2025-2026 Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners

Informal Discretionary Competition (IDC) Application Due 11:59 p.m. CT, January 10, 2025

Texas Education Agency®

NOGA ID

Authorizing legislation

This LOI application must be submitted via email to **competitivegrants@tea.texas.gov.**

The LOI application may be signed with a digital ID or it may be signed by hand. Both forms of signature are acceptable.

TEA must receive the application by **11:59 p.m. CT, January 10, 2025**.

Application stamp-in date and time

Grant period from **March 01, 2025-April 30, 2027**

Pre-award costs permitted from **Not Permitted**

Required Attachments

1. Excel workbook with the grant's budget schedules (linked along with this form on the TEA Grants Opportunities page)
2. TRPN Regional Convener Assurance (linked along with this form on the TEA Grants Opportunities page)

Select Focus Area & Name Which of Texas' 28 Workforce Development Areas Being Applied For

○ **Focus Area 1**

◉ **Focus Area 2**

Workforce Development Area 15-Rural Capital Area

Amendment Number

Amendment number (For amendments only; enter N/A when completing this form to apply for grant funds):

Applicant Information

Organization Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Are | CDN | Campus | ESC | DUNS

Address 701 E. Whitestone Blvd. Suite 200 | City Cedar Park | ZIP 78613 | Vendor ID

Primary Contact Diane Cook | Email Diane.cook@ruralcapital.net | Phone 512-244-7966

Secondary Contact Chris Myers | Email chris.myers@ruralcapital.net | Phone 512-244-7966

Certification and Incorporation

I understand that this application constitutes an offer and, if accepted by TEA or renegotiated to acceptance, will form a binding agreement. I hereby certify that the information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and that the organization named above has authorized me as its representative to obligate this organization in a legally binding contractual agreement. I certify that any ensuing program and activity will be conducted in accordance and compliance with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations.

I further certify my acceptance of the requirements conveyed in the following portions of the LOI application, as applicable, and that these documents are incorporated by reference as part of the LOI application and Notice of Grant Award (NOGA):

☒ LOI application, guidelines, and instructions

☒ General and application-specific Provisions and Assurances

☒ Debarment and Suspension Certification

☒ Lobbying Certification

Authorized Official Name Paul Fletcher | Title CEO

Email paul.fletcher@ruralcapital.net | Phone 512-244-7966

Signature | Date

Shared Services Arrangements

Shared services arrangements (SSAs) are not permitted for this grant.

Statutory/Program Assurances

The following assurances apply to this program. In order to meet the requirements of the program, the applicant must comply with these assurances.

Check each of the following boxes to indicate your compliance.

☒ 1. The applicant provides assurance that the application does not contain any information that would be protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) from general release to the public.

☒ 2. The applicant provides assurance to adhere to all the Statutory and TEA Program requirements as noted in the 2025-2026 Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners Program Guidelines.

☒ 3. The applicant provides assurance to adhere to all the Performance Measures, as noted in the 2025-2026 Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners Program Guidelines, and shall provide to TEA, upon request, any performance data necessary to assess the success of the program.

☒ 4. The applicant assures that any Electronic Information Resources (EIR) produced as part of this agreement will comply with the State of Texas Accessibility requirements as specified in 1 TAC 206, 1 TAC Chapter 213, Federal Section 508 standards, and the WCAG 2.0 AA Accessibility Guidelines)

☒ 5. The applicant acknowledges that Per Section 22.0834 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), any person offered employment by any entity that contracts with TEA or receives grant funds administered by TEA (i.e., a grantee or subgrantee) is subject to the fingerprinting requirement. TEA is prohibited from awarding grant funds to any entity, including nonprofit organizations, that fails to comply with this requirement. For details, refer to the General and Fiscal Guidelines, Fingerprinting Requirement.

☒ 6. To carry out the roles and responsibilities of a regional convener for a geographic region with boundaries identical to those of the workforce development area.

☒ 7. Identify at least one staff person, who meets the qualifications and experience of a regional convener lead as outlined in these guidelines, with adequate time allocated to the work of this grant project and who will serve as the regional convener lead.

