

Section 2 General Requirements

The System

The Gulf Coast region of southeast Texas is a diverse and growing 13-county area with almost 7 million residents and over 140,000 businesses. The nation's fourth largest city, Houston, sits at the core of the region. Key business sectors include energy, transportation, construction, engineering, and health care. The region houses NASA's Johnson Space Center; the Texas Medical Center, one of the world's largest concentrations of health education, research, and care institutions; the nation's second largest port; and a significant concentration of the world's largest oil and gas/energy companies. The region's workforce is also diverse with a large and growing immigrant population.

Together the Gulf Coast Workforce Board and its operating affiliate Workforce Solutions are the public workforce system for the region. During the last year, Workforce Solutions served more than 400,000 area businesses and people using more than \$200 million in resources.

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board

The Workforce Board is a volunteer board of directors, led by business and appointed by local chief elected officials. In addition to area employers, its membership includes representatives of education, organized labor, economic development organizations, and local community organizations. The Board sets the strategic direction for the Houston-Galveston area's workforce system and its operating affiliate Workforce Solutions.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) is the Board's staff, serving as the system's corporate home office and providing management of and direction to contractors that operate Workforce Solutions.

The Board's mission is to help employers meet their workforce needs and individuals build careers so both can compete in the global economy.

The Board believes in **innovation**, **productivity**, **accountability**, and **results** and promotes these values as essential to its system.

The Board's vision for the future is:

- the Gulf Coast region ranks among the top ten economic regions in the world,
- there is a single, integrated regional workforce system which offers solutions for businesses' human resource needs and helps residents build careers, and
- the Workforce Board sets the regional workforce agenda and is recognized for its excellence.

The Board has designed and planned its system—and is working to leverage its resources in the broader regional community—to achieve the following strategic results:

- Competitive employers;
- An educated workforce;
- More and better jobs
- Higher incomes

Workforce Solutions

Workforce Solutions is the Workforce Board’s operating system. It exists to carry out the Gulf Coast Workforce Board’s mission and contribute toward achieving the Board’s expected results.

Workforce Solutions itself is a large system with several interrelated parts, all focused on adding value for its customers. The system includes Employer Service, Career Offices and two financial aid centers which support them, a variety of community and youth-focused projects, an early education quality project, the region’s adult education consortium, a staff training and development unit, and several vendor networks.

- **Employer Service** is the marketing and sales arm of Workforce Solutions, responding to employers’ demands for skilled workers and providing information to Career Offices about employers’ needs. Employer Service helps employers source and develop talent and provides employers with information and professional consultancy on human resource and workforce topics. Employer Service uses the career office network as a principal source of talent.
- The network of **Career Offices** is the supply side of Workforce Solutions, connecting educated and trained workers to the employers who need them. Using information from the Employer Service staff about what employers need now, career office staff help people *get* a job, *keep* a job or get a *better* job.

Office staff place candidates in jobs, teach them about the best ways to look for work; offer professional advice and current information on the local labor market, careers, and career planning; support individuals who need help to increase their education, acquire the necessary skills for in-demand jobs, and go to work.

- A **Financial Aid Support Office** supports the work of the career offices by determining customers eligible for Workforce Solutions financial aid and helping eligible customers access that aid.
- A **Financial Aid Payment Office** maintains Workforce Solutions’ relationships with vendors who deliver a variety of service for eligible customers, pays those vendors, and tracks and reports financial aid expenditures.

- A group of discrete **Community and Youth Projects** – linked with the career office network – operate in various parts of the region, providing service to special groups of young people or supporting a particular community’s needs for jobs and economic growth.
- Workforce Solutions’ **Early Education and Care Quality** project directs specific technical assistance, consulting, and best practice support for the largest group of our network vendors – early education and child care providers. Its goal is to substantially improve the quality of early education in the region. This project helps assess, review, and support vendors in the *Texas Rising Star* quality rating system.
- The **Gulf Coast Adult Education Consortium** includes multiple providers of adult basic education, literacy instruction, and integrated education/training. Connected to the career offices, the consortium providers offer classes and instruction for more than 20,000 people every year.
- Workforce Solutions’ **Staff Training and Development** unit offers classes, technical assistance and coaching, as well as certifications to support the further development of staff skills. This unit maintains an online learning management system that helps staff and their supervisors schedule training and record achievements.
- Workforce Solutions has several **Vendor Networks** – the largest being our early education/child care provider network – which we develop and maintain to buy a specific service for an individual customer. The second largest of these networks – our education and training network – includes all the providers of skill training, offering courses and programs leading to certifications and degrees for our area’s high-growth, high-skill occupations.

