



2023-2024 Tri-Agency Grant for Regional Conveners
Letter of Interest (LOI) Application Due 11:59 p.m. CT, January 13, 2023

NOGA ID

Authorizing legislation **Senate Bill 1, Part 18. CONTINGENCY AND OTHER PROVISIONS, Sec. 18.15. Contingency for House Bill 1525**

This LOI application must be submitted via email to **loiapplications@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 13, 2023**.

Grant period from **March 1, 2023 - April 30, 2024**

Pre-award costs permitted from **Award Date**

Application stamp-in date and time

Required Attachments

- Application Part 2: Excel workbook with the grant's budget schedules (linked along with this form on the TEA Grants Opportunities page)
- Attachment A: Regional Convener Reference Form (Submit up to three forms with Application)

Application Information

Which [workforce development area](#) are you located in and applying to represent as a regional convener?

Region 15

Select your organization type:

Workforce Development

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 Area** CDN

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

Primary Contact **Diane Tackett** Email **diane.tackett@ruralcapital.net** Phone **512-244-7966**

Secondary Contact **Kelly Moreno** Email **kelly.moreno@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
- Debarment and Suspension Certification
- General and application-specific Provisions and Assurances
- Lobbying Certification

Authorized Official Name **Paul Fletcher** Title **CEO**

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

Signature  Date **1/13/23**

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 program funds will supplement (increase the level of service), and not supplant (replace) state mandates, State Board of Education rules, and activities previously conducted with state or local funds. The applicant provides assurance that state or local funds may not be decreased or diverted for other purposes merely because of the availability of these funds. The applicant provides assurance that program services and activities to be funded from this LOI will be supplementary to existing services and activities and will not be used for any services or activities required by state law, State Board of Education rules, or local policy.
- 2. 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.
- 3. The applicant provides assurance to adhere to all the Statutory and TEA Program requirements as noted in the 2023-2024 Tri-Agency Grant to Regional Conveners Program Guidelines.
- 4. The applicant provides assurance to adhere to all the Performance Measures, as noted in the 2023-2024 Tri-Agency Grant to Regional Conveners Program Guidelines, and shall provide to TEA, upon request, any performance data necessary to assess the success of the program.
- 5. 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.
- 6. The applicant assures 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. The applicant assures to 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. The applicant assures to identify multiple staff at the regional convener organization to engage in the work and participate in the designation process. This includes someone in an executive leadership position who has decision-making authority on behalf of the regional convener organization.
- 9. The applicant assures to complete all grant activities and deliverables in a timely manner, as described in the description of program and performance and evaluation measures.
- 10. The applicant assures 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.

Statutory/Program Assurances cont'd

- 11. The applicant assures to convene and engage a cross-sector pathways leadership team in the strategic planning process within the first three months of the grant project.
- 12. The applicant assures 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.
- 13. The applicant assures 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.
- 14. The applicant assures to plan and execute work-based learning that will address K-12 gaps and will expand upon existing work-based learning within their region.
- 15. The applicant assures to participate and engage in statewide training and convenings during the grant period.

Statutory/Program Requirements

1. Current Regional Landscape - Describe the key career and education pathway initiatives and/or programs currently underway in your region, including those funded by TEA, THECB, and/or TWC, and your current level of involvement in those initiatives. Please also describe the current staff you have in place to support these initiatives and/or programs who will continue to be involved in this project and any new staff you would like to use grant dollars to hire to support this work. Describe the qualifications and experience of the staff person who will serve as the regional convener lead for this grant project.

Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA) supports the 9-County region surrounding Travis County. In our region we have over 36,000 employers, 35 ISDs, 6 community colleges and 4 universities. It is our mission to support each of our communities ' unique needs and meet the customers where they live.

WSRCA has been serving as one of the lead intermediaries for the TRPN Cohort 3 Texas Innovation Corridor Pathways Partnerships for the past year. We have convened a cross-sector team to develop high-quality education and career pathways that represent high demand occupations in the electrical, plumbing and pipe-fitting sectors. This cohort includes partnerships with employers, higher education and three ISDs. The results of this collaboration have been a better understanding of the needs of the employers and the parameters higher ed and ISDs must work within to meet state standards. We have been able to develop crosswalks for these fields that support student growth and build the talent pipeline.

WSRCA implements the workforce development funding available through the Texas Workforce Commission, including but not limited to: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, TANF / Choices, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training, and the Child Care Development Funds (CCDF). WSRCA has over 35 years of experience working with the employer communities in rural areas, connecting with school districts and post-secondary opportunities and aligning the skills of our residents with the needs of our businesses.

WSRCA has been awarded through the Department of Labor (Rural Healthcare Initiative) and the Department of Commerce (Good Jobs Challenge - REINVEST) to build and sustain industry sector partnerships and increase the talent pipeline in skilled trades, healthcare, IT / Financial Technology and Advanced Manufacturing.

