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2021-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas

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INTRODUCTION

The future of work is changing. Automation and new technologies are restructuring entire industries. Workers must master new skills at a rapid pace. Education and workforce training systems must prepare students for a changing economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these trends while also exacerbating the existing racial fault lines in our society and economy.

Workforce development organizations are operating in a new environment in which they are expected to be more strategic, agile, and collaborative than ever before. High-performing workforce boards are becoming more ambitious in their pursuit of broader community and economic goals. They are expanding their services, tools, and partnerships to serve more workers and employers while also driving towards large-scale economic prosperity and opportunity in their service areas.

Within this context, Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas (WSNCT) chose to develop a new strategic plan designed to elevate its impact and create solutions for complex economic and workforce challenges. This plan will guide programs, services, and partnerships delivered in the 14-county North Central Texas Workforce Development area so that the region remains competitive, and workers have access to economic opportunities.

WSNCT is in a prime position to influence change at scale. The organization not only provides direct services to jobseekers but also acts as a leader in the regional workforce ecosystem. To achieve its goals, WSNCT must continue to evolve and expand its role as a thought leader, convener, and catalyst for meaningful changes in the region's workforce and economy.

In 2020, WSNCT engaged TIP Strategies (TIP) to assist in developing a five-year strategic plan that will help the organization expand its impact and prepare for the future. The priorities in this plan were identified by board members in 2020 as core issues for the economic success and advancement of workers. Through a series of workshops with the board and staff, the strategies in this plan were identified as ways for WSNCT to continue to meet its mission while also evolving its core functions and the increasing the scale of its impact.

This strategic plan as a static document, but one that invites revisions and amendments as conditions change. Now, more than ever, stakeholders should take a dynamic approach to implementation—one that revisits this plan on a regular basis to measure progress and to reprioritize strategies and actions as needed.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

The purpose of a strategic plan is to provide a call to action and roadmap for an organization to achieve its mission and goals. An effective strategic plan also communicates an organization's values and priorities to the world. Realizing WSNCT's mission to advance business-driven solutions that promote economic growth and opportunity will require the organization to work in new and innovative ways.

WSNCT board members identified three priorities that build on the organization's vision and mission while focusing resources on areas where WSNCT is best positioned to make an impact in the region. While these priorities will chart a new path for WSNCT, the organization should continue to provide high-quality services that meet community needs and create a skilled workforce prepared for the future.

VISION

WSNCT is the recognized leader in building tomorrow's workforce.

MISSION

To advance business-driven solutions that promote economic growth, opportunity, and a skilled workforce.

VALUES

INCLUSION
Leverage our collective genius.

COMMUNITY
We're in this together.

LEADERSHIP
Courage to shape a better future.

TRUST
Operate with integrity and respect.

PRIORITY AREAS

CHILDCARE QUALITY

CAREER EXPLORATION

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

CORE FUNCTIONS

The bulk of this strategic plan focuses on three goal areas: childcare quality, career exploration, and community partnerships. Later sections of this plan include specific purposes, measures, and actions associated with those three goals; however, it is important to note that WSNCT, like other workforce boards, has several core functions that allow the organization to add value to the region's workforce ecosystem.

Five core functions guide WSNCT's approach to workforce development. While focus is often placed on programs and services to workers, WSNCT can also play a leadership role in the workforce system through its research, marketing, partnerships, and advising functions.

1. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY

High-performing workforce boards operate and support programs that meet the needs of workers and businesses. Childcare, education, and workforce training programs are common programs and/or services provided by workforce boards, including WSNCT.

2. RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

Many workforce boards measure strategic outcomes related to community and economic outcomes to inform program, policy, and investment decisions. Increasing internal capacity to better understand, analyze, and communicate data is a core way for WSNCT to add value to the region's workforce ecosystem.

- Research focused on childcare quality, future of work trends, and high-demand occupations/industries were identified as priority topics.
- While WSNCT should support research and data-driven decisions across all its goals, childcare quality is an area where WSNCT's thought leadership can be transformative (Purpose 1.2 under Childcare Quality).

3. MARKETING AND INFORMATION SHARING

Workforce boards that can clearly communicate a vision, share information, and enhance awareness of workforce issues are more effective in reaching their goals. WSNCT board members and staff indicated a need to share information about its programs and services to a wider audience.

- Conducting a brand audit would shed light on how WSNCT and its programs and services are perceived by key audiences and help set more targeted marketing goals.
- WSNCT should better leverage its digital marketing channels by developing and sharing more information about research, programs, partner organizations, and other resources.

