that meet the state performance standards. A training provider may apply for certification for any of its programs. However, if the program does not prepare students for employment in an occupation on the Board's Target Occupations list, the school must justify inclusion by demonstrating that

the occupation is indeed in demand.

Appropriate documentation demonstrating a projected minimum of ten total openings in the 26 counties of the Panhandle Workforce Development Area (WDA) in each of the next five years must be submitted to the Board. Schools are encouraged to submit validating information for Board review. Such documentation must consist of at least three sources, including, but not limited to: recent economic statistics; information provided by employers, e.g., letters; posted job openings; newspaper articles; information provided by professional organizations related to the occupation or industry; local employer-based, industry-specific advisory groups; and/or other appropriate information verifying demand.

WIOA emphasizes the importance of training services providers to afford the highest quality training services and be responsive to In-Demand and emerging industries. Training provider evaluation criteria must include documentation of partnerships with employers related to the particular training program, WIOA Section 122(b)(4)(D)(ii). To comply with this requirement, documentation must take the following forms, and will be maintained by the PWDB: letter of support from a local employer or employers; evidence of the existence of an employer-based advisory committee; or other means acceptable to the Board as set forth in policy adopted in a public meeting. Providers must also document financial stability through submission of the most recently completed financial statements to the Board. Submissions must include Balance Sheets, Income Statements (Profit & Loss), and Auditor's Notes.

The PWDB uses several strategies to increase the number of providers and training options for customers, and to assure that local training is available, as follows:

- ✓ The inclusion of public training providers in the membership of the Board's Labor Market Information (LMI) Committee and public notice of those sessions (considered public meetings) assures communication to local providers of training gaps and potential employer collaborations;
- ✓ Positive relationships are sustained in the region with all local providers that offer training in Target and In-demand occupations. Various standing agreements exist, including the options of provider application to the ETPS (1) for all programs that prepare students for the Target occupations, (2) when a student is interested in a particular program, thereby limiting the demand on the provider's staff time, or (3) not at all, but other resources may be leveraged to allow customers to receive training (e.g., apprenticeship programs);
- ✓ Maximum flexibility is provided to training providers that wish to certify programs for WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker customer training. At application, training providers certify that their programs lead to specified occupations, including those targeted by the PWDB. Programs that consistently produce student completions that lead to training-related employment are retained on the ETPS;
- ✓ Those programs with at least five WIOA-enrolled participants per year are evaluated for this outcome. If a substantial percentage of the WIOA participants do not complete the program or cannot obtain training-related employment after graduation, PWDB staff will conduct an evaluation with the provider and the WSP staff to determine what improvements, if any, are necessary to increase the program's WIOA student success rate;
- ✓ To ensure continuous improvement of ETPS-certified programs, labor market information is provided to training providers, including input from employers and other workforce customers. In addition, periodic meetings are held with training providers and employers to

discuss labor market skill and training needs, prior to the submission to the PWDB for updates to the Target Occupations list; and

- ✓ To ensure that training is available and the need for skills is communicated to the public, skilled trades occupations with workers who are expected to retire faster than they can be replaced are included on the Target Occupations list. These occupations include high-demand opportunities in Construction trades such as Construction Equipment Operators, Carpenters, Electricians and Plumbers; repair workers such as Auto Mechanics, Diesel Mechanics, Heating, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Mechanics, Industrial Machinery Mechanics, and Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanics; Industrial Truck & Tractor Operators, and manufacturing technicians such as Machinists and Welders. Registered apprenticeship provides some of the local training for these occupations, including those in Construction. Referrals are made to apprenticeship opportunities by WSP staff.
- **Remote areas and technology:** With 26 counties encompassing 26,000 square miles, the size and scale of the Texas Panhandle presents a daunting challenge to the delivery of vital workforce services to the populace, compounded by the existence of only one full-service rural Workforce Solutions Panhandle office in Borger and one itinerate location in Hereford. An additional component to this challenge is the fact that our rural communities continue to have the most need for workers, and yet have the smallest labor force. The PWDB's newer, smaller mobile workforce unit is more cost effective to operate and staff. Following the placement of the new mobile unit into service, the older mobile unit is available to be stationed at a specified rural location, with the option of limited transport to other rural communities for employer hiring related functions, such as job fairs, career exploration events, and other opportunities specifically aimed at connecting rural employers with job seekers, and strengthening linkages to workforce services.

Fully utilizing both mobile workforce units, that offer a comprehensive menu of workforce services on a consistent basis to customers in rural areas of the Panhandle who have had limited to no workforce services activity in their area, requires additional approaches. A Rural Business Services Representative is primarily responsible for conducting business services activities with a primary focus on connecting with, and serving, rural employers, by working closely with WSP staff operating the mobile units to conduct activities that promote full utilization of both units in the rural communities. Coordinating planning schedules will ensure employers in rural communities are introduced to, and delivered, essential workforce services. Increased employer awareness of workforce services will increase job placement opportunities, and advance the potential for developing work-based training and internships.

Additionally, access to workforce services for rural communities is increased and enhanced through specific technology improvements, such as continued updates to the WSPanhandle.com website, acquisition and implementation of innovative website elements, improving current online connectivity, and creating access to virtual services. A logical step in achieving these aims is applying a strategy for improvements in rural wireless Internet connectivity, through such methods as creating MiFi hotspots throughout the region, and identifying, and advertising, appropriate rural locations which offer free Wi-Fi, such as libraries and courthouses. Increased and improved access to Internet-based applications for career exploration and job matching and information about occupational and work-based training opportunities can expand and enhance service delivery to rural customers who do not reside within reasonable travel distance to any WSP office. Further strategies include:

- ✓ Outreaching workforce services to the public through multiple electronic sources, primarily web-based media. This will include the continued development of social media utilization, to

promote services and provide immediate responses to customer needs, and increase social media presence on the most popular websites and web applications that appeal to, and will reach, the younger population;

- ✓ Maintaining personal contact through the WSP Business Services team with employers in rural communities, assessing needs and developing customized solutions which address recruiting challenges and skills gaps;
 - ✓ Regularly updating the WSP website with more interactive and easily accessed resources, such as job search training videos, and maintaining relevant content;
 - ✓ Continuing to host successful hiring events at rural locations;
 - ✓ Expanding the quality and quantity of focused job fairs and career fairs in the rural communities, including involving specialized education programs as hosts;
 - ✓ Continuing utilization of analysis and local wisdom gained through practical experience enhancing the set of operational strategies for serving rural communities to be implemented. Investments will continue to be made to market services to the public through multiple technologies and electronic media. Continued efforts of WSP's social media specialist to guide the development and utilization of this resource, in collaboration with the WSP Business Services team, in promoting workforce services throughout the region, will be supported. Targeted social media will be further identified and developed to provide an additional venue for customers—both employers and job seekers to communicate needs and generate appropriate staff responses;
 - ✓ Including hiring events for job openings, career fairs, and job fairs focusing on rural communities. The WSP website has been redesigned to provide remote users services that are like those offered in the brick-and-mortar offices. New resources available on the website include an improved user interface, more interactive activities such as job search training videos, additional methods for direct, real-time communication to obtain staff assistance, and a fresh new approach to reach and engage disconnected youth using appealing smartphone web applications that offer youth the same multitude of services available on the website, and at WSP offices; and
 - ✓ Supporting WSP Business Services members and other key staff continuing to visit employers in our rural communities, assessing needs face-to-face and developing customized solutions which address recruiting and skills gaps. Rural partners will continue to provide itinerant locations for staff to meet with customers throughout the region, including community-based organizations such as Panhandle Community Services, as well as libraries, colleges, independent school districts and public offices. Combined with regularly scheduled staff visits to more rural locations utilizing the second mobile unit, offering computer access with Internet connectivity for accessing WorkInTexas.com and other employment services, will assure rural customers that WSP still has a demonstrated rural presence and can provide services in their communities.
- **WIOA §188 and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008:** The PWDB has the opportunity to better serve the workforce needs of individuals with disabilities, and ensure compliance with WIOA §188 and the ADAAA, through the ongoing transition of Texas Workforce Solutions VR Services programs and staff into the WSP office in Amarillo. While the physical and financial issues associated with co-location and integration of VR Services staff and WSP staff is a challenge, the intention is for all of the Panhandle region's

offices to grow in the capacity to serve individuals who have disabilities by common appointment scheduling and regularly scheduled visits to many rural locations by the mobile units. Through continued collaboration and joint planning with VR Services, an effective transition plan reflecting the shared goals of providing a seamless approach for access to integrated workforce services, literacy education, vocational rehabilitation, and in-demand workplace skills that lead to self-sufficient employment and advancement for individuals with disabilities, and promoting partnerships with employers and system stakeholders which overcome barriers to meeting workforce needs through creative use of technology and innovation, can be achieved. Following a period of adjustment and settling in to the new paradigm, additional strategies and methods will be developed and implemented based on examination of the successes and lingering challenges observed, and will be designed to increase the quality and effectiveness of workforce services provided to this priority population.

VR Services include counseling, training, medical treatment, assistive devices, job placement assistance, and other services to assist individuals with disabilities prepare for or maintain their independence. Integration of these services affords the local workforce system with increased opportunities to better serve individuals with disabilities in our region, and improve overall employment outcomes for the employers and the potential for self-sufficiency for the individuals served. VR Services staff will provide:

- ✓ Information on program eligibility;
- ✓ Assessment for referrals from WSP staff to determine eligibility for VR Services;
- ✓ Delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, including diagnostics, guidance and counseling, adaptive skills training, vocational training, and pre- and post- employment services;
- ✓ Consultation on rehabilitative technology for workforce customers;
- ✓ Training of WSP staff on disability sensitivity and awareness;
- ✓ Assessment of adaptive technology needs at WSP offices;
- ✓ Information about all programs and services available; and
- ✓ Information and assistance with compliance with all Federal laws and regulations regarding individual with disabilities.

The PWDB and WSP will:

- ✓ Advertise and promote VR Services as part of the entire array of services offered;
- ✓ Integrate VR Services staff into workforce service delivery;
- ✓ Improve and streamline the referral process for individuals with disabilities;
- ✓ Coordinate with VR Services in providing information on the full range of employment services offered including job matching services utilizing WorkInTexas.com;
- ✓ Share timely labor market information and provide a critical link to employers including job leads, job fairs, and hiring events;
- ✓ Coordinate with VR Services staff on co-hosting or supporting VR Services special events;
- ✓ Provide intensive and training services under WIOA as appropriate and applicable, and move towards jointly managing common case files and staffing customers;
- ✓ Actively identify and promote opportunities for co-enrollment to maximize funds and create shorter pathways to achieving training and employment goals;
- ✓ Participate in disability sensibility and awareness training to staff;
- ✓ Request consultation on appropriate rehabilitation technology for workforce customers with disabilities; and
- ✓ Provide additional adaptive equipment, as determined necessary.