In addition to these opportunities, we are building out apprenticeships in healthcare, skilled trades and manufacturing to support student and employer success throughout the region.

The current staff in place, is a highly educated team that includes team members dedicated to K-12 Outreach, apprenticeship development and building employer relationships. This grant will allow WSRCA to pull each individual project into a comprehensive, overall strategy for our WDA. We will hire two additional staff members to build out our team to ensure we are executing the grant. These individuals will have experience in either education or workforce plus relationship building. This robust team will be led by the Director of Community Engagement & Strategic Partnerships. WSRCA has support staff that will support this team.

2. 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?

Based on data, WSRCA has set our priorities to align with Business needs of the 9 - County Region with a focus on the following industries: Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, IT and Skilled Trades. In these focus areas we are working on building talent pipelines for our employers in occupations showing high demand and growth over the next 10 years. Our priorities are to engage potential job seekers early in the process. This will include meeting with middle and high-school students to expand their knowledge of different career opportunities and higher education options that will provide them with occupational and knowledge growth, at minimal to no additional financial stress.

We will continue to develop consortiums with ISDs, employers and higher-ed/training providers to create training pathways through crosswalks, stacking credentials, work-based learning, on the job training and internships/apprenticeships.

Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

3. Regional Alignment Experience - Describe your organization’s experience leading strategic planning to support regional career and education pathways (or related education and training initiatives) in collaboration with stakeholders representing a mix of industry, K-12 education, higher education, and workforce development entities.

WSRCA is bolstering rural area career opportunities in high-demand occupations through our REINVEST program. This program will enable 6 rural counties to generate high-quality jobs for 777 workers across three sector partnerships: Healthcare, Skilled Trades, Finance, and Information Technology, in collaboration with over 46 employers and employer associations. Through the Department of Labor (DOL), WSRCA have been awarded the RHI grant. This program enables WSRCA to create high skilled quality jobs and provide training through RAPs across the healthcare industry. For the past year we have been the lead of the intermediaries for the TRPN Cohort 3 Texas Innovation Corridor Pathways Partnership, where we convened a cross-sector team to develop high-quality education and career pathways that represent high demand occupations in the electrical, plumbing and pipe-fitting sectors for three school districts. Our Education Outreach Team at WSRCA has been focused on developing a strategic plan to support our career and education pathways for our area ’ s youth by working closely with the school districts, local trade schools and trade unions as well as businesses, economic development committees and our counterpart Workforce Boards. We convened 3 local companies and 2 higher education institutes to develop a DOL approved RAP for injection molding. This is building the talent pipeline for our employers. In healthcare we are teaming up with a variety of entities in our 9-County region to support the training pipeline for healthcare professionals. Two examples are Christus Healthcare in Hays County where they are finalizing an apprenticeship program for Patient Care Tech (PCT) along with our training provider Central Texas Allied Healthcare Institute. We are also working with our partners at WF Capital Area and Austin Community College on certified medical assistance and PCT for the Baylor Scott & White hospital system.

4. Regional Data Experience - How do you currently monitor progress and measure quality of career and education pathway programs or initiatives? What do you currently use as metrics or key performance indicators (KPIs) to understand the strength of your region’s pathway programming?

WSRCA defines success in many ways. We track the number of job postings that have been filled, the number of employees who enter or re-enter the workforce, the number of credentials received, measure skills gained through micro-credentialing and other sources, and measure employment retention and wage gain / replacement. While many of these measures were originally developed for our Title I contracts, we continue these measurements through all funding sources to ensure the system is coordinated to meet the needs of local employers. We measure our success rate through our region ’ s unemployment rate, and newly developed workforce pipeline initiatives. We also measure our success rate through Measurable Skills Gain (MSG), employment outcomes, and credential attainment that we enter through our TWIST system. These outcomes are the result of our Title I funded programs.

Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

5. Regional Work-Based Learning Experience – Using the Tri-Agency WBL Continuum attachment available on the TEA Grant Opportunities webpage, describe your experience planning, implementing and/or monitoring work-based learning activities aligned within each of the following categories: a. “Learning about Work”; b. “Learning through Work”; and c. “Learning at Work”

A. We annually participate in Taylor Trades Fair by joining in the planning and implementation of the event. The event usually happens every March. We invite employers to showcase the students from the region ISDs such as Taylor ISD, Pflugerville, Bartlett, Hutto, and Round Rock ISD. Prior to the event our K-12 Outreach Specialists meet with students on interview skills as well as soft skills training. We also lead in the tutorial of Texas Reality Check to students.

We participate in ISD job fairs and utilize our Virtual Reality headsets to provide career exploration workshops. We have over 5000 courses available for the students to explore.

We partnered with The Nest in providing education to their students with regards to industry sectors and job readiness. We partner with all our local ISDs in providing career readiness activities such as workshops about industry sectors, labor market information, and career readiness.