4. CONVENING AND PARTNERSHIPS

Cross-sector partnerships with industry and other partners are now a hallmark activity for high-performing workforce boards. WSNCT should expand sector-based partnerships and industry councils to better link education, workforce, and business goals. Because WSNCT operates at the intersection of many organizations, leveraging its convening power to establish connections and partnerships should be a core function.

5. CONSULTING AND ADVISING

WSNCT can leverage its expertise in education and workforce development to support other organizations in the region. Board members and staff can provide research, information, and other perspectives to inform the work of other organizations with complementary workforce goals. Furthermore, employers also look to WSNCT for its expertise in supporting workers and creating more equitable talent strategies for the region.

PRIORITY 1. CHILDCARE QUALITY

KEY PRIORITY STATEMENT

Improving the quality of childcare in the 14-county North Central Texas Workforce Development area is critical to preparing children for school and supporting their parents in their own learning and development. WSNCT believes that high-quality childcare leads to greater school readiness, long-term educational attainment, and two-generation economic prosperity.

PURPOSES AND ACTIONS

1.1. CHILDCARE COLLABORATIVE. Facilitate collaboration between businesses, early learning programs, and education institutions to harness collective impact and align efforts related to accessibility and affordability of high-quality childcare.

1.1.1. Convene a childcare council with early learning programs, industry leaders, community colleges, and school districts to identify challenges and collaborative solutions for the region.

- Host discussions with industry leaders to understand childcare issues that employers and workers are facing.
- Use surveys, virtual discussions, and town halls to bring together employers and share information about childcare quality.
- Examine available resources, funding, and incentives to encourage employers to expand childcare options for their employees.

1.1.2. Partner with school districts and community colleges to strengthen the link between childcare, early learning, and long-term educational outcomes.

- Support alignment of early childhood outcomes provided by early learning programs and school districts.

1.2. FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH. Expand research and data on the availability of childcare, where childcare deserts exist, and other childcare needs in the region.

1.2.1. Gather information about areas in WSNCT's region that have a disproportionate lack of early learning programs and options.

- Children at Risk released a childcare desert and affordability map that could be a resource for WSNCT to better understand where there is a lack of high-quality childcare.
- Supplement data with qualitative information gathered from employers, providers, and education partners that operate in WSNCT's service area.

1.2.2. Provide information about the talent pipeline for educators and early learning programs, including skills, credentials, salary, and benefits.

- Work with community colleges and other workforce organizations to understand challenges and opportunities to elevate early childhood educators and early learning programs.
- Share information with economic development organizations and employers to identify ways to increase support for professionals providing childcare in the region.

1.3. ELEVATING EDUCATORS. Promote and advocate for elevating the value of early childhood and childcare professionals and their importance to economic and educational outcomes.

1.3.1. Increase the training, including apprenticeships and industry-recognized credentials, for early childhood educators and early learning programs.

- Identify additional resources and incentives to support professional development and continuing education for early childhood and childcare professionals.
- Explore financial incentives that support teachers, directors, and family early learning programs to pursue additional education and training while staying in their roles. [Example: North Carolina's Childcare WAGE$ Project]

1.3.2. Advocate for increased compensation and benefits for early childhood and childcare professionals to support their retention and advancement in the field.

- Partner with regional and statewide education and workforce development organizations to promote policies that improve working conditions for teachers and early learning programs.

OUTCOME INDICATORS

- PROVIDER QUALITY:
  - Percentage of early learning programs that are Texas Rising Star (TRS) Certified or NAEYC accredited
  - Number and percentage of providers by TRS certification levels
- ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY *(DISAGGREGATE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY)*:
  - Average cost of childcare compared to median income
  - Percentage of zip codes that are categorized as childcare deserts
  - Percentage of zip codes that are TRS deserts
- EDUCATOR CREDENTIALS AND COMPENSATION *(DISAGGREGATE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY)*:
  - Number and percentage of childcare workers with a relevant postsecondary degree or industry credential
  - Percentage of childcare and early childhood occupations that pay a living wage

PRIORITY 2. CAREER EXPLORATION

KEY PRIORITY STATEMENT

Opportunities to broaden career awareness and exploration can better connect youth and adults to in-demand jobs as well as fulfill the needs of employers. WSNCT will support career exploration opportunities that equip workers with the skills and knowledge required for success in a rapidly changing and digitally driven economy.

PURPOSES AND ACTIONS

2.1. FUTURE OF WORK. Focus on jobs of the future and skill-based career development that will be required for success in a digitally driven economy.

2.1.1. Convene employers, economic development organizations, and education partners to identify and focus efforts on a set of emerging industries and occupations.

