

Frequently Asked Questions

Modification and Extension of Texas Workforce Development Board Plans

Reference: WD Letter 15-06, Change 6 and Attachments

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Submission of Plans; General Info

1. Question

What are the effective dates of the modified board plans we are submitting?

Answer

Current Board plans remain in effect through September 30, 2009. The modified Board plans become effective October 1, 2009, and remain in effect through September 30, 2010. See page 2, WD Letter 15-06.

2. Question

Does a board just submit the requested modifications, updates, documentation, etc., or the entire plan? I think that last time we just submitted the modifications themselves. You already have our prior modifications, the revised target occupations we sent you last year, and our original plan, right?

Answer

We want the entire updated plan as an integrated piece, since not doing so can make it difficult for Boards and for us to keep track of all that is in their plans. So yes, we are asking for a complete plan, which would follow the content of the original board plan submitted for Fiscal Years 2007-2008 submitted on or before July 5, 2006 (see WD 15-06), and any subsequent modifications, amendments, or other updates to the plan (see subsequent, still active Change versions of WD 15-06). Having a complete, integrated, current plan is beneficial for a board and TWC to communicate clearly to its stakeholders, both internal and external. TWC does not want to be in a position of piecing together for a board, separate documents, and thus having to identify deletions, replacements, and so on, possibly incorrectly. It would be best if the board presented a

single, complete, updated plan document. Appendix 9 is intended in part for boards to direct readers to the location of modifications and other important updates, in their submission.

3. Question

In Appendix 5, signature pages, what/who does “acknowledges joint development and submission of the plan modification” refer to? Is there a particular format for the signature page that is supposed to be used?

Answer

There is no required format for the signature page, but a letter format is probably useful. The three bullets on page 25, Attachment 1 provide 3 types of information that should be included in the signature page. It is signed by the CEO(s) and the Board Chair. It must include a statement that these signatories have jointly developed and are jointly submitting the plan modification, as well as a statement that the signatories certify their acceptance of the various assurances listed in Appendix 6, to the best of their knowledge at the time.

4. Question

In Appendix 3, boards are asked to respond to certain questions regarding three of statewide long term objectives (LTOs) in the state’s system strategic plan. Should boards also update any of the information they have previously submitted for Appendix 3?

Answer

No, boards are not required to submit any additional information beyond responses to the questioned outlined. In their past local board plan submissions, boards have previously demonstrated alignment to the six statewide long term objectives (LTOs) in the state’s system strategic plan – Destination 2010: FY 2004–FY 2009 Strategic Plan for the Texas Workforce Development System. The Council has previously determined that current board plans align with the required LTOs in Destination 2010. Since this is the final year of the current system plan, the Council will not request that boards demonstrate further alignment at this time. However, the Council will review information submitted in response to the Texas Workforce Commission’s request for industry and occupational priorities, for this corresponds to LTO SC 4.0 in Destination 2010. And, to assist the Council in assessing the degree to which the system was effective in achieving state and local goals and objectives for the six-year timeframe of Destination 2010 through a cumulative evaluation report to the Governor and the Legislature, boards are asked to respond to the specific questions outlined.

Strategic Narrative Questions

1. Question

In our last plan modification, under Appendix 1 - System Description - Question 2: Regarding Planned Service Mix, we were instructed by TWC not to complete this question. Since there are no directions regarding this specific question in the Board Planning Guidelines, I am under the impression that we will again not be required to complete this item. Is that correct?

Answer

Yes, that is correct. We have not asked that boards update this item in the current board plan modification and we did not do so in the last one. Boards may update this item if needed, like any other portion of your board plans that we have not specifically requested changes to. If there are any significant updates that you

want to bring to our attention, please add a notation to the Appendix 9 table, providing the page number where we can find the updated information.

Target Industries and Target Occupations Lists

1. Question

Must we use the templates to provide information about our Board's target industries and target occupations? What if our board-established priority industries or occupations don't entirely mesh with the state guidelines for Board Plan modifications?