We participated in the yearly planning and implementation with the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and CTE Department in Manufacturing Day. The students get worksite tours to our local manufacturers. We provided chaperons, and provided a manufacturing industry overview session.

B. Through our WIOA funding, we provide work experience services to our students by partnering with employers that allow our WIOA-eligible students to gain work experience. The job description must match the students’ career goals.

C. Our employer partners have recently received DOL approval for their Registered Apprenticeship Program that we initiated and assisted in developing. This apprenticeship program will be extended for recruitment to our local ISDs.

WSRCA is coordinating with Regency/Towers Nursing home to provide Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) and will coordinate OJT for up-skilling the CNAs.

Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

6. **Regional Convener Responsibilities** - Describe any current work your organization performs related to the additional functions of regional conveners listed below. If there are functions you do not perform, describe how a partner organization performs the function and your working relationship with them. If there are functions that are not currently performed by either your organization or a partner, provide context for why it has not been a focus of your organization’s work to date. a. Analyze labor market information and work on an ongoing basis to ensure career and education pathways are aligned to in-demand industries in the region; b. Convene a cross-sector leadership team made up of education, workforce, and industry stakeholders to develop and implement a regional vision and strategy; c. Engage employers and broker relationships with education and training providers; d. Streamline communicating information across the region; and e. Drive sustainability planning, including coordinated funding strategies, across education and workforce development entities.

- a. WSRCA continually analyzes labor market information and coordinates with our county stakeholders to ensure we are building talent pipelines to meet the needs of the employers and build careers for job seekers.
- b. We are currently the intermediary for a TRPN grant, we are convening 3 ISDs, industry partners in construction, electrical and plumbing and Austin Community College to build work-based learning programs for high school students.
- c. To broker relationships and build out the talent pipeline, we have engaged with employers (Saleen Performance, Inc, TASUS, R&D Molders) and Texas State Technical College and Texas State University to create a registered apprenticeship program to support all 3 employers.
- d. Our outreach team has been streamlining our communication strategy through management of our social media channels and using targeted communication approaches to engage our audience in the most efficient and effective way possible. We continue to review our reach and evaluate new opportunities for improvement.
- e. The WSRCA team builds sustainability in our strategic planning for our initiatives. We coordinate with our partners in education and workforce development partners to obtain the best funding options for each initiative.

Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

7. **Partnerships** - Describe your current partnership(s), including the specific activities involved, with the following: a. Industry partnerships or specific employer partners (by sector); b. Postsecondary education; c. Secondary education; and d. Workforce or economic development.

- a. In manufacturing we have partnered with R&D Molders, Saleen and TASUS to build out an injection molders apprenticeship with our training partner Texas State Technical School and Texas State University. This model will allow students to earn while they learn and build the talent pipeline for the employers.
- b. In healthcare we are partnering with Austin Community College for apprenticeship opportunities in Certified Nursing Aide and Certified Medical Assistant. We are working with the Capital Area Workforce Board to bring this program across all 10 counties. This helps streamline the process for the employers and job seekers to live and work in their local communities.
- c. Currently, we are partnering with Hays CISD, Lockhart ISD and San Marcos ISD to develop pathways in the Electrical and Plumbing/Pipefitters Trade.
- d. We are working with our counterparts in Capital Area Workforce and Alamo Workforce along with the Economic Development groups in our areas to help support the employer needs by developing the training for the talent pipeline, so employees are prepared to fulfill the needs of the employers.
- e. In healthcare we also have our RHI grant, and this grant focuses on the rural counties of Blanco, Llano, Lampasas and Burnet. This grant allows us and helps us focus on our rural counties and helps administer training opportunities and build that talent pipeline for employers within these counties.

Statutory/Program Requirements (Cont.)

8. **Budget narrative** - Describe how the proposed budget will support the goals of the program. Please include justification for the specific funding allocations in the proposed budget, including how costs are connected to the grant activities described in this solicitation. Please also describe how each item in the proposed budget will support the needs of the regional team, beyond any one specific regional partner. In addition, include a description of other funding sources the region will leverage, if any, to support implementation of this project and future work.

We are asking for \$536,750 dollars to support our goals of developing career and educational pathways in our 9-county region to meet our employer needs per county. We are allocating \$418,750 in staff support for this grant. The staff will be leading the implementation of the program and support staff will be utilized to ensure compliance of the program. Staff equipment purchase will total \$5,400 to provide resources for staff to fulfill their obligations. We are proposing contracted services for data support of \$95,000 to meet the data requirements of the grant. For travel expenses we have allocated \$17,600. This funding will be utilized across our entire 9-County region, and we will leverage our other resources and connections to forge new pathways and opportunities for our communities. We will actively assess all our funding sources to leverage all resources to meet the needs of the project.

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