- **Workforce partners' roles and resource contributions:** The PWDB coordinates with hundreds of public agencies, nonprofit organizations and private sector businesses in the region to carry out its mission, such as:
 - ✓ The region's three community colleges, Amarillo College, Clarendon College and Frank Phillips College, and the public university, West Texas A&M University, are essential, as these institutions provide most postsecondary education supported by the Board and numerous methods of support to help students be successful;
 - ✓ The PWDB supports the community colleges' Skills Development Fund, Self Sufficiency Fund, and High Demand Job Training Project applications that support key industries and those associated by cluster relationships, and training for occupations in demand and/or essential to those industries. In addition, staff collaborates with schools and local employers to develop training solutions that meet specific training needs;
 - ✓ Amarillo College houses the region's adult basic education program, overseeing Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Educational Development (GED), and ESL instruction throughout the area, delivered both by onsite teachers and distance learning. ABE services include assessment of workforce customers with limited English skills;
 - ✓ Region 16 Education Service Center (ESC):
 - a) Continues to partner with the PWDB and WSP to promote TWC's Externship for Teachers Initiative which unites workforce, industry and education representatives to promote an effective workforce system. During the summer, teachers are assigned to a partner business and shadow workers to the teachers better understand work-based applications of what they teach. This experience is designed to strengthen the connection between business and education, helping teachers learn what skills are critical to small and large businesses and promoting lesson plans that demonstrate how classroom skills are used at work. PWDB Grant funding is utilized for providing stipends to participating teachers.
 - b) Is also responsible for the area's Head Start and Early Head Start program, offering free, high-quality child development services to income eligible families with children ages 0-5 years old. Head Start and Early Head Start is child-focused learning, but also provides comprehensive services to the child's family;
 - ✓ The Texas Health and Human Services Commission's (HHSC's) Texas Works Program provides financial support to welfare and SNAP families and supports WSP staff efforts to help these customers locate, enter and retain employment;
 - ✓ The area's Independent School Districts collaborate with the PWDB to help at-risk youth complete their high school diplomas, prepare for careers and transition to postsecondary education. Alternative secondary school, tutoring, career exploration and assessment, child care and other services may be provided;
 - ✓ Literacy councils play an essential role in workforce development by helping extremely low-skilled readers gain a level of proficiency that will allow them to improve their employment prospects and benefit from further adult education offered by the community colleges;
 - ✓ The Panhandle's Economic Development Corporations (EDCs) and related organizations provide financial support for occupational training and related equipment, and business

development that leads to increased numbers of jobs. EDC involvement, in the High Demand Job Training Projects, assures workforce system alignment with local economic development resources to the extent possible;

- ✓ WSP coordinates with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to provide information to local Parole Division Officers, regarding Job Seeker services for its Releasees, to enable the Officers to make referrals to WSP to help these individuals locate, enter and retain employment; and
- ✓ Many other local organizations and agencies, such as Panhandle Community Services, Catholic Family Services, Inc., the Salvation Army, Panhandle Independent Living Center, and Amarillo's Downtown Women's Center, provide significant employment and related services. WSP staff coordinate with over 100 faith- and community-based governmental and private organizations in the region to leverage resources on behalf of customers.

Cooperative agreements explain how all local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the requirements for integration of and access to the entire set of services available in the local one-stop delivery system. This includes cooperative agreements (as defined in WIOA §107(d)(11)) between the Board or other local entities described in §101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated state agency or designated state unit that administers programs that are carried out under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act (29 USC 720 et seq.) (other than §112 or part C of that title (29 USC 732, 741) and are subject to §121(f) in accordance with §101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act (29 USC 721(a)(11)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals who have disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts.

Cooperative Agreement means a legal instrument of financial assistance between a Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity and a non-Federal entity that, consistent with 31 U.S.C. 6302-6305: (1) Is used to enter into a relationship the principal purpose of which is to transfer anything of value from the Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity to the non-Federal entity to carry out a public purpose authorized by a law of the United States (see 31 U.S.C. 6101(3)); and not to acquire property or services for the Federal government or pass-through entity's direct benefit or use; (2) Is distinguished from a grant in that it provides for substantial involvement between the Federal awarding agency or pass-through entity and the non-Federal entity in carrying out the activity contemplated by the Federal award.

This is not applicable as no Boards in Texas have these cooperative agreements in place. Given that VR falls under the purview of TWC and as based on TWC guidance, a Letter of Agreement with VR is not required.

B. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination

References: WIOA §108(b)(4); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(3); WIOA §108(b)(5); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(4)

Employer engagement is the key to meeting our regional workforce needs. The PWDB's Business Advisory Committee assists and informs the PWDB regarding the design and delivery of services based on business and industry needs, as well as enhancing employer engagement, and supporting industry partnerships under WIOA. Comprised of PWDB and non-Board members, private sector, Board staff, and WSP staff, this industry partnership endeavors to:

- Facilitate and increase employer engagement;
- Pursue creative ideas and methods to improve program service delivery design;
- Identify skill needs;
- Develop and validate career pathways;
- Collaborate to create youth initiatives such as apprenticeships to connect youth with careers in demand;
- Align educational curriculum to meet industry needs;
- Identify and develop cost-effective training solutions for companies involving employers and the Business Advisory Committee as incumbent worker intermediaries to leverage Skills Development Grant funds;
- Provide work-based learning opportunities;
- Identify barriers to “entry level employment” and develop strategies to remove those barriers;
- Identify and address organizational and Human Resource challenges;
- Increase productivity;
- Promote communication networks between companies, between managers and workers, and between companies and their communities and educational institutions;
- Identify and develop business intermediaries to facilitate identifying and meeting employers’ immediate hiring and training needs; and
- Expand the utilization of high-quality work-based training by collaborating with PWDB staff in revising policies for customized training and OJT, and providing training to workforce and including business services staff on methods of seeking opportunities for these types of training situations which offer the highest potential for success. This includes developing training contracts which produce highly desirable outcomes in the shortest amount of time and with the least expenditures.

In an effort to develop and strengthen linkages between the workforce system and unemployment insurance programs, the PWDB is working with its Business Advisory Committee to assist the PWDB in designing and delivering services based on business and industry needs, including those of customers recently separated from employment.

C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services

References: WIOA §108(b)(12); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(11)

Many Texas Panhandle job seekers need job search assistance, career and labor market information, training in skills that make them more employable, support services such as child care, and referral to community resources. Job seekers include the unemployed, underemployed, and recently laid off workers, as well as special populations such as disabled individuals, and individuals with barriers to employment and literacy skills deficiencies, who may need additional, more specialized assistance in securing employment leading to self-sufficiency.

Workforce services for job seekers focus on activities that lead to finding and retaining self-sufficient employment. Successful delivery of workforce services and linking job seekers to employers remains the PWDB’s most important function, including improving access to services for individuals receiving unemployment benefits, individuals with barriers to employment. Individuals whose skills are not likely to generate employment or self-sufficient wages may be provided training assistance or referrals. Supportive services such as child care and transportation assistance are offered to eligible job seekers and students to facilitate their efforts to enter and retain employment that meets their families’ needs. Such services include:

- Information provided to job seekers about available workforce services and programs;
- Training job seekers to effectively build a record in WorkInTexas.com and complete job matches based on their profile;
- Staff-directed matching of applicants to job openings, using WorkinTexas.com;
- Virtual personal assistance for job seekers through phone, email or online access;
- Seminars and workshops to help job seekers find and retain employment, such as general job search, resume writing and interviewing;
- Work readiness preparation;
- Public access computers, software, fax machines, copiers, and phones for job search;
- Assessment resources for self-evaluation of labor market information and options;
- Maintaining current information on availability of services from and referral to local community resources whenever and wherever possible to maximize WIOA funds and prevent duplication of services;
- Individualized placement services for eligible job seekers, including job development, by building on existing employer relationships and using electronic tools such as job aggregators, which collect job openings from multiple sources and makes them available to be searched all in one location;
- Providing information about Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC) to individuals who are target group members, to promote themselves to prospective employers;
- Employment planning, by mapping successful career pathways which include the steps needed to prepare for and/or enter employment;
- Rapid Response services for workers after a layoff announcement and/or closure, including all the above services and assessment of transferable skills, reemployment planning and referral to training/training assistance as needed;
- Financial assistance needed by eligible job seekers to find and retain employment, including support for transportation, child care and other services; and
- Increased utilization of the City of Amarillo increased public transportation capacity and expansion of bus routes.

Career and labor market information provided to job seekers includes the following:

- Self-assessment tools for determining transferable skills and work preferences;
- Information about occupations in demand;
- Information about local employers and their skills needs;
- Referral to personalized career planning assistance—either internal for eligible job seekers or external;
- Seminars for dislocated workers (Rapid Response); and
- Work-based career exploration for eligible youth and adults.

D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management

References: WIOA §108(b)(21); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(20)

Mastering current technology, and exploring emerging technology, the keys to creating and conducting an effective technology based integrated system for customer intake and case management, will:

- Improve availability of integrated workforce services throughout the region through innovative

technology application, coordination with regional and local organizations, and other effective, efficient methods of service delivery;

- Enhance virtual services readily available through upgrading the WSP website, and marketing the availability of all workforce resources through social media; and
- Complete understanding and application of current capabilities enabling full utilization of existing tools, primarily WorkInTexas.com, and TWIST. Adopting and adapting additional, more efficient technologies, such as a real-time customer tracking system, supplies WSP staff with the means to quickly and accurately assess customer needs and provide seamless service delivery, while maintaining service priority requirements.

Critical to this process is engaging the services of individuals with the newest, most relevant computer programming and coding skills to create and implement new systems and applications, conduct staff training and ongoing technical assistance to maintain high levels of staff performance.

E. Third Party Partnership in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) Programs

*Reference: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training
Third-Party Partnership Guide*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) permits states to use 50 Percent Federal Reimbursement Funds (50-50 Funds) to create partnerships with local entities to provide SNAP E&T services to SNAP recipients. Through these third-party reimbursement (TPR) partnerships, third-party partners (TPPs), such as community colleges, local governments, private-sector entities, and community-based organizations, supply funding for the provision of SNAP E&T services and are reimbursed up to 50 cents per dollar expended. TPP service models present the PWDB with opportunities to expand services to SNAP recipients who may not currently receive them due to funding limitations. The TPP service model allows local entities to recoup up to half of their service costs, which creates incentive to provide services that help SNAP recipients.

In 2024, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and TWC began working on a joint initiative, with the goal of all of Texas’ 28 Workforce Development Boards to be using the TPP service model by 2029. The expected outcome for a SNAP recipient in a third-party partnership initiative is full-time unsubsidized employment.