Relationships in the System

Workforce Solutions in an interlocking system of units and contractors that work together in an integrated fashion.

Although individual units may have primary responsibility for a set of customers, specific functions, or a specific service, all parts of the system must rely on each other and work closely together to ensure Workforce Solutions performs, produces, and delivers the highest quality service for its customers.

Our commitment to this high level of interlocking, integrated, and coordinated service is found in the “I AM Workforce Solutions!” customer service principles. The first of these states:

I am Workforce Solutions to my customer.

This means that no matter what job title or what role or what unit a Workforce Solutions staff member has or is in – both contractor and Board staff – each individual staff member represents the entire system when interacting with customers. To our customers, each of us is the entirety of Workforce Solutions. Each of us is responsible for knowing about our system and service –

and having appropriate relationships in our own units and across the system – that enable to us to help a customer.

Prospective bidders can learn more at <http://www.wrksolutions.com/staff-resources/i-am-workforce-solutions>.

Regional Management Team

All contractors participate with Board staff on the Workforce Solutions Regional Management Team. This team works to address procedure and process issues for the system and ensure the system performs and produces to achieve the Board's expected results.

The Regional Management Team meets once per month and includes representatives from the Board staff and contractors operating Employer Service, the career offices, the financial aid payment and support offices, the early education and care quality improvement service, the staff training and development system, and the adult education consortium, as well as staff representing the Employment Service, VETS, and the vocational rehabilitation system.

The Franchise

The Workforce Board's staff establish the franchise requirements which govern how all contractors operate and deliver service under Workforce Solutions name. The franchise requirements (1) describe how contractors will staff and operate the various divisions and relate to one another and the Board staff, (2) establish system policies and operating procedures, and (3) set performance expectations.

Board staff issuances and directives, are the written system franchise requirements. Bidders may access these through the additional resources list in the appendix of this package.

The Board staff will continue to involve contractors in workgroups that help develop, refine, and implement Workforce Solutions franchise requirements.

Performance

We judge our success by:

- Performance on measures set by The Workforce Board and production requirements set by our funding sources;
- Results from quality assurance reviews; and
- Feedback from our customers.

Performance. The Board has developed a set of measures to judge how our system is achieving the Board’s expected results. The Board’s current measures and annual targets for each measure are in the Resources section of this request.

Production. Our funding sources have a set of expectations for our system’s performance as well. Sometimes these expectations align with the Board’s measures, and sometimes they do not. We call these expectations “production” requirements. We must meet production in order to continue to receive the funding necessary to keep our system operating. We expect contractors to meet contracted annual targets for production to continue receiving contracts. Our current year production targets are in the Resources section.

Customer feedback. We expect each of our units to maintain on-going customer feedback mechanisms that solicits, process and shares back to the system information on what customers think of our service and how customers think we can improve it. From time to time, the Board commissions system-wide customer service surveys and mystery shopping to add to this feedback.

System Policy and Procedures

Standards & Guidelines, Issuances

- Our website has a section titled Staff Resources that includes policies and procedures for Workforce Solutions system. Standards and Guidelines set franchise requirements and Issuances provide updates with new information for operations.