Answer

Yes the templates are a requirement. The establishment of Target Industries and Target Occupations as outlined in the board plan modification guidelines is a significant thrust of the Commission's direction for local Board Plans in this modification, and Boards must modify or supplement other target industry or occupation lists they may have previously established to meet the requirements of the Target Industries and Target Occupations Lists. The template allows the Commission to develop some common types of data and knowledge from all boards on Target Industries as well as Target Occupations for purposes of WIA and other-funded training. The information requested was defined purposefully to be able to understand, evaluate, compile, report on, and plan initiatives at a state level based on Boards' Target Industries and Occupations. While it is conceivable a Board could present the information in an alternate way from the template, at this time for this particular modification submission deadline, the template is being used to be clear about the pertinent information needed and assure it is provided. Boards should find that updating / modifying the templates as their lists change is an easy way to provide documentation to TWC to keep the lists true and in line with their training priorities and activities. This should ease internal and external monitoring tasks through the year.

2. Question

We heard about the possibility of being able to submit a SOCRATES report rather than the excel-based spreadsheets for the Target Industries and Target Occupations Lists. When are details on this going to be made available?

Answer

While this may be possible in the future, for this board plan modification, please refer to the instructions in the guidelines for Appendix 2, Steps 1 through 4. Ensure you are following instructions "to satisfy documentation requirements" for each Step, provide any minimum pieces of documentation in *italics*, and complete the designated excel templates to identify and support the selection of your board's Target Industries List and Target Occupations List, following the "Guidelines" outlined for those.

See also the following Q&A concerning the "Additional Rationale, Local Wisdom, or Comments" space in the Template.

There have been progressive enhancements to SOCRATES that bring together information the SOCRATES user needs or may want to use in labor market analysis and targeting of industries and occupations. The board plan modifications guidelines either require or recommend various LMCI tools including but not limited to

selected components of SOCRATES. Boards are typically relying on a variety of information sources and tools to target their industries and occupations.

3. Question

For both the Target Industries List and the Target Occupations List, language indicates that these must include, but need not be limited to, industries or occupations in industries related to the Governor’s industry clusters. Is there a minimum number of industries, or occupations in industries, that must relate to the Governor’s industry clusters?

Answer

“Industries” may be reasonably interpreted as “at least one”. This would apply to both lists. Hence, the Target Industries List must include at least one industry that is in one or more of the six Governor’s Core industry clusters. The Target Occupations List must include at least one occupation that relates to at least one of the Board’s Target Industries which is in one or more of the Governor’s six Core industry clusters. We fully anticipate Boards will not have a challenge doing this, but in fact will have multiple industries and related occupations associated with the Governor’s industry clusters, included in their target lists.

4. Question

Is a statement of local wisdom or validation required for each industry and occupation on the Target Industry and Target Occupations Lists? What type of information does “local wisdom” refer to? Why are we asked for information on targeting processes in different places in the plan outline?

Answer

It was the intent of the guidelines that Boards provide information on local targeting processes, local wisdom and validation at several levels:

1. Target Industries:

- a. “Describe how the Board identified its target industries and related Texas Workforce Commission (TWC)/Labor Market and Career Information (LMCI) target industry sectors, including, but not limited to, industries related to the Governor’s industry clusters (as reflected in the Board’s submitted Target Industries List).” (p. 4) This is envisioned as a narrative description reflecting on the process of targeting industries overall, and may be as detailed as the Board wishes to adequately describe its approach.
- b. “Describe how local industry, economic development, or other partners were involved in the prioritization or targeting of industries.” (p. 12) This is envisioned as a narrative description further describing how target industries were developed or validated with the assistance of various local partners, local knowledge, or planning initiatives. Again, this is about general strategies used, but may be as detailed as the Board wishes to describe its approach.
- c. The “Additional rationale, local wisdom, or comments” space on the Target Industries List. This space is intended to be used to identify additional information on local knowledge, that may be specific to any industry or some industries on the list – a source of information, a process, or a

piece of knowledge gained that is unique to or limited to an industry or group of industries on the list:

- i. any additional indicators used in targeting the industry in addition to the listed types of indicators, if applicable; and
- ii. local wisdom about the importance of the target industry in the workforce area. This may include, but need not be limited to, information gained from local or regional labor market or industry studies, industry or economic development partners, or employer surveys.