- Partner with regional workforce organizations in developing a regional initiative focused on the future of work.
- Co-identify a limited set of industries, occupations, and/or skills that are vital to the region's economy and future prosperity.

2.1.2. Work with school districts and community colleges to identify core skills (e.g., digital literacy, coding, etc.) that support emerging industries and occupations; expand opportunities related to those skills.

2.2. EXPLORATION PIPELINE. Create a comprehensive pipeline of exploration opportunities starting in early childhood and extending through postsecondary education.

2.2.1. Showcase career exploration best practice opportunities across different age groups from early childhood through K-12 and postsecondary education to identify gaps and create a comprehensive pipeline.

2.2.2. Engage employers in expanding participation in career exploration opportunities that increase in-depth information and access to priority career pathways which will be defined based on employer input.

2.2.3. Support education partners in creating career exploration content (e.g., digital tools, webinars, etc.) focused on target industries and occupations.

2.3. TARGETED DUAL-GENERATION SUPPORT. Increase career exploration opportunities that involve both parents and students to better share information and support the whole family.

2.3.1. Target career exploration activities toward underserved regions where parents and youth lack access and information about future career pathways.

2.3.2. Provide consultations and advice to organizations that expand career exploration opportunities for students and their families.

- Share information on apprenticeships, emerging industries, high-demand occupations, etc. with ISDs and other workforce organizations to expand parental and student awareness.

OUTCOME INDICATORS

- SKILL COMPETENCIES:
  - Number and growth rate of youth participation in training programs focused on core skills (e.g., coding, digital literacy, etc.)
- APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING:
  - Participation in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs aligned with targeted sectors and occupations
- CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT:
  - Number and growth rate of graduates with credential or degree related to a targeted sector or occupation

PRIORITY 3. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

KEY PRIORITY STATEMENT

Achieving ambitious workforce and economic goals will require cross-sector partnerships that create innovative solutions for workers and break down silos between organizations. WSNCT will cultivate partnerships at both strategic and operational levels to build awareness of programs, share information, and leverage public and private resources to meet goals.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

High-performing workforce boards collaborate with a variety of organizations to maximize impact, leverage more resources, and measure success toward over-arching community goals. There is a broad spectrum of ways for boards to collaborate with partners. To pursue ambitious community and economic goals, workforce boards will need to reimagine partnerships, working with both public and private sector organizations with complementary interests.

WSNCT is accustomed to managing formal partnerships with service providers focused on programmatic priorities, such as childcare and career exploration. Such program partnerships are necessary for service delivery and fulfillment of requirements set by funders. Alternatively, strategic partnerships can further WSNCT's mission and vision while supporting long-term priorities beyond service delivery. Table 1 outlines major differences between strategic and program-focused partnerships.

TABLE 1. PARTNERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

Programmatic Partnerships	Strategic Partnerships
► Focuses on program or service delivery ► Facilitates programmatic or operational efficiency ► Guided by short-term performance metrics ► Fulfills requirements from federal or state funding sources ► Governed by formal contracts or memorandums of understanding (MOU) ► Provides workforce board with more direct influence and higher degree of control	► Furthers organizational mission, vision, and values ► Supports long-term relationship building and priorities ► Draws on discretionary and/or coordinated resources ► Does not require formal partnership structure (i.e., can be an informal collaboration) ► Requires indirect influence and provides workforce board with less control

Note: The characteristics shared are generalizations. Partnerships do not have to fulfill every characteristic to be labeled as programmatic or strategic. The information shared should be used to provide directional input, not be treated as a checklist of requirements.

Developing more strategic partnerships as well as bolstering internal infrastructure to manage programmatic partnerships will be central to achieving the goals set forth by board members. Three focus areas for strategic partnerships, including economic development, racial equity and inclusion, and regional partnerships with other workforce organizations, were identified by board members and staff. Figure 1 (next page) provides an overview of WSNCT's partnership focus areas.

FIGURE 1. WSNCT PARTNERSHIP FOCUS AREAS

PURPOSES AND ACTIONS

3.1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Partner with local and regional economic development organizations to better address the workforce needs of employers.

- **3.1.1.** Increase business retention and expansion (BRE) visits with economic development organizations and chambers of commerce.
- **3.1.2.** Convene economic development partners in the region to address shared workforce development challenges.
- **3.1.3.** Collaborate with economic development organizations to build on existing business surveys or create pulse surveys focused on common challenges, including childcare issues, facing employers.

3.2. RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION. Collaborate to build internal and external capacity to serve communities of color and eliminate racial inequities in workforce outcomes.