☒ 8. Identify multiple staff at the regional convener organization to engage in the work and participate in grant activities. This includes someone in an executive leadership position who has decision-making authority on behalf of the regional convener organization.

☒ 9. To complete all grant activities and deliverables in a timely manner, as described in the description of program and performance and evaluation measures.

☒ 10. To coordinate with their assigned coach, to be provided by TEA for technical assistance, and meet with their coach frequently throughout the project, including within the first month to align on program priorities and requirements.

☒ 11. To participate and engage in statewide training and convenings during the grant period.

☐ 12. **Focus Area 1:** To convene and engage a cross-sector pathways leadership team in the strategic planning process within the first three months of the grant project.

☐ 13. **Focus Area 1:** To develop an asset map and gap analysis within six months of the grant start date under the direction and guidance of their assigned coach. In addition, the applicant will keep this landscape analysis updated throughout the grant project.

☐ 14. **Focus Area 1:** To develop, in collaboration with members of the cross-sector leadership team, a strategic plan and supporting action plans within the first 12 months of the grant project.

☒ 15. **Focus Area 2:** The applicant assures it will begin implementation of the strategic plan, including taking action on deliverables included in the two-year implementation plan.

☒ 16. **Focus Area 2:** To execute work-based learning that will address K-12 gaps and will expand upon existing work-based learning within their region.

Summary of Program

Provide an overview of the program to be implemented with grant funds. Include the overall mission and specific needs of the organization. Also include the following in your response:

a. *Current Regional Landscape* - Describe the key career and education pathway initiatives and/or programs currently underway in your WDA, including those funded by TEA, THECB, and/or TWC.

b. *Regional Convener Priorities* - What are your priorities for strategic alignment across current state, regional, and local pathways initiatives in the WDA? What would be necessary for that alignment to take place?

c. *Regional Convener Responsibilities* - Describe any current work your organization performs related to the additional functions of regional conveners. Include analysis of labor market information, convening of cross-sector teams, engagement of employers, communication across the region, and efforts to drive sustainability.

The Workforce Development Board's mission is to build an employer-driven workforce system that meets the demands of a global economy by actively involving industry and business leaders in workforce development decisions. This approach enables industry leaders to identify labor and economic trends, access customized training, and hire highly skilled workers. Simultaneously, it supports the welfare, orientation, assessment, education, training, and placement of job seekers, helping them achieve profitable and self-sufficient employment.

Aligned with this mission, the new program focuses on increasing employer engagement with school districts and postsecondary institutions. By fostering meaningful partnerships, the program ensures that students gain real-world learning experiences that prepare them for postsecondary success. Employers will play a direct role in shaping educational opportunities to match workforce needs, creating a pipeline of skilled and educated workers ready to meet the demands of local and global economies. Through these efforts, the program bridges the gap between education and industry, driving innovation, economic growth, and community development.

Our region benefits from three dedicated K-12 Career Coaches, formerly known as outreach specialists. These professionals collaborate with school districts—primarily engaging with teachers and students—to support career preparation and exploration. Their efforts include mock interviews, resume writing, VR headset-enabled career exploration, and organizing career days. Additionally, they assist with providing labor market information to both educators and students. This initiative is funded by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC).

Another impactful program in our region, Re-Invest, is funded by a Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration grant, which has facilitated the establishment of Sector Partnerships in our targeted rural industries. Through these partnerships, employers collaborate with school districts and higher education institutions to bridge the gap between education and industry. This collaboration aims to offer students real-world experiences such as internships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships.

Finally, Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area is hosting a series of convenings designed to unite industry leaders, higher education representatives, and K-12 educators. These events focus on discussing in-demand industries and aligning Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs with workforce needs. The convenings are supported by the Tri-Agency Regional Convener grant.

The Regional Convener's priorities include fostering strong connections between industry and education by leveraging partnerships between chambers of commerce, school districts and higher education partners and incorporating sector partnerships into the framework of employer engagement. Additional priorities focus on providing a clear, comprehensive representation of the education and career pathways available within the Workforce Development Area.