2. Target Occupations:

- a. “Describe how the Board identified the target occupations for which it will dedicate Workforce Investment Act (WIA) training resources (as reflected in the Board’s submitted Target Occupations List). (p. 4)) This is envisioned as a narrative description reflecting on the process of targeting occupations for the training purposes outlined, and may be as detailed as the Board wishes to adequately describe its approach. Boards should be careful to make it clear how the targeting of industries flows into the targeting of occupations that support those industries.
- b. “Describe how local employers, including small employers (defined as less than 100 employees), were involved in validating projected demand for target occupations. “ (p. 17) This is envisioned as a narrative description reflecting on the specific part of the occupational targeting process of obtaining employer input and validation of demand for target occupations, which could have been accomplished through employer surveys, focus, groups, consultations, or other means – please describe whatever processes were used to systematically gather employer validation or similar input on target occupations.
- c. “For specific target occupations, identify local wisdom or validation information in the requested column of the Target Occupations List (see the sample language below); (p. 17) This refers to the “Additional rationale, local wisdom, or comments” space on the Target Occupations List. The space provided for this is intended to be used to identify:
 - i. any additional indicators used in targeting the occupation besides the listed types of indicators, if applicable;
 - ii. local wisdom that further supports or validates the importance of the target occupation in the workforce area. This may include, but need not be limited to, information gained from surveys of employers; local or regional labor market or occupational studies; or other information gained from industry, economic development, or professional/occupational organization partners.
 - iii. the specific nature of the need for any Target Occupation chosen that is not associated with one of the Board’s Target Industries, if applicable. Upon identifying such an occupation, Boards should first consider whether this is a reflection of industry dynamics that may warrant a change to the Target Industry List, in addition to a possible addition to

the Target Occupations List. Both lists should be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to keep them current and responsive to trends in the workforce area.

5. Question

On the Target Occupations List, there is a column labeled NAICS Industry Code. Are you requesting that we include the NAICS codes for each of our Target Industries that might employ people in that occupation? For example, if we determine we are going to have 20 Target Industries, and we select Secretaries as a Target Occupation, we would probably need to list all 20 NAICS Codes in that box. Other occupations might be more specialized, but I believe we will have several that might cross over numerous industries.

Answer

Yes. We are expecting that many occupations on a board's Target Occupations List will be relevant to more than one of your Target Industries. Where this is the case, in the cell for NAICS code on the row for a particular Target Occupation, you may list the various NAICS industry codes, separated by comma.

6. Question

Can we use the hourly wage in our target occupations rather than the weekly wage? SOCRATES is set up using the hourly wage.

Answer

You may use the type of wage related information available in the tool/data source being used. For example, wage information may be provided as average weekly or monthly earnings, a minimum annual salary, an entry-level or experienced-level salary, a mean or median measure of central tendency, etc.

7. Question

We do not believe it is reasonable that a Board be limited to putting occupations on its Target Occupations List that are only related to its Target Industries. There are various circumstances in which we would have a legitimate need to define an occupation as a priority for WIA funded training that may not necessarily be associated with one of our Target Industries, which is a fairly small list (10 to 15 recommended, no more than 20 accepted per the Guidelines).

Answer

We agree, particularly in light of the changing economy, that Boards need flexibility at this time of rising unemployment across a wide range of industries and occupations. It is the intent of the Target Occupations List that it adequately address the occupational priorities associated with the Board's target industries. The list must include at least one target occupation for each of the Board's target industries on its Target Industries List, including industries related to the Governor's industry clusters.

However, Boards may have a need to define a Target Occupation that may not necessarily be associated with one of their Target Industries. An explanation of this need should be provided in the "Additional Rationale, Local Wisdom, or Comments" space on the Target Occupations List. Upon identifying such an occupation, boards should first consider whether this is a reflection of industry dynamics that warrants a change to the Target Industry List, in addition to a possible change to the Target Occupations List.

Both the Target Industry List and the Target Occupations List should be reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to keep them current, closely related to one another, and responsive to trends in the workforce area.

8. Question

When will you make available the State Target Occupations List?

Answer

The list was approved by the Commission April 7, 2009 and with some requested information enhancements, will be made available with formal guidance to the Boards later in April. Expectations of use of the list by Boards in their WIA and other funded training were approved exactly as proposed and discussed previously in the board planning modification. One of the places this is described is in WD Letter 15-8, Change 6, page 2, footnote.