Marketing and Communications

- The Board staff is the central office for marketing and communications related to the Board’s regional system. The marketing standards and guidelines describe how Workforce Solutions is marketed, use of Workforce Solutions name and logo, and marketing and communications protocols and requirements for contractors.
- Contractors may not use their corporate names or identities when operating any part of the system. Contractor staff are required to present themselves to customers and the general public as Workforce Solutions staff.
- The Board staff plans and directs all marketing and system communications efforts. Contractors’ involvement in marketing and communications efforts is at the Board staff’s direction.
- The Employer Service Division markets to employers. Other division’s contractors and staff are strictly prohibited from marketing, or engaging in marketing activities, to employers, except at the direction and under supervision of Employer Service or Board staff.
- The Board staff coordinates and directs contacts with the media.

- The Board staff develops and maintains Workforce Solutions' website and the system's toll-free telephone number.

Quality Assurance

- The Board staff sets standards for quality assurance, financial, and compliance monitoring of Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast operations and contracts.
- Teams made up of Board and contractor monitors conduct quality assurance reviews to insure contractors are meeting compliance standards and operating in accordance with franchise requirements.
- Federal and state requirements for workforce services are integrated into common tools.
- Board staff also conduct reviews of contractor expenditures, billings, payments, and inventory and financial systems on a regular basis throughout the year.

Information Systems

- The Board staff sets requirements, provides, and maintains Workforce Solutions management information system (MIS). The Workforce Solutions' MIS is important in delivering service to customers, reporting on service delivery, and judging system and contractor performance. The MIS consists of several pieces of software and a wide-area computer network that connects all parts of the system.
- ✓ **WorkInTexas.com** is Workforce Solutions' principal service delivery and customer information system. It is a web-enabled, online job matching service that also reports performance. Staff in both the Employer Service and Career Office divisions use WorkInTexas, which is provided and maintained by the Texas Workforce Commission.
- ✓ **The Workforce Information System of Texas (TWIST)** is a customer information and service management database which primarily tracks customers receiving Expanded Service and Financial Aid. It tracks service to customers, helps staff manage service delivery, and reports performance outcomes. TWIST is used by career office, Support Office and payment office staff. It is provided and maintained by the Texas Workforce Commission.
- ✓ **Workforce Solutions Wide-Area Network** is a wide-area computer network that connects all parts of the system to each other and customers and staff to the Internet. The Board staff pays for and maintains the lines that run from individual contractor locations to H-GAC. Contractors pay for and maintain local-area networks in the local career offices or other service sites under specifications set by the Board staff. Contractors purchase computer equipment—using contract funds and specifications set by the Board staff—for customer and staff use. The Board owns all computer equipment purchased by contractors, and equipment currently in the system remains in the system if contractors change.

Financial Management

- The Board's revenues, which it uses to fund contracts and operations, are federal and state funds, subject to the requirements for use of public money. We expect contractors to understand and use applicable federal Office of Management and Budget cost and administrative circulars, the Governor of Texas' Uniform Grant and Contract Management Standards, the Texas Workforce Commission's financial manual for workforce, and applicable laws and regulations in budgeting and expending the public funds in their Board contracts.
- It is the objective of the Workforce Board to place the maximum amount of resources at points in the system where customers are directly served. All funds we contract for administrative and management activities of contractors will be spent in support of direct service delivery.
- All contractors must demonstrate familiarity with and the ability to abide by the terms of H-GAC's contracts, including the requirements for financial management.
- Bidders must submit a copy of their organization's most recent financial comprehensive audit, along with audited financial statements, when submitting a proposal to us.
- We encourage contractors to consider implementing salary incentive programs for their staff, linked to the Board's performance requirements. The Board staff will review any contractor incentive program before agreeing to fund it.
- Contractors are not required to adhere to one set of travel policies – each may use its own internal policy, as long as the Board staff has reviewed the policy before its implementation and agreed to fund it.
- Contractors must develop cost allocation plans that properly allocate costs between management/administrative functions and operations, as well as among the various federal revenue sources that fund Workforce Solutions contracts. Contractors' cost allocation plans must meet requirements of the Texas Workforce Commission's workforce financial manual and be reviewed by the Board staff. We will ask contractors to develop their allocation plans when negotiating a contract budget.
- Contractors must have a policy to control, track and account for cash substitutes used as financial aid for our resident customers.
- More information on financial management requirements is contained in the additional resources part of this request.