To support these efforts, the Regional Convener will ensure technical assistance is readily available to both education and employer partners, while maintaining effective communication about initiatives under the regional convener grant. Strategic alignment across state, regional, and local pathways initiatives will require developing a robust infrastructure for data collection and tracking to monitor progress. Stakeholder input will be critical in shaping alignment strategies and identifying the tools necessary to achieve cohesive and impactful outcomes.

Our Workforce Development Board serves as a regional convener by acting as a central hub for labor market data, facilitating employer engagement through round tables and career fairs, fostering effective communication across the region, and actively pursuing grant funding to sustain the efforts of board staff.

Through this grant, we will enhance our role as a convener by streamlining employer engagement using sector partnerships and a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Additionally, we will provide technical assistance for Work-Based Learning to both educators and employers, positioning ourselves as the go-to resource for employment and education initiatives.

Qualifications and Experience for Key Personnel

Outline the required qualifications for primary project personnel and any external consultants to be involved in the program's implementation and delivery. Include the following in your response:

a. *Organizational Capacity* - Describe your current level of involvement in key career and education pathways initiatives in your region, how current staff is involved, and anticipated staff hires (including their qualifications and experience) for this grant.

b. *Regional Alignment Experience* - Describe your organization's experience in leading strategic planning for regional career and education pathways, including collaboration with industry, K-12 education, higher education, and workforce stakeholders.

c. *Regional Convener Responsibilities (related to staff involvement)* - Include experience in engaging employers, convening cross-sector leadership, and sustaining coordinated efforts.

Organizational Capacity:
The Regional Convener Lead is actively fostering collaborations between school districts and chambers of commerce to engage employers and secure work-based learning opportunities, laying the groundwork for pathway development. Currently, three collaborations are in progress, with an additional three in the initial stages. The ultimate goal is to establish collaborations for all of our school districts within the region by the end of the grant period, as well as ensuring that our higher education partners have adequate work-based learning opportunities for students.

While the Regional Convener Lead is spearheading this initiative, expanding capacity and ensuring long-term success will require the involvement of K-12 Coaches. Their participation will be critical for scaling the initiative and sustaining its impact across all districts.

Regional Alignment Experience
Our Board has established sector partnerships in two areas of the region—east and west. These partnerships serve as a vital component of employer engagement, providing a direct connection to K-12 and higher education for collaboration on work-based learning opportunities and pathway development.
The goal is to expand this model by establishing at least one additional sector partnership by the end of the grant period, further enhancing regional alignment and strengthening connections between industry and education.

Regional Convener Responsibilities
During the planning grant period, the Regional Convener focused extensively on community outreach, relationship building, and understanding the regional landscape. These efforts led to the initiation of collaborations between chambers of commerce and school districts to engage employers in creating work-based learning opportunities.
Given the expansive size of the Rural Capital Area, sustaining these collaborations long-term requires a scalable approach. To address this, train-the-trainer models will be implemented to equip K-12 Coaches and backbone organizations—aligned with our sector partnerships—with the tools and knowledge needed to continue fostering and maintaining these critical connections. This approach ensures capacity building and the sustainability of these initiatives across the region.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Describe the major goals/objectives of the proposed program. Detail any strategies that will be implemented to meet those goals/objectives. Include the following in your response:

a. *Regional Work-Based Learning Experience* - Using the Tri-Agency WBL Continuum, describe your experience planning, implementing, and monitoring work-based learning activities and summarize gaps in work-based learning in your region.

b. *Regional Convener Responsibilities (related to goals)* - Include specific regional goals like aligning pathways to labor market needs, engaging cross-sector teams, and improving communication and sustainability efforts.

c. *Partnerships* - Describe your partnerships with industry, postsecondary education, K-12 education, and workforce/economic development, and detail specific collaborative activities.