The PWDB will contract with appropriate TPPs, such as Amarillo College’s Advocacy and Resource Center; Goodwill Industries of Northwest Texas; Family Support Services; and Wesley Community Center, to provide SNAP E&T services to eligible SNAP recipients, such as:

- Employment planning and assessment;
- Identification of a SNAP recipient’s strengths and barriers to employment;
- Vocational training incorporating:
 - Occupational assessment and remedial and entry-level job-skills training;
 - Short-term, prevocational, entrepreneurial training;
 - Customized training;
 - Institutional skills training;
 - Upgrade training; and
 - Vocational education.
- Nonvocational Education programs or activities to improve basic skills or employability,

incorporating the following:

- Adult basic education
- Basic skills and literacy
- HSE and high school instruction
- ESL
- Postsecondary education that does not result in a baccalaureate or advanced degree
- Work readiness training

In addition to basic skills and literacy, workforce development services must include financial literacy training, and services may include providing child care assistance, when necessary.

Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities

A. Rapid Response Activity Coordination

References: WIOA §108(b)(8); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(7)

In alignment with the State WIOA Plan, PWDB staff actively participate in a Regional Workforce Network (RWN), collaborating with five other Board areas in West Texas for the purpose of sharing information to further build capacity for seamless workforce operations and service delivery to workforce to customers. Topics discussed in face-to-face meetings range from best practices for developing and fostering successful working partnerships with local entities, to cost sharing, procurements, and budgets, as well as special projects to identify opportunities to leverage critical resources designed to promote economic development in the Panhandle region.

This RWN has developed a project focused on identifying best practices for assessing skills training of job seekers and employers to pinpoint relevant credentials necessary for successful job placement and retention, which includes the participation of several employers and multiple local colleges. Three Board areas in this RWN have collaborated to support the workforce needs resulting from the declining oil and gas industry in the Permian Basin/Cline Shale areas. In addition, the RWN is working to develop new partnerships with out-of-state partners in adjacent states such as Oklahoma and New Mexico, to share “labor sheds”, develop a strategic approach to producing regional labor market information, and host combined regional job fairs and other events which support workforce development, respond to economic development challenges, and ultimately better serve the workforce customers in these adjacent areas.

The WSP Business Services team provides Rapid Response services to employers considering, or planning, a layoff or closure. Services are designed to minimize the cost of the layoff to the employer, encourage customized training or other services to limit or prevent job losses, or quickly transition workers into other employment. Services are delivered onsite or in a location convenient for workers, and may include a broad range of services, including but not limited to: unemployment insurance information and referral, assistance with accessing customized training to help workers adjust to technical advances and prevent layoffs, seminars to assist workers to manage their dislocation and find other employment, and worker referral to training resources.

The designated Rapid Response Coordinator for the PWDB is also the lead Business Services staff member, ensuring that any employer that has announced a layoff or closure will receive business-focused support. The Coordinator ensures that the employer receives needed services, and facilitates communication between the employer, TWC, and WSP staff in serving affected workers. Once services are initiated for workers, WIOA program staff are available to assist in providing assessment, reemployment planning, and connection to the local ABE provider if language skills,

adult basic education and GED preparation are needed, as well as providing career guidance and occupational skill development, and to access job development and supportive services, as determined appropriate for each worker.

Rapid Response activities in rural areas may require temporary, onsite or local offices where WSP staff can meet the needs of affected workers. Both employers and job seekers will have access to “back office” staff who can respond quickly to telephone and electronic communications, in order to provide services to customers who prefer not to go to a WSP office or who are not based in Amarillo. The PWDB continues to explore paperless recordkeeping options, to effectively utilize staff time while providing customer services outside the WSP offices.

B. Youth Activities and Services

References: WIOA §108(b)(9); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(8)

The PWDB and WSP have developed a new staff position to enhance youth and young adult activities. This Career Outreach Specialist will focus on innovative technology in Virtual Career Exploration. The PWDB is purchasing Virtual Reality headsets, along with library of occupational videos, which transport the user into an interactive environment to participate in performing tasks in a specific job. The Career Outreach Specialist will host events, both in area schools and in WSP offices, guiding students in exploration of potential occupations and careers in their areas of interest.

The PWDB’s Youth program is primarily focused on Out-of-School Youth who need postsecondary education and/or work experience to achieve self-sufficiency. Disconnected youth, parenting youth, first-generation college students, foster youth, and youth who have other barriers to employment, are the priority youth populations determined most likely to benefit from local workforce services.

Increasing the number and quality of work-based training opportunities for at-risk youth such as paid internships for college students and graduating high school seniors that are directly related to students’ career interests. Many youth served in workforce programs must be engaged in an occupational component, so paid internships will offer competitive wages to encourage participation. These internships will include mentoring by supervisors trained by workforce staff to provide appropriate encouragement and career exploration.

WSP and PWDB staff fully support the local “No Limits, No Excuses” Panhandle Community Partnership, which assists students in the local school districts with accessing information on colleges and universities, and mapping out a plan for success after high school graduation. This project is building community partnerships that result in an increase in the number of low-income, young adults who complete employer-recognized and valued certificates and degrees, and has led to the implementation of two major youth-serving strategies in which workforce resources have been committed.

The PWDB continues its collaboration with the Texas Panhandle Rural Alliance (TPRA), a group of important partners from different sectors who strive to create a common agenda and apply the concept of “collective impact” as an effective approach for solving specific community social problems, focused on rural communities in the Panhandle. Through research and stakeholder engagement, this collaboration helps to ensure the Panhandle’s vitality of a sustainable population of working age people, through five objectives:

- Support the Panhandle’s homegrown talent to stay or return to the region;
- Establish workplace conditions for workers of all ages to thrive in jobs and continue to build their skills;

- Create supportive conditions for learners to pursue and complete the post-secondary education or training of their choice;
- Raise learners' aspirations early and strengthen education-career pathways; and
- Close the achievement gap for minorities and English language learners.

Because transitioning low-income students from high school to college has been found to be not as difficult as retaining them in postsecondary training until they successfully complete, WSP Youth Program staff provide case management and mentoring to help current students address barriers that arise during their studies, to facilitate college retention and completion.

WSP staff continue to coordinate and expand efforts between schools and businesses to offer job fairs and career fairs, preferably held in the morning and in the afternoon on the same day in rural locations, maximizing the available audience for youth and the employers, and resulting in highly increased attendance and participation by both parties.

One excellent example of collaboration is the one between WSP staff and the AmTech Career Academy, which has proven to be the kind of targeted, well-prepared approach to conducting meaningful youth job/career fairs, that was the missing link. The nearly unanimous positive comments from employer surveys received demonstrated the event is most valuable for two primary reasons: 1) the Principal of AmTech effectively uses social media to promote the event, and 2) the Principal's exceptional preparation of the students to meet employers, including presenting a highly professional appearance and attitude.

In addition to continuing to serve low-income youth, homeless youth, youth who have disabilities, foster youth, and youth who have barriers to employment, refocusing efforts to outreach and engage out of school youth in successful work-based training opportunities is the primary goal of the PWDB, related to youth services. This cannot be accomplished without employing innovative and imaginative current technologies to reach this population. One immediate example is using existing or creating inventive new smartphone applications to engage disconnected youth with the local job market and promote successful job seeking. Critical to this process is soliciting input and feedback from youth for these projects, as well as ideas for updating the WSP website in a way that appeals to them and creates interest in using the website as a source for job market information. Local Information Technology (IT) staff must have the skills to keep this approach fresh and relevant to youth.

The WIOA youth program, in the Panhandle, includes developing career pathways which lead to self-sufficiency, while meeting required performance measures. The fourteen WIOA youth program elements are key to the overall success of youth program participants. WSP staff determine which elements would be most effective for youth through initial assessment, develop individualized service plans, and identify career pathways. Staff identify and engage local resources which provide access to, or directly offer, services related to the youth elements.

Creating a meaningful attachment to the workforce is a critical factor for success and is accomplished through fostering relationships with community-based organizations which serve local youth, and creating new connections to local employers who have the desire and the labor needs that will afford youth with meaningful work-based training opportunities. Collaboration with the WSP Business Services team to identify these employers helps to facilitate this process.

The overall goal of the Youth programs in the Panhandle is to create the means for Youth program participants to first arrive at data-driven choices, and then develop appropriate and successful career pathways for youth that align with demand. Combining classroom occupational training with short-term work experience opportunities or internships, with an occupational education component, and

utilizing all applicable Youth program elements, provides a vital connection to the job market and employers, leading to enhanced performance, successful outcomes, and preparing youth to succeed in the job market and in life. Youth providers in the region are the three community colleges (Amarillo College, Clarendon College, and Frank Phillips College) one university (West Texas A&M University), and local employers that provide work-based training such as career-related internships.

Ensuring the WIOA Youth elements available include linking youth with the appropriate sources, partner agencies, and community providers, by:

- Focusing on outreach and engagement of Out of School Youth and youth disconnected from the workforce, including a streamlined approach to eligibility, identifying appropriate services and career pathways, and developing effective service strategies encompassing educational and employment goals;
- Transitioning low-income youth from high school to college to prepare for many of the jobs being created in Texas and nationally for “middle-skill” occupations, including those that require postsecondary education leading to attainment of certificate and associate degrees;
- Accessing alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services when determined appropriate and necessary to keep youth engaged and connected;
- Tutoring, remedial skills training, and instruction for dropout prevention and leading to attaining a secondary school diploma or recognized equivalent;
- Retaining low-income youth in postsecondary training until completion, and providing short term work experience and paid internship opportunities that enhance completion and transition;
- Providing paid and unpaid short-term work experience opportunities with an occupational education component resulting in a vital connection to the job market and employers, leading to enhanced performance and successful outcomes;
- Ensuring appropriate supportive services which assist youth in completing program activities, including work based or occupational training, and obtaining and retaining employment are provided under WIOA;
- Providing adult mentoring during and after program participation for a period of at least 12 months to prevent youth from falling through the gaps or becoming disconnected;
- Arranging leadership development opportunities such as community service and other similar activities which encourage youth to give back to their community, and builds confidence, maturity, and self-esteem;
- Affording appropriate guidance and referrals for counseling including drug or alcohol abuse to address and resolve individual needs of youth program participants;
- Providing ready access to current relevant labor market information including PWDB specific demand occupations and industries, and career counseling and exploration;
- Assisting youth with improving and increasing financial literacy by providing relevant and relatable online instruction geared towards youth participants; and
- Exploring and tapping into local entrepreneurship ventures including a university-sponsored small business incubator program.

C. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs

References: WIOA §108(b)(10); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(9)

Strategies include the following:

- Making available financial aid information and referrals to training providers;
- Providing career and training plan assistance for eligible individuals, including individuals with barriers to employment, developing successful career pathways and program co-enrollment wherever appropriate and beneficial;
- Coordinating Adult Literacy, ESL, basic education, and GED preparation—either by referral or intensive short-term classes, for eligible individuals;
- Developing a menu of activities leading to achievement of post-secondary, recognized credentials;
- Supporting local ISDs and community colleges to pursue skills development grant opportunities including Apprenticeship programs and to apply for and obtain grants such as the TWC’s JET (Jobs and Education for Texas) and the High Demand Job Training (HDJT) grants;
- Collaborating on Innovation partnership grants to upgrade skills and earning potential for incumbent workers, and Industry-Recognized Skills Certification Initiative Grants which provide short term courses through local colleges leading to certification completion and enhanced job placement opportunities; and
- Facilitating Postsecondary occupational skills training at community colleges, career colleges or universities.