- **3.2.1.** Disaggregate workforce data by race, ethnicity, and gender to better understand economic and workforce challenges for diverse communities.
- **3.2.2.** Build internal staff capacity to serve diverse communities (e.g., equity training, defining equity and inclusion for WSNCT, etc.).
- **3.2.3.** Align affirmative outreach plans (AOP) under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with other WSNCT equity and inclusion priorities.

3.3. REGIONAL WORKFORCE BOARDS. Work with other workforce partners, including the Regional Workforce Leadership Council (RWLC), to share relevant data about industries, workforce needs, and programs.

- **3.3.1.** Create data sharing partnerships with other workforce organizations and workforce investment boards (WIBs) to better understand workforce needs across the DFW Metroplex and target services.
- **3.3.2.** Identify common challenges or regionwide opportunities to collaborate on critical workforce issues (e.g., preparing for the future of work, increasing quality jobs, supporting economic development priorities, etc.).

3.4. INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE. Develop internal infrastructure to manage formal programmatic partnerships with service providers.

3.4.1. Establish a referral process, vetting mechanism, and success metrics for formal programmatic partnerships focused on service delivery.

3.4.2. Create a centralized inventory of operational partnerships and utilize a customer relationship management (CRM) system in a consistent manner to maintain updated contact information.

- Develop internal training opportunities so that all teams understand how to use the CRM.
- Use reports from the CRM to inform decisions and set priorities of the WSNCT Leadership Team.

OUTCOME INDICATORS

- RESOURCES:
  - Amount ($$) of resources leveraged toward partnership goals from 1) private sector, and 2) other public partners
- PARTNERSHIP VALUE:
  - Partner satisfaction in achieving desired organizational goals
- OTHER:
  - Other partnership outcomes should be jointly agreed upon by partners and focused on the outcomes desired from the collaborative work

STRATEGIC INDICATORS

A critical activity of a high-performing workforce board is the ability to track and measure progress towards a series of strategic indicators. Strategic indicators are high-level community outcomes that the board seeks to influence. Tracking strategic indicators allows a workforce board to understand community challenges and make strategic decisions about how the organization can focus its efforts to best influence change. Moving the needle on these indicators will take combined efforts across multiple organizations.

While WSNCT's efforts alone are likely insufficient in changing these outcomes, the board should still track and focus on these indicators. Regular reporting on strategic indicators allows the board to understand the economic context and workforce challenges that the community faces. It provides a picture of the environment in which programs and services are delivered.

Table 2 provides a list of indicators that is intended to focus WSNCT's staff and board on high-level strategy and outcomes; however, staff will also need to identify programmatic metrics and operational outputs to track progress towards organizational goals. Strategic indicators are not meant to replace organizational metrics but instead focus the board's attention on community outcomes that it seeks to influence. TIP strongly recommends that WSNCT disaggregate indicators as well as internal metrics by race and ethnicity where possible.

TABLE 2. STRATEGIC INDICATORS

PRIORITY ALIGNMENT LEGEND: ↻ Childcare Quality ↻ Career Exploration ↻ Community Partnerships

METRIC	DESCRIPTION	SOURCE	PRIORITY
Provider quality	Percentage of providers that are Texas Rising Star (TRS) Certified or NAEYC accredited	Texas Workforce Commission, in-house data collection	▲
	Number and percentage of providers by TRS certification levels	Texas Workforce Commission, in-house data collection	▲
Childcare access and availability	Average cost of childcare compared to median income	United for ALICE[1], MIT living wage calculator[2]	▲
	Percentage of zip codes that are categorized as childcare deserts	Children at Risk Texas Childcare Desert Map[3]	▲
	Percentage of zip codes that are categorized as TRS deserts	Children at Risk Texas Childcare Desert Map	▲
Educator credentials and compensation	Number and percentage of childcare workers with a relevant postsecondary degree or industry credential	In-house data collection, surveys, and interviews	▲
	Percentage of early childhood and childcare jobs that pay a living wage	In-house data collection, MIT living wage calculator	▲
Skill competencies	Number and growth rate of youth participation in training programs focused on core skills (e.g., coding, digital literacy, etc.)	In-house data collection, surveys, and interviews	▲
Apprenticeship training	Participation in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs aligned with targeted sectors and occupations	In-house data collection, surveys, and interviews	▲
Credential attainment	Number and growth rate of graduates with credential or degree related to a targeted sector or occupation	IPEDS, Emsi – NCES	▲

[1] United for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) research center: https://www.unitedforalice.org/texas.
[2] Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) living wage calculator: https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/48/locations.
[3] Children at Risk Texas childcare desert and affordability map: https://childrenatrisk.org/childcaredeserts/.