The regional strategy focuses on advancing pathways, fostering collaboration, and ensuring sustainability. Key efforts include promoting pathways through the launch of a data dashboard with stakeholder training, along with continuous optimization and impact analysis. Sustainable engagement will be achieved by strengthening collaborations among schools, chambers of commerce, and sector partnerships to develop and enhance pathways, supported by the Pathway Leadership Team and consistent employer engagement. Work-based learning initiatives will focus on expanding programs, increasing student access, and ensuring long-term sustainability through continuous improvement. Finally, a resource hub will be developed to house the data dashboard, work-based learning tools, and other resources, with ongoing updates to engage stakeholders and meet regional needs.

The planning phase for Work-Based Learning (WBL) focused on building community connections and addressing the needs of employers and educators. This led to tailored resources, including toolkits for employers and educators to facilitate partnerships and integrate WBL into programs. Professional development sessions were created to help teachers collaborate effectively with industry partners.

A tool was also introduced to track employer interest in specific WBL activities, allowing teachers to connect with businesses and launch opportunities. However, gaps remain: school districts need more support to implement WBL programs, and fragmented data collection limits tracking and measuring impact. Addressing these gaps is critical to scaling and sustaining WBL efforts.

In January and February 2025, regional convenings across North, South, East, and West will gather the Pathway Leadership Team, chambers, school districts, higher education, and industry partners. Each event will introduce the strategic plan, showcase the data dashboard, and highlight successful chamber-district collaborations to inspire new partnerships. Work-Based Learning tools will be shared, followed by discussions on in-demand industries to drive pathway development. Attendees will sit by school district with mixed stakeholders at each table to encourage collaboration and spark meaningful dialogue for future initiatives.

Through strong collaborations between chambers of commerce, school districts, and the Pathway Leadership Team, numerous partnerships have been established. Our Board of Directors, which includes members from industry, chambers, ISDs, and community colleges, has been pivotal in advancing quality pathways. Board members with chamber connections have been instrumental in linking school districts and employers to launch work-based learning experiences.

We facilitated three key events—two in Williamson County and one in Lee County—that connected employers, educators, and students. These included Work-Based Learning presentations, teacher-employer networking, and a student career exploration visit to local businesses, creating valuable partnerships and new opportunities.

Additionally, Board members from Economic Development play a vital role in fostering employer engagement and driving strategic conversations. Relationships remain the foundation of this work, and a key focus moving forward is strengthening collaborations with higher education to enhance pathway development.

Performance and Evaluation Measures

Describe the performance measures identified for this program that are related to student outcomes and consistent with the program's purpose. Include tools and processes that will be used to ensure effectiveness, such as annual labor market needs assessments and tracking project outcomes. Include the following in your response:

a. *Regional Data Experience* - How do you monitor progress and measure the quality of career and education pathway programs or initiatives? Include metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess the strength of your region's pathways.

b. *Regional Convener Responsibilities (related to performance)* - Focus on ensuring career pathways align with in-demand industries and convening cross-sector leadership teams.

c. *Anticipated Project and Student Outcomes* - Outline the anticipated outcomes for each grant activity and the projected student outcomes. Include the projected number of students from each partner school district that will participate in the activities related to this grant activity.

This program is focused on improving student outcomes by expanding work-based learning (WBL) opportunities across multiple industries and schools. Our benchmark is to increase the number of schools and industries offering WBL opportunities, ensuring representation from key sectors such as healthcare, information technology, skilled trades, and advanced manufacturing. WBL fosters relevant learning, real-world connections, and better prepares students for the workforce.

A. Regional Data Experience
Annually, surveys will be distributed to schools to conduct self-assessments of their CTE pathways. These surveys will assess performance against the seven components of high-quality pathways, providing actionable insights for improvement.

B. Regional Convener Responsibilities
1. As the Regional Convener, we will host convenings across the region—in the north, south, east, and west. These events will bring together education and industry stakeholders
2. Utilizing data-driven information, conduct professional development sessions with educators to enhance the alignment CTE programming with in-demand industries.
3. Develop opportunities for industry representatives to connect directly with CTE programs.