D. Child Care and Early Learning

Reference: 40 TAC §809.12

Many Texas Panhandle job seekers need support services such as child care, offered to eligible job seekers and students to facilitate their efforts to enter and retain employment that meets their families’ needs. Child care can be cost-prohibitive for low-income families. Many WSP customers are right on that line of having their entire paycheck only being enough to cover the child care expense. In cases like this, the customer many times will:

- Give up the job to stay home with the child, and become dependent on public assistance;
- Choose to leave the child in an unsafe situation such as in the care of another, only slightly older child or individuals who lack adequate training in early childhood development, and health and safety practices; or
- Leave a child alone.

High-quality child care has many positive impacts on children, such as increased safety and school readiness, as well as impacts on the parents in obtaining and keeping a job, or completing job training. Child care assistance promotes long-term self-sufficiency by enabling parents to work, attend school or attend job skills training, and increase educational levels. To address this issue and implement the following strategies, the PWDB:

- Seeks out additional opportunities to further expand classroom capacity;
- Continues to phase in increases to the maximum reimbursement rates paid with workforce resources to providers caring for eligible children;

- Sustains efforts to support training and professional development for child care administrators and workers;
- Provides follow up training and monitor delivery of recently purchased child care curricula intended to provide an organized and managed approach to promoting critical areas of development;
- Ensures monitors and assessors continue regular observation and review of providers to identify areas which need improvement, and assist providers to initiate or improve TRS (Texas Rising Star) rating levels thus continually improving quality of care and potentially increase reimbursement rates; and
- Looks for and invest in projects which improve child care quality.

The Panhandle's Child Care program gets children school ready. The PWDB utilizes funding it receives from TWC in assisting customers in enrolling children in a quality licensed child care facility that:

- Ensures children are safe and in a learning environment while parents work or are in training;
- Utilizes early childhood development, which includes high quality curriculum;
- Provides a structured learning environment, with specially trained teachers and safe, healthy food;
- Supports the child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development, and
- Prepares children for their education/school, work/career and ultimately, self-sufficiency in their adult lives.

WSP's new staff position of Child Care Business Coach under a new Child Care Industry Support Division will assist Child Care Provider owners and managers, as needed, to increase quality and capacity of existing businesses, in creating new business and in connecting to resources available to help increase the likelihood of success. Primary duties will include:

- Connecting child care providers with TWC's child care provider expansion entity/entities;
- Connecting child care providers with TWC's funded business coaching and business training;
- Connecting child care providers with Texas Health and Human Service Commission's Child Care Regulation department to learn about Texas' regulatory requirements for child care operations;
- Connecting child care providers with the Texas Department of Agriculture to learn about the Child and Adult Care Food Program;
- Assisting child care providers with understanding how WSP can help them hire support and other workforce assistance services;
- Assisting child care providers with understanding how to participate in the Child Care Services program and the Texas Rising Star quality rating system; and
- Assisting child care providers with understanding how to use the Texas Child Care Availability Portal and the Texas Early Childhood Professional Development System.

The Texas Early Learning Council acts as the State's advisory council on early childhood education and care for children from birth to school entry as required by the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007. TWC, as part of an Interagency Implementation Support Team, provided recommendations in the development of the Texas Early Learning Strategic Plan 2020-2025. The PWDB and WSP will continue to align with the goals, strategies and action plans discussed in the Early Learning Strategic Plan and in TWC's Child Care Workforce Strategic Plan 2023-2025, as follows:

- Supporting the Texas Early Childhood Professional System (TECPDS); and
- Identifying opportunities to stabilize the child care workforce and promote the hiring and retention

of high-quality early educators, such as:

- ✓ Improving the infant and toddler child care workforce through continued support of the Texas Infant and Toddler Specialist Network (ITSN);
- ✓ Supporting early childhood education (ECE) workforce initiatives, including those providing wage supports;
- ✓ Incorporating strategies to support early childhood educators by promoting the expansion of Career Technology Education (CTE) programs of study in the ECE field, including the attainment of Child Development Associate (CDA) certification, and dual credit options; and
- ✓ Supporting the development of additional early childhood Registered Apprenticeship Programs.

In alignment with the intent of House Bill 619 (HB619) to improve the quality of the infant, toddler, preschool, and school-age child care workforce in Texas, a portion of TWC’s Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funding for the PWDB is set aside annually for the purpose of Child Care Quality Improvement (CCQI) activities to be utilized in assisting Child Care providers in becoming Texas Rising Star (TRS)-certified or assisting TRS-certified providers in achieving higher levels of TRS certification. The PWDB and WSP continue to follow a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan by supporting:

- Secondary educational attainment for caregivers and administrators;
- Professional development to assist with teacher/child interactions, curriculum, classroom management and child development;
- Professional development for child care program managers, directors and assistant directors;
- Programs with TRS incentives;
- Classroom content delivery with early learning digital platform;
- Curriculum content delivery with evaluation and assessment tools; and
- Programs with TRS mentor assistance and support.

While TWC annually allocates what is referred to as “Formula” funds to the PWDB for the purpose of subsidizing the cost of child care, there is also an opportunity of leveraging even more funds into the Panhandle area through a process of “matching funds” with Federal dollars. In collaborations with Amarillo College, Texas Tech University and West Texas A&M University, each of which certify allowable child care related expenditures at their institutions, and through an agreement for a donation of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding provided to the PWDB by the City of Amarillo, TWC is able to draw down, for every dollar, an addition two dollars, that is passed directly through to the PWDB for the Subsidized Child Care Program. Each year, these partners give a big boost to the children and parents of the Panhandle.

E. Transportation and Other Support Services

References: WIOA §108(b)(11); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(10)

Supportive services for eligible job seekers utilizing appropriate program funds for eligible individuals required to obtain or retain employment, or to enter and complete subsidized training, include the following:

- Residential assistance with rent, mortgage, and utilities,
- Transportation assistance in the form of fuel cards, mileage reimbursement, or auto repair, for personal vehicles, and bus tickets for accessing public transportation;
- Assistance with work or training related items or services; and

- Subsidized child care.

F. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy

References: WIOA §108(b)(13); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(12); TWC WD 18-23, Change 2

In 2017, the PWDB was enlisted to provide review of the Proposal for the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Service Provider Grant, submitted to TWC by Amarillo College, as required under TWC's Workforce Development (WD) Letter 20-17. In its August 2017 Board Meeting, the PWDB authorized creation of an AEL Grant Application Review Committee for the purpose of providing to TWC, recommendations related to the alignment of AEL Local Provider Grant proposals with the PWDA Integrated Plan under WIOA regulation §463.20. Committee members reviewed the Proposal from Amarillo College and provided the Review and Comments to TWC, as required. The comments confirmed that the application was consistent with WIOA and the Board Plan. Amarillo College was awarded the Contract as the Panhandle's AEL Service Provider in 2018, and has the potential of being awarded renewals of the Contract through 2023.

The PWDB continues to develop, facilitate, and expand innovative partnerships between the Board and employers, community colleges, AEL providers, WSP and other stakeholders, to leverage resources for the provision and integration of an array of workforce and AEL services. The PWDB has fostered an excellent ongoing relationship with Amarillo College in collaborating on skills development initiatives, incumbent worker training, and achievement of industry recognized credentials, as well as traditional classroom based occupational training programs. Building on this relationship, AEL staff from the college regularly meet with PWDB and WSP staff to exchange information, improve processes and methods to assist AEL students with arriving at appropriate and effective career pathways and subsequent enrollment including co-enrollment whenever determined beneficial, or necessary, to completion. One key to the success of this collaboration is the development of a new digital customer referral tool by Amarillo College, to enhance the collaboration with the PWDB and WSP, in performing intake, determining program eligibility, assisting with enrollment in classes, coordinating supportive services as needed, and facilitating the process of connecting customers in order to provide English language, math, reading, and writing instruction to help students acquire the skills needed to succeed in the workforce, earn a high school equivalency, or enter college or career training. This helps to streamline and improve the referral process and track customer participation and success. Other important strategies include:

- Improving data collection methods which streamline customer intake and assessment processes, and which efficiently and accurately pinpoint intrinsic needs of eligible adult customers;
- Identifying and developing career pathways and integrated employment plans that create data driven career choices that are aligned with demand, and deliver appropriate and necessary services under WIOA;
- Enhancing AEL customers' educational and career advancement through the organization of appropriate AEL activities, work readiness and job preparation activities, occupational training, and other services specifically designed to meet the identified needs of adult individuals;
- Strengthening coordination and collaboration on partnerships which increase access to essential services for adults who are basic skills deficient, low income, have other barriers to employment, and are otherwise unprepared and ill equipped to enter employment or successfully retain employment;
- Increasing the number of low-income customers and individuals with barriers to employment who engage in short-term training leading to employment, and increase the number and quality of work-based training opportunities including work experience and customized OJT;

- Closing the information gap and promote where the jobs are by focusing primarily on industries that are net exporters of goods and services, and include occupations that provide a broad range of high-demand career opportunities for eligible adults;
- Increasing potential for customer success by ensuring AEL activities are integrated with and relevant to workforce training, are aligned with common learning objectives and activities identified, and will enhance successful personal outcomes and program completion rates for work based and occupational training;
- Concentrating focus on completion of a recognized postsecondary credential in an In-Demand or Target Occupation, to assist an individual in entering or advancing within a specific In-Demand or Target Occupation, or In-Demand Industry, as determined by the Board, and aligned with local and regional economic and labor market analysis;
- Utilizing co-enrollment and simultaneous participation in basic skills education and occupational training to accelerate customer progress on a pathway to successfully entering a high demand occupation and ultimately achieving self- sufficiency;
- Developing innovative methods for using current technology to increase customer access to AEL services, including virtual learning and online classes;
- Designing and delivering educational services that meet the particular needs of individual adults, such as accommodating schedules with multiple entry and exit points, flexible non-semester based scheduling, and alternative class times and locations; and
- Continuing to fine-tune strategies for creating employment opportunities for filling skills gaps in emerging industrial and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) occupations by identifying demographic, industrial, and employment trends and potential STEM skill shortages, using TWC Labor Market Career Information and solicited employer input, such as connecting area employers with TWC's Registered Apprenticeship programs to establish industrial machinery manufacturing and repair training opportunities which require STEM skills. Offering grant writing and application assistance to area employers and colleges for the Skills Development and Self- Sufficiency Fund, and other grant opportunities, will expand capacity as well.

The TWC AEL Strategic Plan Fiscal 2021 to 2026 calls for, as one of its goals, to enhance customer experience with increased coordination. In alignment, the PWDB and WSP will continue to support the objectives and action items set forth in the AEL Plan as follows:

- Align TWC AEL workforce development service policies to enhance the workforce customer experience to promote co-enrollment and referral efforts with the PWDB;
- Support development of career pathway ladders, and distribution of career pathway resources, with AEL, VR and the PWDB; and
- Support 60x30TX goals and share information with the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative.