Resources	Amount ($$) of resources leveraged toward partnership goals from 1) private sector, and 2) other public partners	In-house data collection, surveys, and interviews	▲
Partnership value	Partner satisfaction in achieving desired organizational goals	Survey	▲
Other	*Other partnership outcomes should be jointly agreed upon by partners and focused on the outcomes desired from the collaborative work*	*TBD*	▲

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE AND PHASING

Strategic plans are living documents. Even in the best of times, economic and workforce contexts shift and evolve at a rapid pace. Developing a strategic plan in the middle of a pandemic will require even more flexibility and agility. Furthermore, many of the purposes and actions in this plan will push WSNCT to diversify its core functions and strengthen areas of work that have not been a big focus in the past. While the priorities and purposes in this plan are important markers for WSNCT's work over the next five years, the implementation details will change.

WSNCT staff should take a phased approach to implementation. Instead of laying out all the details for every priority and purpose, staff can build out detailed implementation plans by year. Table 3 offers a phased approach that will allow staff to take a gradual approach to implementing the priorities of this plan and making any necessary changes (e.g., resources) required for successful implementation. For example, year one of implementation should focus on bringing together new partners, identifying focus areas, and aligning internal infrastructure to support new priorities.

TABLE 3. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE AND PHASING

PURPOSE / ACTION	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
1.1 CHILDCARE COLLABORATIVE					
1.1.1 Convene a childcare council with early learning programs, industry leaders, community colleges, and school districts to identify challenges and collaborative solutions for the region					
1.1.2 Partner with school districts and community colleges to strengthen the link between childcare, early learning, and long-term educational outcomes					
1.2 FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH					
1.2.1 Gather information about areas in WSNCT's region that have a disproportionate lack of early learning programs and options					
1.2.2 Provide information about the talent pipeline for educators and early learning programs, including skills, credentials, salary, and benefits					
1.3 ELEVATING EDUCATORS					
1.3.1 Increase the training, including apprenticeships and industry-recognized credentials, for early childhood educators and early learning programs					
1.3.2 Advocate for increased compensation and benefits for early childhood and childcare professionals to support their retention and advancement in the field					
2.1 FUTURE OF WORK					
2.1.1 Convene employers, economic development organizations, and education partners to identify and focus efforts on a set of emerging industries and occupations					

2.1.2 Work with school districts and community colleges to identify core skills (e.g., digital literacy, coding, etc.) that support emerging industries and occupations; expand opportunities related to those skills					
2.2 EXPLORATION PIPELINE					
2.2.1 Showcase career exploration best practice opportunities across different age groups from early childhood through K-12 and postsecondary education to identify gaps and create a comprehensive pipeline					
2.2.2 Engage employers in expanding participation in career exploration opportunities that increase in-depth information and access to priority career pathways which will be defined based on employer input					
2.2.3 Support education partners in creating career exploration content (e.g., digital tools, webinars, etc.) focused on target industries and occupations					
2.3 TARGETED DUAL-GENERATION SUPPORT					
2.3.1 Target career exploration activities toward underserved regions where parents and youth lack access and information about future career pathways					
2.3.2 Provide consultations and advice to organizations that expand career exploration opportunities for students and their families					
3.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT					
3.1.1 Increase business retention and expansion (BRE) visits with economic development organizations and chambers of commerce					
3.1.2 Convene economic development partners in the region to address shared workforce development challenges					
3.1.3 Collaborate with economic development organizations to build on existing business surveys or create pulse surveys focused on common challenges, including childcare issues, facing employers					
3.2 RACIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSION					
3.2.1 Disaggregate workforce data by race, ethnicity, and gender to better understand economic and workforce challenges for diverse communities					
3.2.2 Build internal staff capacity to serve diverse communities (e.g., equity training, defining equity and inclusion for WSNCT, etc.)					
3.2.3 Align affirmative outreach plans (AOP) under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with other WSNCT equity and inclusion priorities					

3.3 REGIONAL WORKFORCE BOARDS					
3.3.1 Create data sharing partnerships with other workforce organizations and workforce investment boards (WIBs) to better understand workforce needs across the DFW Metroplex and target services					
3.3.2 Identify common challenges or region wide opportunities to collaborate on critical workforce issues (e.g., preparing for the future of work, increasing quality jobs, supporting economic development priorities, etc.)					
3.4 INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE					
3.4.1 Establish a referral process, vetting mechanism, and success metrics for formal programmatic partnerships focused on service delivery					
3.4.2 Create a centralized inventory of operational partnerships and utilize a customer relationship management (CRM) system in a consistent manner to maintain updated contact information					