Target Occupations and Eligible Training Providers

1. Question

If we work with a WIA customer to determine with them that they should pursue occupational training in an occupation on the State Target Occupations list, do we need to then make sure we connect them with an Eligible Training Provider (ETP) to obtain this training?

Answer

Yes. The list is used in the same manner as the board's target occupations list. Keep in mind that under implementation of training funded by ARRA funds, there are more flexible possibilities to contract for group training directly with institutions of higher education or eligible training providers. TWC continues to offer its assistance to Boards in facilitating the application and approval process of ETPs and so Boards are invited to contact TWC ETP staff for this type of assistance.

2. Question

If we determine with a WIA customer that we want to send him or her to an ETP approved occupational training program that is outside our board area because there isn't such a program in ours, can we do that?

Answer

Yes. We assume that in the described situation the training program supports an occupation that has been identified by your Board as a target occupation or is on the state target occupations list; however, there is not an ETP in the area available to provide the necessary training for the target occupation. The Workforce Investment Act does provide for selecting providers outside a particular Board area:

WIA Sec.122(e)(4)(B) "Selection from the State List – Individuals eligible to receive training services under section 134(d)(4) shall have the opportunity to select any of the eligible providers, from any of the local areas in the State, that are included on the list described in subparagraph (A) to provide the services, consistent with the requirements of Section 134."

WIA Sec.134(d)(4) (A) "Funds allocated to a local area for adults under paragraph (2)(A) or (3), as appropriate, of section 133(b), and funds allocated to a local area for dislocated workers under section

133(b)(2)(B) shall be used to provide training services to adults and dislocated workers, respectively--
... (iii) who select programs of training services that are directly linked to the employment opportunities in the local area involved or in another area in which the adults or dislocated workers receiving such services are willing to relocate;”

Staff will want to consider whether the occupation being trained for is available in the local area. If not, a conversation with the participant is warranted on whether the participant will be willing to relocate to another area of the state for a job upon completion of training.

3. Question

If we need help in getting agreement/cooperation of that program outside our area to serve our customer (we may not have a relationship with them and they may be reluctant to deal with us on just one customer), can TWC assist?

Answer

Yes. You may contact the TWC ETP staff for assistance if you encounter difficulties in working with any approved ETP. The contact information for ETP is Toll-free Help Desk Line = 1-866-256-6333 or e-mail = etp.helpdesk@twc.state.tx.us

4. Question

If we send a WIA customer willing to relocate to a training program that is outside our board area because there isn't such a program in ours, does this affect our performance?

Answer

Regardless of where the customer is in training or ultimately gains employment, s/he will remain your customer in terms of applicable performance measures.

Regional and Local Priorities

1. Question

Our board has been working with our regional consortium of workforce boards on developing a regional labor market analysis and regional plan. Can we utilize a modified version of this for our board plan modification?

Answer

Please relate any relevant planning work your board is doing, to your board plan modification. Current modification requirements do not request updates to Appendix 8 (regional plans); however, if there have been changes to your board's regional plan and its impact on your work, by all means update that section of your board plan -- in addition to completing the required modifications, of course. Some boards have worked with regional partners, perhaps in consultation with TWC/LMCI staff, on labor market analyses and identification of industry and occupation priorities that are very similar to what is requested in the board plan modification for Appendix 2. By all means, boards should use this information in completing Appendix 2; to provide the required information may mean some additional steps. A board's regional work may in some part be the source or documentary support for its priorities expressed in the board's Target Industries or Target Occupations. It may even be that a board has adopted the target industry and target occupational priorities

developed for their regional plan, as their own. If the target industries and/or occupations otherwise meet the requirements, this is fine. If any of this sounds like it might apply to your board, please call to discuss.

2. Question

I understand that the LMCI labor market data available to us is only available at the workforce board level. However, is there a way in which we can have two different sets of industry and occupational targets: one for our heavily urbanized county, and another for the rural areas/counties in our region? We would do this via personal interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative and quantitative sources of information to create the targets for the rural counties and complement the data that is currently made available to us by TWC. We think that our communities would benefit greatly if we tailored our services to what they are seeing based on each of their areas and what employment and industry trends are unique to them.