As well, the PWDB and WSP will continue to support the TWC Goals as outlined in the Texas Workforce Consolidated Strategic Plan, that align with the AEL Strategic Plan, by:

- Supporting a workforce system that allows employers and workers to achieve and sustain economic prosperity;
- Preparing individuals for employment by supporting education and training that equip them with in-demand skills as identified by employers; and
- Fostering systems that enhance early education, support strong families, advance the growth of the at-risk workforce to accelerate their employment opportunities, and help support personal and family stability.

The PWDB and WSP will also continue to support the Texas Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative strategies outlined in the AEL Strategic Plan by:

- Identifying students' most efficient paths to attaining high-value credentials;
- Strengthening and streamlining collaboration among key education and workforce system stakeholders who are developing pathways at the regional level;
- Expanding opportunities for work-based learning experiences;
- Ensuring students and families have the support, tools, and resources needed to achieve education and career success;
- Expanding access to effective college and career advising;
- Reducing financial barriers in education; and
- Aligning statewide education and workforce systems with statewide priorities and goals.

Part 6: Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Services

A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training

References: WIOA §108(b)(7); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(6)

Per WIOA, individualized training, career, and education services will be given on a priority basis, regardless of funding levels, to public assistance recipients, other low-income adults, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. Veterans and eligible spouses will continue to receive first priority of service for all Department of Labor (DOL) funded job training programs, which include WIOA programs. To ensure priority service is given, WSP staff will be thoroughly trained and will maintain proficiency in the following areas:

- Initial identification of customer status and information gathering;
- Assessment of customer information including employment and training needs;
- Determination of appropriate workforce services, including co-enrollment;
- Suitable referral and timely follow up; and
- Documentation of entire process in the Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST), and WorkInTexas.com, as appropriate.

The PWDB continues to focus on training as a successful method to help individuals become self-sufficient and ensure that employers have the qualified pool of skilled local workers needed to succeed in a highly competitive business climate. To sustain and improve training and education services, the PWDB:

- Strives to increase the number and quality of work-based training opportunities for job seekers and students, including youth internships, work experience, and customized OJT training;
- Provides increased work-readiness training options to job seekers;
- Continues to develop and facilitate innovative partnerships with community colleges, businesses, and other stakeholders, assisting them with planning and preparation for training grants that will increase workers' skills and build educational capacity in the region, including utilization of the Skills Development Fund to develop customized job training, and other such opportunities;
- Maintains collaborations with regional employers and colleges to increase training and education opportunities and utilize innovative partnership grants to upgrade skills and earning potential for incumbent workers, and to meet the changing needs of local business and industry (such as an Incumbent Worker Training Project, in the Fall of 2022 with the City of Canyon to train Solid Waste Truck Operators); and

- Works to close the information gap and promote where the jobs are by focusing primarily on industries that are net exporters of goods and services, and include occupations that provide a broad range of high-demand career opportunities for eligible adults and dislocated workers.

B. Service Priority

Reference: 20 CFR §679.560(b)(21)

Local workforce development area policies and procedures ensure that priority in coordinating programs and delivering services for targeted populations, including veterans, individuals with disabilities, at-risk youth, Foster Youth, individuals with barriers to employment, and workers at all skill and occupational levels is paramount, so that these groups receive the resources to be successfully employed, become self-sufficient, and prepared for long-term career growth, and comprise a qualified labor pool available for local employers. Information and training received from Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff will enhance and improve the strategies developed and applied for individuals with disabilities.

PANHANDLE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD POLICY:

Consistent with WIOA, individualized career services and training services will be given on a priority basis, regardless of funding levels. In addition, WSP will administer programs and services in a manner that is not discriminatory based on a disability, per the cited references in 29 CFR 38.12. Veterans and eligible spouses will continue to receive priority of service for all federal and state funded job training programs, which include WIOA programs. The existing guidance on priority of service for veterans remains in effect. (See WD Letter 25-15, issued on October 26, 2015, Applying Priority of Service and Identifying and Documenting Eligible Veterans and Transitioning Service Members.) Under state law, foster youth and former foster youth, as defined below, will also be given priority in the receipt of federal and State funded services. (See WD Letter 43-11 as amended, Priority of Service for Eligible Foster Youth, for additional details.)

In addition to the eligibility criteria that all participants are required to meet, some programs also have priorities that establish a rank order to be observed in enrolling or serving participants. These priorities can be of two types: a) statutory; or, b) discretionary. The following provides guidance on how priority of service interacts with these two types of priorities.

Programs with Statutory Priorities

Some programs are required by law to provide a priority or preference for a particular group of individuals or require the program to spend a certain portion of program funds on a particular group of persons. An example of this type of priority is the priority for low-income individuals and for recipients of public assistance for the WIOA adult formula programs. For programs with this type of mandatory priority, program operators must determine the status of each individual person in a priority group and apply priority of service. Priority for WIOA individualized career services and training services must be provided in the following order:

1. Eligible veterans and eligible spouses (as defined in WD Letter 25-15) who are also recipients of public assistance, low-income, or basic skills deficient.
2. Foster youth and former foster youth, as defined in WD Letter 43-11, issued on November 3, 2011, and entitled, "Priority of Service for Eligible Foster Youth", who are also recipients of public assistance, low income, or basic skills deficient.
3. All other individuals who are recipients of public assistance, low-income, or basic skills deficient.
4. All other eligible veterans and eligible spouses.
5. All other foster youth and former foster youth.

6. All other individuals, including any local priority groups established by the Panhandle Workforce Development Area (WDA) Board.

The local priority group established by the Panhandle Workforce Development Area (WDA) Board is all adults who at the time of WIOA enrollment have not completed a high school diploma, GED, or other high school equivalency, and have not completed a GED, nor are currently attending GED or equivalency classes.

Priority of service means that a person is given priority in order of the priority groups over non-covered persons for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under a qualified WIOA program. Priority means that a person in a priority group is entitled to precedence over non-covered persons for services. This means that a person in a priority group either receives access to a service earlier in time than a non-covered person or, if the resource is limited, the person in a priority group receives access to the service instead of or before the non-covered person.

For services such as classroom training, priority of service applies to the selection procedure, as follows:

- First, if there is a waiting list for the formation of a training class, priority of service is intended to require a person in a priority group to go to the top of that list.
- Second, priority of service applies up to the point at which an individual is both approved for funding and accepted or enrolled in a training class.

Therefore, once a non-covered person has been both approved for funding and accepted/enrolled in a training class, priority of service is not intended to allow a person in a priority group who is identified subsequently to "bump" the non-covered person from that training class.

The application of priority of service varies by program depending on the eligibility requirements of the particular program. Qualified job training programs fall into two basic categories: universal access programs and programs that require prospective participants to meet specified eligibility criteria.

Universal Access Programs

For workforce programs that operate or deliver services to the public as a whole without targeting specific groups, a person in a priority group must receive priority of service over all other program participants. For example, the primary universal access services are the "core" services delivered through the One-Stop system under the Wagner-Peyser and WIOA programs. A person in a priority group will receive the first level of priority in universal access programs. For example, an eligible priority person requests universal services, however, all seats in the resource area are being used by non-eligible persons and there are several non-eligible persons in line. In this case, the eligible priority person would receive priority by being moved to the front of the line, but would not displace one of the non-eligible persons already using a computer.

Programs with Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria identify basic conditions that each and every participant in a specific program is required to meet. A person in a priority group must first meet any and all of the statutory eligibility criteria in order to be considered eligible for enrollment in the program, receipt of priority for enrollment in the program, and priority for receipt of services. For example, for services such as classroom training, priority of service applies to the selection procedure as follows: First, if there is a waiting list for the formation of a training class, the eligible veteran will receive priority by being moved to the top of that list. Second, priority of service applies when an individual is both approved for funding and accepted or enrolled in a training class. Therefore, once a non-eligible person has been both approved

for funding and accepted or enrolled in a training class, an eligible veteran who is identified subsequently will not take the place of the non-eligible person from that training class.

Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts

A. Fiscal Agent

References: WIOA §108(b)(15); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(14)

The Panhandle Regional Planning Commission (PRPC) is the grant recipient and administrative entity for the PWDB and its partner group of chief elected officials, the Panhandle Workforce Development Consortium's Governing Body. These entities are responsible for the disbursement of grant funds described in WIOA §107(d)(12)(B)(i)(III), as determined by the CEOs or the governor under WIOA §107(d)(12)(B)(i).

B. Sub-Grants and Contracts

References: WIOA §108(b)(16); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(15)

PRPC's Procurement Manual is aligned with TWC's Financial Manual for Grants & Contracts (FMGC), to ensure that competitive processes are used to award grants and contracts. The Contractor that staffs the WSP offices and delivers associated workforce and child care services is procured through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. RFPs are also utilized to solicit consulting and professional services. Vendors which offer other services and items determine to be required to complete training or obtain/retain employment are procured through competitive methods that are tailored to the service(s) or item(s) to be purchased. PRPC makes payments directly to training providers and other vendors for goods and services authorized by the WSP Contractor on behalf of workforce customers. These payments include training costs, supportive services, and child care fees.

Part 8: Performance

A. Board Performance Targets

References: WIOA §108(b)(17); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(16)

The PWDB's methods for evaluating program performance involve review of local, state and federal expectations on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis. While TWC continues to define and determine the applicable state performance measures under WIOA, the following methods for measuring and tracking Panhandle performance are ongoing. Monthly performance reviews include the evaluation of information shown below, which is provided to the Board after staff analysis of successes and shortcomings:

- Number of employers, job seekers, and program customers served;
- Number of workforce program customers served by activity;
- State-reported actual performance compared to expectations;
- Funds expended compared to budgeted resources;
- Locally established measures' actual performance compared to expectations;
- Performance goals with which private sector contractor profit is associated; and
- Board staff monitoring results.

The following performance measures were set in accordance with WIOA § 116(c):

- Adult Employed Quarter 2 Post Exit
- Adult Median Earnings Quarter 2 Post Exit
- Adult Employed Quarter 4 Post Exit
- Adult Credential Rate
- Adult Measurable Skills Gains
- Dislocated Worker Employed Quarter 2 Post Exit
- Dislocated Worker Median Earnings Quarter 2 Post Exit
- Dislocated Worker Employed Quarter 4 Post Exit
- Dislocated Worker Credential Rate
- Dislocated Worker Measurable Skills Gains
- Youth Employed/Enrolled Quarter 2 Post Exit
- Youth Employed/Enrolled Quarter 4 Post Exit
- Youth Median Earning Quarter 2 Post Exit
- Youth Credential Rate
- Youth Measurable Skills Gains
- All Career & Training (C&T) Participants Employed/Enrolled Quarter 2 Post Exit
- All Career & Training (C&T) Participants Employed/Enrolled Quarter 4 Post Exit
- All Career & Training (C&T) Participants Credential Rate

Quarterly evaluations of trends in the areas listed above, as well as special grants and strategic objectives, receive additional analysis by staff. Results of these reviews are reported to the PWDB upon completion or incorporated into future plan or policy changes submitted to the group for approval. Annual evaluation of contract results and progress toward achieving strategic objectives are also reported to the Board upon completion or incorporated into policies submitted to the group for approval.

