

WSRCA awarded \$12M Good Jobs Challenge Grant for its REINVEST initiative

Special to The Highlander

The U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration (EDA) recently announced that Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA), the nonprofit community partnership providing no-cost recruitment and employment services in the nine-county Rural Capital Area of Central Texas, was awarded a \$12,087,373 grant for its new skills development initiative, Rural Employers Infuse Vital Economic Success in Texas (REINVEST), to bolster workforce opportunities in high-demand occupations in communities within its workforce development area.

WSRCA is one of only 32 industry-led workforce training partnerships across the country to be awarded the prestigious grant, as part of the \$500 million Good Jobs Challenge funded by President Joe Biden’s American Rescue Plan.

The Good Jobs Challenge is part of a suite of American Rescue Plan programs developed by EDA to equitably distribute its \$3 billion allocation to assist communities nationwide in their efforts to build a better America by accelerating economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and building more resilient, shockproof local economies.

REINVEST will enable six rural counties (Burnet, Blanco, Llano in the west and Bastrop, Lee, Fayette in the east) 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.

The population and demand for services are growing, employers are struggling to hire, and rural workers are struggling to access the quality training and support systems they need to thrive. REINVEST will bridge this gap by linking various resources and stakeholders to transform how these industries recruit, train, and place workers into high-quality jobs.

Understanding the importance of person-to-person relationships and local community expertise, REINVEST will house the sector partnerships in the separate geographies by partnering with Workforce Network, Inc., and Smithville Workforce Training Center to create industry sector partnerships to address the lack of skilled talent for these growing industries and an insufficiently built out workforce training and support system.

Additionally, Third Sector Capital Partners will provide project-wide technical assistance to support system development, project design, equity, sustainability and evaluation.

“Bolstered by our strong industry sectors, our Central Texas communities are recovering quickly from the economic downturn spurred on by the pandemic,” said WSRCA CEO Paul Fletcher. “This award provides us with more resources to bolster those efforts by growing our local talent supply chain to build a stronger workforce pipeline into these key industries and continue providing Texans with the opportunity to forge a sustainable career path to support their families.”

“A trained workforce is essential to ensuring that the United States can compete and succeed in the 21st century,” said Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, in a statement. “Thanks to funding from the American Rescue Plan, the Commerce Department is able to make once-in-a-generation investments in industry-driven, and locally-led workforce systems that will create high-quality jobs and accelerate regional economic growth, especially for underserved communities.”

Funds will bolster construction, healthcare and technology workforce in rural communities



Pictured, from left, are Fay Crider, CEO & President, Workforce Network, Inc., Sara McKinney, Rural Healthcare Initiative Student Pursuing Certified Medical Assistant Training, Gail Davalos, Director of Stakeholder Relations, Workforce Network, Inc., Tim Ols, President, Baylor Scott & White Health - Hill Country Region, The Honorable Ron Cunningham, Llano County Judge, The Honorable James Oakley, Burnet County Judge, Paul Fletcher, CEO, Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area.

Core to REINVEST’s equity strategy is the goal to build economic opportunities for people in rural communities who have historically been underserved by economic development projects and business investments. The project will prioritize training programs and apprenticeships for these populations including immigrants, women, and low-income individuals. REINVEST employer partners include Hill Country Builders Association, Quick Connect Electrical Services, Ascension Seton, Imagine Solutions, CMIT Solutions, among many others.

“We’re grateful for the U.S. Department of Commerce’s investments in our communities through the Good Jobs Challenge and proud of our team’s efforts to develop unique workforce development initiatives to empower our region,” said WSRCA COO Diane Tackett. “REINVEST will directly benefit over 700 workers, more than 100 local employers, and will indirectly benefit nearly 3,000 family members, in addition to supporting over 60,000 community members desperate for healthcare. Together with our local partnerships, we’re building a world-class workforce for Texas, by helping Texans reach their full potential by living, working, and investing in their own communities.”

In its award announcement, the EDA said the 32 winning projects were selected from a competitive pool of 509 applicants.

By partnering with labor unions, community colleges, industry, and other stakeholders, these projects will solve for local talent needs and increase the supply of trained workers and help workers secure jobs in 15 key industries that are essential to U.S. supply chains, global competitiveness, and regional development.

This funding will advance a broad range of sectors—including agriculture and food production, energy and resilience, healthcare, manufacturing and informa-



Pictured, from left, are Pct. 4 Burnet County Commissioner Joe Don Dockery, Burnet County Judge James Oakley and Texas Tech – Highland Lakes representative Celia Merrill.



Sara McKinney, a Rural Healthcare Initiative Student Pursuing Certified Medical Assistant Training, was one of the featured speakers at the announcement event in Marble Falls on Sept. 20.



Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area is the Lead Agency for this project and are contracting with Workforce Network, Inc., to help build the industry sector partnerships with employers, training providers and school districts, and bring the training opportunities into the communities served.



The local announcement event was held on Sept. 20 at Lakeside Pavilion in Marble Falls.

tion technology—jumpstarting the design, development, implementation, and expansion of training programs tailored specifically to each community.



Burnet County Judge James Oakley talks about the benefits of the program Sept. 20 and the participation from the county as the program utilizes an area of the AgriLife Building in Burnet.



The total investment in the three western counties that will be the focus (Blanco, Burnet, and Llano) is approximately \$4.6 million.





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