Answer

A board must submit one Target Industries List and one Target Occupations List that represents the needs and priorities in their workforce area as a whole. However, there are varying dynamics across any workforce area. It is up to the board how it balances these needs to compose an overall workforce area list. Boards are encouraged to rely on relevant data that describes local needs in selecting the Target Industries and Target Occupations for the Board area. Information on these considerations, since they will be critical explanations for the composition of the target lists, should be included in the Board's responses to Strategic Narrative items (c.) and (d.) and Appendix 2, Steps 2 and 4, including the "Additional rationale, local wisdom or other explanation" spaces on the Target Industries and Target Occupations lists. For example, it may be noted that demand in a given industry or occupation is largely found with predominantly urban (or rural) area employers.

MOUs

1. Question

It's not clear to us what you are looking for in the MOU list. For some of the identified programs/fund categories, we have a contract with TWC, and we have a contract with our one-stop provider. Do you want the contract also and the expiration date? For some of the items in the list, we have an MOU or more than one. In other cases, nothing. Why do you need a copy of the MOU?

Answer

The intent of Appendix 7 is to get a general idea of who your Board is working with to deliver services, in a cooperative relationship described/covered by an MOU, and help ensure we have a copy of your MOU on file.

In terms of your relationship with TWC, true, many of the programs listed at the top of the list are part of your contract, and your contracts with your one-stop providers locally are contracts, not MOUs. What we are asking for here, though, is identification of any MOU – form agreements that you have with other entities.

There is a variety among the categories on the list as to what form of agreement you might have with another entity in relation to that programmatic or funding area, and there is variation among Boards in terms of what entities they work with and the type/format of agreements they have with them. Just be comprehensive in identifying the MOUs you do have, with local, regional, or state entities, as applicable, with attention to the required and optional categories listed, provide the date information requested for any MOU, and a copy of

the MOU for good measure. If your Board has a contract with a party about one of the identified types of services, an MOU does not need to be submitted, however, please note that a contract that covers the issue – you can put this information in the expiration date column.

Recovery Act Linkages

1. Question

How do the Board’s identified strategies and service plans in conjunction with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds cross-over with the strategic board plan identified in this board plan modification? How will duplication, conflicting information, or need to change the board plan later to match the recovery plan implementation be avoided?

Answer

DOL has required a TWC State Plan be submitted by June 30, 2009 to include American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) strategies, which will need to incorporate local strategies. Because both the State and local plans are due June 30, TWC must find another vehicle to gather local input. TWC asked Boards to respond to a list of questions regarding ARRA implementation strategies, to be submitted April 15, 2009. These responses should address federal guidance in DOL TEGL 14-08 and Texas Workforce Commission Guidance expressed at its public meeting on April 7, 2009.

Local strategies described in the board’s ARRA responses due April 15th should be included in the local board plan submission, reflected in relevant modifications requested, and any other relevant areas of the plan. The board should also endeavor to address any additional guidance subsequent to Commission meeting on April 7th that may become available in time to be included in the strategies described in its plan modification.

2. Question

Can you explain changes to the ITA system that are expected, e.g. contracting requirements or flexibility, and treatment of targeted occupations vs. demand occupations? Is this the difference? If so, do we have to include this in our plan modification?

Answer

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act guidance indicates that “Local boards may award a contract to a higher education institution or other eligible training provider if local board determines that it would facilitate the training multiple individuals in high demand occupations – as long as contracting does not limit customer choice.” Under the provision in the Recovery Act, you will be allowed to contract directly with a training provider for training of multiple individuals, and you will not have use the ITA process. In addition, institutions of higher education such as community colleges will not have to be on the eligible training provider list in order for you to contract with them. All other types of providers will have to be on the eligible training provider list in order to be awarded a contract. Further details will be provided.

In the planning guidelines, boards will be required to develop both a demand and a target occupation list. Use of WIA funds and ITAs are limited to the occupations on the target occupation list, while training funded with other funding sources (e.g., Trade, Choices, FSE&T) could be from the demand or target occupation lists. The demand occupation list will be a much broader list of occupations for which you identify that there is a projected demand for workers in that occupation that exceeds people available to perform those jobs.