Part 9: Training and Services

A. Individual Training Accounts

References: WIOA §108(b)(19); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(18)

Adults, dislocated workers, and Out of School youth ages 18-24 who have been determined eligible for WIOA and need occupational training may access training with an Individual Training Account (ITA), which enables them to choose among available training providers. Training and ITAs are handled in a tiered approach following specific steps. Generally, individuals are expected to contribute toward their own support and/or educational costs, as much as possible. Job seekers that have tested the labor market for employment without success are identified by employment services staff in the WSP office, and may be referred to program case management staff.

Initial assessment and objective assessment are conducted, and the information documented and entered into the TWIST system. WSP staff and customers collaborate on development of an individualized service plan. Customers deemed in need of basic skills are referred to literacy programs, adult basic education, GED, and adult educational cooperatives. Referrals for occupational skill classroom training may be made directly to the community colleges and university.

Customers eligible for workforce services that cover all or part of training costs are referred only after comprehensive assessment and individual service plans document the need for training/employment. WSP staff maintains a cooperative relationship with the Panhandle community colleges' business and

industry programs to ensure that training provided meets local employers' needs.

An ITA can only be used for training that leads to employment and is limited to training in a Target Occupation as defined by the PWDB. Board staff compiles a list of training providers certified by TWC through the ETPS. The ETPS website provides information about these providers and is made available to each customer in WSP offices to provide maximum opportunity for customer choice. An ITA covers tuition, fees, books and supplies. An ITA does not include the cost of supportive services (based on assessment). WSP Program Case Managers decide the appropriate total value of each ITA, based on the customer's assessment and employment plan, and the certified training provider's published costs. The key issues with an ITA are:

- Customer choice, including increased information about eligible training programs made available through the ETPS;
- Eligibility and suitability for an ITA determined accurately and effectively;
- Training in occupations, targeted by the PWDB, and most likely to offer local employment, career growth, and self-sufficiency;
- Consistently high performance and completion rate for eligible training providers;
- Cancellation/forfeiture of an ITA and recovery of unused funds; and
- Exceptions that allow non-ITA training.

B. ITA Limitations

References: 20 CFR §663.420

Limits on Duration and Amounts of ITA's and coordination with other resources to maximize customer choice include:

- Established monetary limits for the total WIOA funded cost per participant for training and support services combined;
- No limit on the amount for an ITA based on individual training provider cost;
- Duration limited to the shortest length of time necessary to complete the level of occupational education and training required to begin entry level employment in the chosen field; and
- Exceptions regarding how ITA's are handled on an individual basis, per local policy.

Part 10: Apprenticeship

A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs

The PWDB is committed to reenergizing and refocusing efforts to create and utilize Registered Apprenticeship (RA) programs to train individuals, for skilled trades in high demand and high wage occupations, while they earn wages. RA combines on-the-job- training under the supervision of experienced journey workers with related classroom instruction. The best opportunities for apprenticeship training in the Panhandle are in the fields of wind energy, industrial manufacturing, and industrial machinery repair.

WSP staff and the Business Services team collaborate to develop and implement a detailed plan of action which includes determining and applying effective methods to identify potential apprenticeship candidates, especially veterans, actively seek out potential employers who would benefit from this partnership, and create successful matches.

Staff strongly encourages and assists employers with new or existing local apprenticeship training

programs to register in the ETPS so that WIOA funds may be leveraged to assist with training costs.

B. Apprenticeship Texas

The PWDBs' strategy and commitment to Apprenticeship Texas is based on detailed information and guidance personally provided by TWC Apprenticeship staff. WSP staff and the Business Services team collaborate to develop a strategic approach which involves:

- Working to identify and actively outreach potential employers in both traditional and non-traditional industries to participate in the Apprenticeship Texas initiative;
- Connecting employers with TWC Apprenticeship staff when appropriate and beneficial;
- Providing complete Apprenticeship Program information including tapping into available funds; and
- Remaining in communication with and guiding employers through the entire apprenticeship process through successful completion.

Part 11: Public Comment

References: WIOA §108(d); 20 CFR §679.550(b) and §679.560(b) and (e)

On Thursday, October 24, 2024, partners from regional training providers and stakeholders were notified regarding requests for input and comments on the PWDB's analysis and development of proposed lists of the In-Demand Industries, In-Demand Occupations and Target Occupations to be presented for approval to the PWDB in its quarterly meeting on December 11, 2024. Suggestions were incorporated into the lists and Notice of this Public Meeting was published in the Texas Register, Potter County, and on the <https://wspanhandle.com> and <https://theprpc.org> websites. The lists were approved by the PWDB and Consortium's Governing Body (CEOs) in the December 2024 Public Meetings.

On Friday, January 24, 2025, and Friday, January 31, 2025, Legal Notices seeking Public Comment regarding the 2025-2028 PWDB Plan were placed in the Texas Register, the Amarillo Globe-News, and on the <https://wspanhandle.com> and <https://theprpc.org> websites, with comments accepted until February 24, 2025. No comments were received.

Notice of the quarterly Public Meeting of the PWDB held on February 26, 2025 requesting the PWDB's approval of the 2025-2028 PWDB Plan to be submitted to TWC, was published in the Texas Register, Potter County and on the <https://wspanhandle.com> and <https://theprpc.org> websites on February 19th, 2025.

Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements Local Board Plan Requirements for Alignment to the Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan

State law requires local workforce development boards (local board) to adopt a plan that “sets broad goals and objectives for all workforce development programs in the local area consistent with statewide goals, objectives, and performance standards,”¹ as outlined in the workforce system strategic plan, [*Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031*](#).

The Texas Workforce Investment Council (Council) reviews each board plan to ensure that local goals and objectives are consistent with the workforce system strategic plan. Under state law and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Council is charged with recommending the local board plans to the Governor for consideration and approval.

The local board planning process highlights the importance and interdependence of the constituents and partners of the Texas workforce system. Local boards oversee the delivery of workforce programs and services and are essential in both the development and implementation of system goals and objectives in the system strategic plan. The planning requirements help local boards inform the Council of innovative practices and articulate how local plans translate the workforce system strategic plan into local action that moves the system forward.

Local board responses apprise the Council—and, with the Council’s recommendation, the Governor—of system alignment, including program implementation, strategic initiatives, and innovative practices. All 28 boards will be represented in the briefing for the approval of the local plans and subsequent Council recommendation to the Governor for consideration for approval in the spring of 2025. Board responses may be included in the Council briefing materials verbatim.

Board responses cover the three strategic opportunities and four system goals in *Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031* that focus system partners on the Council’s mission to produce an agile and resilient workforce. Building on a foundation of continuous innovation and increased collaboration, the system plan calls for accelerated engagement around three strategic opportunities: engagement of employers, improving outcomes for Texans with barriers, and use of data to support investment decisions. Each of these envisions a desirable future state for Texas and lays out essential actions to be implemented that support system goals and stronger outcomes across the Texas workforce system.

System Goals and Objectives

Crucial to the strategic planning process and to align with federal and State statute, the Plan must contain system goals used to create actionable objectives to meet the vision and mission of the system. Four goal areas and their corresponding system objectives, strategies, and action plans have been identified:

1. Employers Goal – Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs

Through engagement with employers, education and training providers, the PWDB collaborates in career and technical education design, content, and delivery options that are aligned with industry needs. In alignment with *TWC’s System Goal 1 – Focus on Employers, Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs*, the PWDB will continue:

- Instituting and expanding upskilling and reskilling programs as part of core education and

training inventory, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of employers for middle-skill workers;

- Developing training opportunities toward industry-based certifications to expand the number of work-ready individuals in high demand occupations;
- Expanding integrated education and training programs for middle-skill occupations and increase learner persistence to completion, certification, and employment;
- Increasing the number of employers who participate in work-based learning programs;
- Engaging industry representatives to collaborate with community colleges in new program development that incorporates national industry-based certifications into programs of study;
- Responding flexibly to employment changes through the identification and delivery of programs that support the attainment of short-term credentials, including industry-based certifications and licenses;
- Assisting with aligning the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to Industry-based certifications, where applicable. (Reference: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/curriculum-standards/teks/texas-essential-knowledge-and-skills>); and
- Assisting with aligning with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) in identifying and implementing relevant industry-based certifications and licenses, and incorporating the occupational information into statewide career and technical education programs.

In its activities, initiatives, and processes that accelerate the delivery of relevant education and training programs to meet employers' needs, and to institute and expand:

➤ Upskilling and reskilling programs that address employers' needs for middle skill workers:

The PWDB and WSP partnered with Plains Dairy on a Skills Development Fund (SDF) project to provide targeted training for the company's employees. Through this collaboration, WSP helped Plains Dairy identify key skills gaps and worked with local training providers to develop customized programs aimed at enhancing the technical and operational skills of their workforce. The project focused on upskilling 166 employees in areas such as equipment maintenance, quality control, and production processes, resulting in improved productivity and efficiency of 30% at Plains Dairy. Leadership at Plains Dairy has reported high satisfaction with the SDF program, noting a substantial decrease in employee turnover and workplace injuries. The training for supervisors and managers has resulted in a significant reduction in leadership turnover.

➤ Adult learners transitioning to employment through integrated education and training programs:

- ✓ WSP designed and implemented Texas Panhandle Career Signing Days, an initiative that connects local high school students with in-demand careers. By partnering with schools, employers, and community organizations, WSP equips students with the resources to explore diverse career paths and gain hands-on experience, while also addressing the skills gap and fostering a strong workforce for the region. This year, WSP sponsored 12 events, serving 17 schools and 205 students.
- ✓ The PWDB and WSP participated in the Middle Skills Employment Supplies Pilot Project (WOS), designed to support individuals preparing to join the workforce who are either not enrolled in WIOA programs but are eligible for services; or among current WIOA customers when all available customer service funding has been obligated, and the customer has a letter of intent to hire. WSP provided funding for 38 participants to acquire necessary tools,

uniforms, and supplies for middle skills occupations—those requiring education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree. This initiative expended \$22,275.18, ensuring individuals were equipped to begin employment in vital roles.

- ✓ The WIOA Upskilling and Training To Address Skills Gaps Grant Award offered essential resources to Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth seeking industry-recognized credentials in high-demand fields like healthcare and transportation. The program exceeded its targets, with 24 participants enrolled and completing their assessments, expending a total of \$67,483.00. Together, these programs not only support individual career advancement but also strengthen the local economy by preparing a skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of in-need industries.

