

Discussion Paper

Adopting An Evidence Framework for Workforce Programs

Background

Over the past year, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), in partnership with the Office of the Governor, Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC) and Rural Capital Area Workforce Board, have worked together to develop a new Evidence Framework to better measure the impact of publicly funded workforce development programs with support from Results for America, a non-partisan organization dedicated to helping decision makers at all levels of government harness the power of evidence and data to solve workforce challenges. A goal of the work is to discover innovative approaches and replicable models that lead to better outcomes for workers and employers.

Texas is implementing an approach that, over time, will support innovative and proven models. This approach will create an evaluation point structure that incentivizes grant applicants to identify and use program models that have demonstrated a record of effective outcomes. To continue to encourage innovative, but less- tested program models, the state is designing a tiered strategy. Evidence tiers have been defined to support a graduated method for programs and applicants to adapt to evidence-based grants.

Issues

In August 2019, the Commission approved \$1.8 million dollars in WIOA Statewide funding for the Building Construction Trades project. The team is now preparing to implement the first part of the Evidence Framework, which will include incorporating the evidence tiers and new metrics into the upcoming Request for Applications (RFA) for this project. Given the recognition that many Texas youth ages 16-24 are not currently engaged in employment or the workforce (called “opportunity youth”), and that we have a growing demand for workers in the construction trades, staff recommends prioritizing opportunity youth models for the Building Construction Trades project this year in effort to connect youth to training opportunities that provide in demand skills that can be learned and applied quickly.

Additionally, staff recommends that an evaluation of the project be conducted to ensure that we are learning from the youth training projects – figuring out what works and providing real-time adjustments to programs so that training participants are positioned for success. With a portion of the funds previously approved for the Building Construction Trades project, an evaluator may be identified through competitive Request for Proposal (RFP).

Once piloted, the evidence framework in this initial RFA will be incorporated into other discretionary grants if successful, i.e., Wagner-Peyser and the WIOA Governor’s Reserve.

Decision

Staff are seeking Commission approval to:

- 1) prioritize Opportunity Youth as the eligible participants in the 2020 Building and Construction Trades RFA; and,
- 2) competitively procure a program evaluator who can support the implementation of these grantees as we work to jointly build the evidence base for youth workforce development programs using up to \$300,000 of the 1.8 million in funding previously approved for this project.