C. Outcomes Measures
Year 1:
Conduct four collaborative regional convenings with schools, higher education, and employers.
50% of our school districts are trained to implement the Bridging the Gap toolbox for work-based learning opportunities.
35% of our school districts are connected to industry utilizing the Bridging the Gap model for work-based learning opportunities.
Year 2:
85% of our school districts are trained to implement the Bridging the Gap toolbox for work-based learning opportunities.
60% of our school districts are connected to industry utilizing the Bridging the Gap model for work-based learning opportunities.
50% of Career and Technical Education (CTE) students are provided a work-based learning opportunity, ranging from guest speaking, job shadowing, mentorships, internships, career days, and worksite tours.

Budget Narrative

Describe how the proposed budget will meet the program's needs and goals, including staffing, project design, and resources needed to support the grant's implementation. Include the following in your response:

a. *Funding Allocations and Justification* - Provide justification for the specific funding allocations in the proposed budget and describe how each item will support the team's needs.

b. *Grant Activities Support* - Detail how the specific funding allocations will support the grant activities in each of the domains: Regional Alignment, Regional Work-Based Learning, Regional Data, and Regional Communications.

c. *Coordinated Funding Strategies* - Outline the coordinated funding strategies the team will use to incorporate other funding sources to support the implementation and future sustainability of this project.

WSRCA is requesting at total of $300,000 for this grant, broken down as follows:
6100-Payroll. Total Amount $230,400.00
Regional Convener Lead: $230,400
This allocation covers a two-year salary for the Regional Convener Lead, who will oversee the implementation of the strategic plan.
6200-Professional and Contracted Services. Total Amount $15,000.00
Data Dashboard Maintenance: $15,000
This funding ensures the maintenance of the data dashboard, which tracks evolving labor market trends, program offerings, enrollment, and completion data. Year one services to be provided collaboratively with Region XIII Education Service Center. Year two the management of the dashboard will be brought internally at WSRCA and funds will be leveraged from additional WSRCA funding to support the maintenance of the dashboard.
6300-Supplies and Materials. Total amount $7000.00
Subscriptions: $3,000
Subscriptions to labor market information platforms and design tools (e.g., Lightcast) are vital for accessing and sharing up-to-date data.
General Supplies and Materials: $2,500
Includes supplies for convenings, trainings, and office operations to support grant execution
Printing: $1,500
Printing costs include educator and work-based learning toolkits for use at convenings, ensuring resources are accessible and impactful.
6400-Other Operating Costs- Total Amount $22,000.00
Travel- $12,000
Conference attendance and travel across the nine-county region, facilitating connections between stakeholders and ensuring comprehensive regional coverage.
Convening Costs: $10,000
This allocation covers facility rentals and necessary materials, such as agendas, pens, and other supplies.

Grant Activities Support: Regional Alignment: Convenings unite higher education, K-12, and industry to develop pathways and foster collaboration. Work-Based Learning: The Convener Lead builds partnerships among chambers, schools, and industries, providing technical assistance and data tracking. Data: Dashboard maintenance ensures stakeholders access timely labor market data and program metrics for informed decisions. Communication: Labor market platform subscriptions keep us updated on industry trends to guide pathway development.

Coordinated Funding Strategies:
WSRCA will leverage funds from existing grants to include the TWC Innovation Fund Grant and Texas Regional Pathways Network Grant to enhance pathway development across the region and support the creation of a regional HUB for career and education pathways. Additionally, WSRCA will actively pursue other funding opportunities that support the convener work.

CDN | Vendor ID | Amendment #

Appendix I: Amendment Description and Purpose (leave this section blank when completing the initial application for funding)

An amendment must be submitted when the program plan or budget is altered for the reasons described in the "When to Amend the Application" document posted on the Administering a Grant page. The following are required to be submitted for an amendment: (1) Page 1 of the application with updated contact information and current authorized official's signature and date, (2) Appendix I with changes identified and described, (3) all updated sections of the application or budget affected by the changes identified below, and, if applicable, (4) Amended Budget Request. Amendment Instructions with more details can be found on the last tab of the budget template.

You may duplicate this page

Amended Section	Reason for Amendment