➤ Attainment of short-term credentials in programs aligned with high-demand occupations:

The PWDB continues to participate in TWC’s High Demand Job Training (HDJT) Program which has been supporting the PWDB since 2018 in partnering with local Economic Development Corporations that use their local economic development sales taxes for high-demand training. Most recently, with its ninth HDJT grant award, the PWDB, along with the Dalhart Economic Development Corporation, the Dalhart Education Foundation, and Frank Phillips College have entered into an agreement to purchase equipment and supplies to expand the Diesel Mechanics Program at Frank Phillips College-Dalhart Center Rahl Campus. The goal of this project is to align Frank Phillips College’s Diesel Mechanics Certificate programs with area industries’ hiring and skills needs by providing workforce training to forty (40) students in the occupations of Bus and Truck Mechanic and Diesel Engine Specialists. The purpose of this Grant Award is to purchase equipment and supplies.

2. **Learners Goal – Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship**

Through collaborative and transparent processes, the PWDB and its partners focus on outcomes that improve the employability of program participants, from across a wide spectrum of capabilities and experiences, to meet employer needs. In alignment with *TWC’s System Goal 2, Focus on Learners, Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship*, the PWDB will continue to expand partnerships with system partners and stakeholders to promote collaboration, joint planning, and enhanced participant outcomes by:

- Expanding work-based learning as a core education and training program pre-employment strategy for youth and adults, including collaborating with State and community agencies for enhancing services to foster youth; and improving rehabilitation employment outcomes by establishing additional partnerships with secondary and postsecondary entities, and employers;
- Expanding registered and industry-recognized apprenticeship programs in both traditional and non-traditional areas to ease workforce shortages through engaging and assisting employers to begin new programs, especially in underserved populations, including increasing access to, referral between, and outcomes of adult education programs and services; and connecting more ex-offenders with adult education programs through better developed referral processes and appropriate short-term integrated training options. The PWDB maintains Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with regional providers conducting apprenticeship programs such as the Independent Electrical Contractors (IEC) of the Texas Panhandle, the West Texas Electrical JATC and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 602, the Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 404, and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Local 665;
- Representing the Texas Panhandle within the statewide Texas Regional Pathways Network

(TRPN) Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners which formed the Panhandle Pathways Leadership Team. This Team includes representatives from, in addition to Region 16 ESC, the PWDB and WSP, the Amarillo Area Foundation, Amarillo College, Clarendon College, Wheeler Economic Development Corporation, and West Texas A&M University. The goal of the TRPN grant is to build high-quality regional career and education pathways into high-wage, in-demand industries by ensuring all Texans have the skills and credentials needed for economic advancement. Ultimately, the Team's goal of this work is to create pathways that keep local talent in the region, and participating in regional discussions with the Texas Education Agency about career pathway expansion opportunities for high school students.

3. Partners Goal – Alignment to Support Career Pathways

By improving transitions, aligning programs, and ensuring portability and transferability, the workforce system improves access and the ability of all students to complete programs of study, earn credential(s), transition to further education, and gain critical employability skills. Through the implementation of a common technical core curriculum that is recognized statewide, programs of study can enhance delivery efficiency, dual-credit effectiveness, and improve student outcomes and transitions. Employers are better positioned to find and hire the employees they need through an enhanced education and training pipeline. In alignment with *TWC's System Goal 3, Focus on Partners, Alignment to Support Career Pathways*, the PWDB will continue to:

- Support the identification of credentials of value by:
 - Developing and implementing policies and processes for career and technical education opportunities for dual credit; and
 - Enhancing transition services for students and youth with disabilities to competitive integrated employment or to postsecondary education and training followed by competitive integrated employment, aligning with the Texas Workforce Solutions Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Pathways to Careers Initiative (PCI) Pre-Employment Transition Services (ETS) Pathways to Career Initiatives.
- Streamline and clarify existing career pathways and models to increase alignment between secondary and postsecondary technical programs by:
 - Collaboration with secondary and postsecondary institutions to engage employers to identify and support credentials of value, that respond to local labor market needs, including postsecondary technical sub-baccalaureate credit and non-credit credentials, industry-based certifications, apprenticeship certificates, and licenses;
 - Developing and executing a model and improve and enhance services, programs, and policies to align with programs of study in community and technical colleges with secondary programs; and
 - Seeking input from business and industry to identify the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities, that they require.

4. Policy and Planning Goal – Relevant Data Sets

By addressing high-priority programmatic needs through an integrated strategy, decision-making, at the system, partner, and participant levels, is improved and system service delivery is enhanced. PWDB activities, initiatives, and processes will support the availability and coordination of relevant workforce, education, and employment data to evaluate program outcomes to respond to the needs of policy makers and planners. In alignment with *TWC's*

System Goal 4, Focus on Policy and Planning, Relevant Data Sets, the PWDB will continue to:

- Expand high-quality childcare availability in the Panhandle, including but not limited to:
 - Engagement with childcare providers and employers to establish on-site or near-site, high quality childcare facilities. The number of families served by TWC’s Subsidized Child Care Program during the Fall of 2024 in the Panhandle region was more than 1,700 per month with the number of children served averaging more than 2,500 each day. WSP currently maintains Child Care Services Agreements with more than 100 childcare providers across the region and continues to encourage relationships with additional high-quality facilities; and
 - Expand Texas Rising Star certifications. WSP continues to promote and support the attainment of high-tier Texas Rising Star (TRS) certification by all child care providers. Of the current providers working with the PWDB, 18% have a TRS Two-Star Quality Certification, 28% are Three-Star, and 26% are certified at the Four-Star level. WSP utilizes a Child Care Business Coach under its Child Care Industry Support Division. This staff assists Child Care Provider owners and managers, as needed, to increase quality and capacity of existing businesses, in creating new business and in connecting to resources available to help increase the likelihood of success.
- Identify and quantify quality outcomes, including industry-based certification data to:
 - ✓ Improve methods to increase effectiveness of service delivery and achievement of employment outcomes for underserved populations;
 - ✓ Identify and implement relevant technology and service delivery options to expand program and service outcomes, and to collect and report data;
 - ✓ Execute a secure, shared data infrastructure that will facilitate data import, storage, access, integration, analysis, and reporting to understand and quantify quality program outcomes;
 - ✓ Provide rural service delivery options through the use of mobile units and affiliate sites; and
 - ✓ Expand the use of technology for providing online services such as job fairs, eligibility determination, and other interactions.
- Enhance wage records for improving service delivery that will maximize customer wage and skills gains in employment advancement by expanding customer service beyond simply referring individuals to utilize TWC’s Labor Exchange, WorkInTexas.com, with individualized and customized career counseling and through:
 - collaboration with employers to identify enhanced employment and earnings data to gain deeper insight into program outcomes, and
 - examining and strengthening how the PWDB and its system partners identify, evaluate, and implement ways to streamline and improve timeliness and completeness of data matching and sharing, specifically with industry-based certification attainment, to evaluate program effectiveness and outcomes.

Strategic Opportunities

Accelerating Alignment: Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2031 envisions a collaborative workforce system capable of accelerating the delivery of workforce programs, services, and initiatives to meet the needs of a thriving economy. The strategic

opportunities focus system partners on three critical success factors that will lead to broad achievement of the system plan goals and objectives.

Strategic Opportunity 1 – Employer Engagement

Staff with the PWDB and WSP coordinate across agencies and with regional stakeholders to gain insight into the needs of employers and minimize duplication of “asks” from multiple sources that burden employers.

- Representing the Texas Panhandle within the statewide Texas Regional Pathways Network (TRPN), the Region 16 Education Service Center (ESC) was awarded the Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners in October 2023 and formed the Panhandle Pathways Leadership Team. This Team includes representatives from, in addition to Region 16 ESC, the PWDB and WSP, the Amarillo Area Foundation, Amarillo College, Clarendon College, Wheeler Economic Development Corporation, and West Texas A&M University. The goal of the TRPN grant is to build high-quality regional career and education pathways into high-wage, in-demand industries by ensuring all Texans have the skills and credentials needed for economic advancement. Ultimately, the Team’s goal of this work is to create pathways that keep local talent in the region.

An extensive quantitative analysis and robust stakeholder interviews were fundamental components of the Tri-Agency Texas Regional Pathways Network Panhandle Pathways Leadership Team’s three-phase planning process—discovery, opportunity, and implementation. (Source: TIPS Strategies, Regional Solutions Report, Panhandle Pathways Leadership Team, June 2024)

1. Discovery – Participants included leaders from higher education, economic development, workforce development, K–12 education, and community nonprofits. One key takeaway revealed that resourcing for rural areas is an obstacle to improving pathways across the 26 counties. Rural areas often face population loss, resulting in school consolidation which further reduces the education and workforce capacity of areas already experiencing resourcing challenges. Rural communities may be disincentivized to invest in certain training (such as computer programming) because of limited job opportunities in those occupations locally. Additional challenges relate to a lack of infrastructure, particularly transportation.
2. Opportunity – Increased employer engagement, innovative solutions to rural career and technical education, and clear roles for regional collaboration can better align training programs with industry needs.
3. Implementation – Several successful initiatives are providing effective, partnership-based solutions to strengthening education and workforce pathways:
 - WSP’s Education Outreach Specialist (EOS) provides in-school services to school districts in the region. Services provided to these districts are career guidance, career preparation, and workforce information to students. The EOS provides engaging and interactive presentations/workshops to 6th-12th grade students in a classroom setting on the following topics: labor market and high-demand jobs, employability skills, work-based learning, and postsecondary pathways. Virtual Reality career exploration headsets have become a popular tool, enriching this initiative by utilizing today’s technology to help students get hands-on experience in high-demand industries, including manufacturing/construction, health sciences and information technology. The EOS has contracted with school districts in the Texas Panhandle, delivering 2,555 Virtual Reality experience activities, 3,346 participating in workshops, significantly impacting the local workforce by preparing over 5,800 students for future careers;

- The Amarillo Area Foundation’s Panhandle Community Partnership (PCP) offers an in-depth website that allows anyone to explore careers in accounting, aircraft mechanics, carpentry, education, the skilled trades, food services, healthcare, manufacturing, and computer systems;
 - AmTech Career Academy, a specialized career and technical education campus in the Amarillo Independent School District (ISD), is one example that allows students to practice their skills using technology and machinery that can be found in the workplace;
 - Several stakeholders identified Amarillo College’s earn-and-learn Level 1 certification program to upskill ASCO Equipment employees as another example of a scalable model to enhance training accessibility;
 - In more rural areas, communities are overcoming challenges through sub- regional partnerships. The Gateway to Health Careers program brings dual-credit health science CTE programs to Panhandle districts through distance learning. This partnership among Frank Phillips, Amarillo College, Clarendon College, and participating districts brings training for high-demand health occupations into K–12 classrooms;
 - Likewise, the Rural Nursing Education Consortium (RNEC) enables rural jobseekers to attain licensed vocational nurse and registered nurse certifications through a regional collaboration between hospitals and community colleges; and
 - Several stakeholders identified the Rural Schools Innovation Zone model as an avenue to explore for enabling district partnerships centered on training success.
- The PWDB continues its oversight of the WSP system to improve system responsiveness, communication, and coordination with workforce system partner agencies, elements, and programs, with its focus on employer engagement and assisting employers in finding qualified workers and services. WSP’s Business Services Unit (BSU) and Employment Services (ES) group, provide tailored consulting services to over 1,500 employers across the 26 counties, leveraging established relationships, coordinating local and State outreach, addressing workforce needs, supporting the local economy, driving workforce development, and helping businesses find, and keep, skilled talent with:
- Job Posting and Recruitment Assistance - Employers receive help posting open positions on statewide and local job boards, gaining access to a large pool of job seekers, including specialized talent pools;
 - Candidate Screening and Referral - Pre-screening services match candidates based on job-specific criteria, referring qualified individuals to streamline hiring and improve retention;
 - Onsite Hiring Events and Job Fairs - Organizing and hosting job fairs and recruitment events, both onsite and at community locations, with options tailored to meet employer-specific hiring needs;
 - Labor Market Information - Providing access to current Labor Market Information specific to the Panhandle region, covering wage trends, workforce demographics, and industry insights, enabling informed workforce planning;
 - Employee Training and Skills Development - Connecting employers with training resources and upskilling programs to develop their workforce, offering information on training grants for skills enhancement and retraining;

