

Ending the Middle Skills Gap: Apprenticeship Statewide Initiative
Discussion Paper

Background

On June 30, 2021, the Texas Workforce Commission's (TWC) three-member Commission (Commission) launched a comprehensive statewide strategy to end the middle skills gap in Texas.

As the Texas economy continues to grow, employment demand has dramatically increased for individuals in the middle-skills occupations, defined as workers with some education beyond high school but less than a four-year degree. Some of the occupations affected are as follows:

- Automotive service technicians and mechanics;
- Nursing assistant;
- Patient care technician;
- Production machinist, assemblers, and fabricators; and
- Logistics management and supply chain analysts.

Proposed Initiative

The apprenticeship training model is a strong and proven approach in addressing employer needs, in placing individuals on rewarding career pathways, and in ending the middle skills gap. With this mind, it is recommended that TWC launch a statewide initiative in which apprenticeship training programs are created or expanded to support the occupations listed above.

Because these occupational shortages are present across the state, it is also proposed that this initiative be organized and managed at the state level by TWC's Office of Apprenticeship (OA) staff. The TWC OA staff will oversee the award of non-competitive incentives from the state agency level. Incentive funding and TWC services can support registered apprenticeship program (RAP) development, launch, and/or sustainability and may also include:

- Department of Labor (DOL) registration, and
- costs related to RAP design and launch, such as:
 - curricula development;
 - related instruction or training for apprentices (in-person, online, or hybrid);
 - training supplies for apprentices;
 - instructor costs or mentor activities; and
 - other identified requests based on employer needs, as allowable.

Because this initiative marks a shift in how TWC has historically managed the growth and expansion of RAPs in Texas, TWC OA staff will work with other departments and divisions across TWC to ensure optimum levels of collaboration and coordination.

Decision Point

It is proposed that the following funds and amounts be used for the initiative described above:

- \$3.5M WIOA Statewide
- \$3.5M DOL Apprenticeship Expansion