- Work-Based Learning Programs - Supporting apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training (OJT) opportunities, with options for partial wage reimbursement for employers participating in OJT programs;
- Incentive and Tax Credit Assistance - Guiding employers through available tax credits, like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), and other hiring incentives, providing application support for maximum benefit;
- Layoff Aversion and Rapid Response Services - Offering resources to help avert layoffs through retraining programs and provides Rapid Response services for businesses facing layoffs, closures, or workforce changes;
- Veteran Hiring Services - Specialized support for hiring veterans, including access to veterans' talent pools and guidance on tax incentives and veteran-friendly recognition programs;
- Interview Facilities - Offices provide interview facilities equipped with essential amenities, allowing employers to conduct interviews in a convenient, professional setting.
- Employee Retention Strategies - Advising employers on retention strategies, sharing best practices for creating a positive workplace culture, improving satisfaction, and reducing turnover;
- Compliance Assistance - Helping employers navigate labor laws and regulations to ensure a legal and safe work environment; and
- Workforce Development Partnerships - Collaborating with educational institutions, industry associations, and community organizations to build strategic partnerships that strengthen workforce development in the region.

Strategic Opportunity 2 – Improving Outcomes for Texans with Barriers to Employment

Staff with the PWDB and WSP strive to engage Panhandle residents with diverse needs — including those with disabilities, foster youth, sex-trafficking victims, incarcerated juveniles and adults, and opportunity youth — by designing programs that address their needs, maximize outcomes, and improve career opportunities. Some of these populations face significant barriers prior to and when receiving workforce training and following entry into employment. The lack of critical supportive services or alignment between them may result in the loss of retention in a program of training, as well as employment exit after a relatively short period of time.

In recent years, technology applications have helped to reach, engage, and train more of these individuals, and new applications are continuously being developed that facilitate learning and employment opportunities that may have been previously inaccessible to populations that have historically faced barriers to participation in the labor market. At the same time, consistently high employment demand is opening doors to new career opportunities. The PWDB and WSP provide access to education and training programs that have the necessary supportive services and resources to help individuals reach their full potential in the labor market, including, but not limited to, the following:

- The PWDB and WSP continue to support TWC's Student HireAbility Navigator (SHN) program, a statewide strategy to support, expand, and enhance the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities. The Panhandle's SHN develops, plans, coordinates, and promotes systemic and collaborative strategies to make employers

aware of the advantages of hiring individuals from these populations. The SHN provides services to educational and community partners as well as employers identified collaboratively with local TWC Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff. SHN services support TWC's VR services for individuals with disabilities, as required under Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which modified and amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 701 et seq. (Rehabilitation Act).

- The PWDB maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize the cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with North Texas Job Corps, the regional partner in the Job Corps program, the nation's largest free, residential career training and education program for low-income young adults ages 16 through 24. WSP provides co-location in the Amarillo facility to a full-time staff who provides access to Job Corps services to Panhandle residents. This staff attends WSP team meetings; participates in WSP Youth and Young Adult career events; contributes to WSP's social media outreach; and, under the MOU, refers individuals who may be eligible, to WSP for support services. This may include transferring allowable data which may have been collected from the individual in order to expedite WSP's intake process, reduce duplication of effort, and eliminate unnecessary redundancy.

Strategic Opportunity 3 – Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions

The requirement and collection of key datasets and documentation of evidence that a program or project achieved its intended outcomes can illuminate areas of strength and weakness to better assess high value funding opportunities. The ability of program administrators to assess what programs or projects work, which ones work better, and which ones work less well is critical to the stewardship of public funds.

➤ Strategically Implemented Fund Initiatives

- The Reemployment Services Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program is a federal grant program designed to allow states to provide intensive reemployment assistance to individuals who are receiving unemployment insurance (UI) benefits and are determined to be likely to exhaust their benefits before becoming reemployed. Through the RESEA program, TWC identifies claimants who would benefit from personalized reemployment services and provides funding to the PWDB and WSP for claimants to access an array of resources and services available that support reemployment, including the opportunity for enrollment in the WIOA Dislocated Worker or other programs, as appropriate. RESEA is mandatory for all claimants that are selected to participate in the program and failure to complete all required services in the Initial RESEA appointment which consists of registration in Wagner-Peyser Services and provision of a resume review, UI eligibility review, customized labor market information, one additional reemployment service or training and a reemployment plan and participation in any subsequent RESEA meetings may result in the suspension of UI benefits. In 2024, WSP reports that, of the 531 individuals in the RESEA Profile Pool Count, 402 Initial Individuals completed the program for a 76% Completion Rate.
- Veteran Services - Recognizing the unique challenges veterans face when transitioning into civilian careers, Workforce Solutions Panhandle provides targeted support, including job placement assistance, skills translation, and access to resources tailored to veterans' military experience. In FY2024, a total of 504 veterans and eligible individuals received 6,028 individual services, which included:
 - ✓ 22 veterans within 180 days of discharge, receiving 165 services
 - ✓ 458 eligible veterans, receiving 5,532 services

✓ 24 other eligible persons, receiving 331 services

In 2024, 5.3% of customers were Priority of Service Veterans. 5,532 services were provided to Priority of Service Veterans & Qualified Spouses, 6.1% of total services. Of the veterans assisted, 221 served fewer than 180 days in the military, 24 were the qualified spouse of a veteran, and 458 were eligible veterans.

- The Choices Program helps Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) applicants and recipients transition from welfare to work through job searches, readiness classes, and support services like childcare and transportation. WSP Career Specialists provide personalized support to meet individual needs. In 2024, of the 92 individuals served, 63 were employed and 55 received Support Services.
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training program connects recipients to work-based activities and educational services, with specialists creating tailored plans to address barriers to employment. Together, these programs enhance job security and economic stability in the Texas Panhandle, fostering a more self-sufficient community. In 2024, of the 375 individuals served, 137 were employed and 220 received Support Services.
- The TWC's Noncustodial Parent (NCP) Choices program significantly benefits the Texas Panhandle community by helping non-custodial parents achieve financial stability. By assisting parents in securing better jobs, the program promotes individual economic growth and fosters family stability through regular child support payments, ultimately strengthening the local economy.

At WSP, the NCP program has positively impacted 65 non-custodial parents, with 23 securing full-time employment, resulting in a 36.5% employment success rate. This initiative not only aids parents in finding jobs but also lays the groundwork for financial stability, benefiting their children and enhancing the overall well-being of families in the region. By focusing on job placement and support, the NCP Choices program contributes to stronger economic and social outcomes in the Texas Panhandle.

- The PWDB's Summer Work Experience program serves youth from rural communities in the Texas Panhandle. Participants worked for the local school districts where they live and were given work assignments that provided them an opportunity to learn skills and work habits that will benefit them throughout their working careers. Students qualify for this summer program based on family income. A total of 33 participants were placed at seven (7) rural school districts. Students collectively worked over 6,700 hours and earned a total of \$75,564 in wages. This not only supports the participants' financial needs but also fosters a strong work ethic and essential job skills that will benefit them in future employment. By empowering youth and enhancing their employability, the TANF Summer Work Experience Program contributes to the economic vitality and resilience of the Texas Panhandle, helping to build a stronger, more skilled workforce for the future.
- The Summer Earn & Learn (SEAL) program is a statewide initiative that provides students with disabilities, aged 14-22, with work readiness training and paid work experience. Over five weeks, participants work with local employers, gaining valuable skills and insights for their transitions to postsecondary education and employment. Some may even be offered full-time positions upon completion. Out of 48 referrals, 39 participants were placed at worksites, achieving a placement rate of 84.62%. They completed work readiness training at a rate of 62.5%, working a total of 5,582 hours and earning \$65,499.76. This not only supports their financial independence but also enhances their employability. With 36 participating worksites,

the program strengthens community connections and prepares students for successful futures, fostering greater opportunities and economic stability in the region. With a growing demand for a skilled labor force, including students with disabilities can enhance recruitment strategies. SEAL offers a risk-free way to meet short-term staffing needs, with wages and workers' compensation covered for participants, reasonable accommodations provided, and additional training as needed. Employers also receive site visits to ensure satisfaction with participants.

➤ WSP's Participant Training Services

WSP's Training Services aim to enhance workforce development by providing individuals with access to training and employment services. It helps job seekers gain the skills needed for in-demand occupations through funding for training programs, career counseling, and support services. Training Services also emphasizes collaboration among various workforce agencies and encourages partnerships with local businesses to ensure that training aligns with industry needs, ultimately promoting economic growth and individual career advancement.

- Adult & Dislocated Worker programs offered at WSP are crucial for supporting individuals in the Panhandle community, equipping them with the skills needed for in-demand careers in the region.
 - ✓ Out of 341 applications, Training Services enrolled 250 individuals in Adult & Dislocated Worker programs, reflecting a strong enrollment rate of 73.31%. This indicates a high level of interest and successful onboarding into the programs.
 - ✓ Training was provided across various occupations, with a significant focus on healthcare (191 participants) and transportation (79 participants). This variety helps address local job market needs, ensuring that training aligns with available employment opportunities.
 - ✓ With 25.8% of participants coming from rural areas, Training Services programs help bridge the gap for those in less accessible regions, promoting economic stability and opportunity.
- Young Adults, age 24 and younger, who are experiencing difficulties are eligible for workforce benefits based on individual circumstances. Training Services can assist motivated Young Adults who are authorized to work in the United States, registered with Selective Service (if required), and are experiencing challenges to workforce success.
 - ✓ The Young Adult Training program offered a diverse range of training opportunities for young adults in FY2024, with 86 participants, 58 of which are currently engaged in or having completed training while 28 participated in workforce-paid internships. These programs encompass a wide spectrum of skills and industries, equipping Young Adults with the tools they need for successful career paths. These training initiatives are designed to empower participants with the knowledge and expertise necessary to excel in today's competitive job market, fostering a brighter future for our young workforce.