

High-Skill, High-Growth Occupations

Petition Process to Add and Drop Occupations

February 2025

(rev. January 2026)

Background

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board, through its operating affiliate Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast, is committed to providing basic labor market information and services to all employers and residents across the 13-county region. The bulk of the resources available for employer service are, however, targeted to employers representing industries most likely to employ significant concentrations of workers and provide above average wages.

While these employers are likely to have needs ranging along the entire spectrum of occupations that make up their workforces, those with chronic labor shortages in high-skill occupations have top priority for service by Workforce Solutions or one of its partners in the regional workforce system. The Board believes that helping these employers solve their workforce problems will benefit both employers and residents of the region and ultimately yield the best return on the taxpayer's investment.

The Board targets the resources it controls – and influences those controlled by its partners in the regional workforce system – with its strategic plan and a series of supporting lists: 1) *Targeted Industries*, 2) *Where the Jobs Are*, and 3) *High-Skill, High-Growth Scholarship Eligible Occupation List*.

The High-Skill, High-Growth Scholarship Eligible Occupation List

The High-Skill, High-Growth Scholarship Eligible Occupation list, or simply High-Skill High-Growth Occupation List is made up of high-skill, above average-paying occupations critical to the Gulf Coast region's economic future. They offer the best job opportunities to area residents now and will likely continue doing so over the next decade. These occupations are found in many industries in the region, not just in those on the Targeted Industries list.

Qualifying Criteria

As of February 2025, occupations must meet the following criteria to be included on the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation List:

- 50% or more of total occupational employment must be found in Targeted Industries as of 2032
- Projected employment in 2032 must be greater than or equal to the median for all occupations in the region ($\geq 1,668$)
- Projected growth rate must be greater than or equal to the average of all occupations in the region ($\geq 14.9\%$)
- Minimum education requirements of a high school diploma combined with moderate on-the-job training, long-term on-the-job training, apprenticeship, internship/residency or work experience in a related occupation

- Median hourly wages must be greater than or equal to the OEWS 2023 median wage for all occupations in the region (\geq \$22.54)
- Occupations found on previous High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list and which meet four of the five criteria immediately above are eligible to be retained

Student Scholarships

Students preparing for employment or looking to advance their careers within occupations on the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list are eligible for – but not guaranteed – scholarships from Workforce Solutions or one of its partners.

Scholarship counseling is available to assist resident customers seeking education for employment in other occupations.

Functions of the Lists

The Where the Jobs Are List is a list of occupations likely to provide the largest number of job opportunities in the region over the next ten years regardless of education and training requirements, future growth, or wages, and as such is largely informational in nature. In contrast, the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list focuses workforce investments on occupations with the greatest potential for future demand by employers. Furthermore, many high-skill, high-growth occupations are designated as Scholarship Eligible whereby Workforce Solutions or one of its partners may provide student scholarships to cover some or all costs of the education or training required for employment.

Modifying the Lists

Internal – We will review all lists every two years and update them as new labor market information (either statistical data or local labor market intelligence) becomes available. New information may result in fewer or more occupations qualifying for a list, a change in the mix of the targeted industries or occupations, or some combination thereof.

External – An employer or group of employers may petition the Gulf Coast Workforce Board at any time to add or drop occupations from the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list and/or request a change to an occupation's scholarship eligibility. Please note that petitions by training providers are not accepted. There are four steps to the process:

- 1) Contact the Workforce Board.
Employers wanting to petition the Gulf Coast Workforce Board to amend the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list should contact Board staff by email to econanalysis@wrksolutions.net
- 2) Collect information.
Board staff will work with the petitioner(s) to clarify the nature of the request and provide statistical and/or local labor market intelligence documenting the validity of the request. Submission of information including but not limited to the following is strongly suggested:

- Overall justification for the petition to amend the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list
- The number of jobs in the occupation across the Gulf Coast greater-Houston region along with evidence that the occupation approaches some combination of the High-Skill High-Growth qualifying criteria noted above
- The petitioner’s projected short, medium, and long-term hiring needs including the number current filled and open positions within the petitioner’s organization and among industry peers if known. The inclusion of links to active job postings or digital copies as supporting documentation is recommended.
- Details on entry-level, median, and full performance salaries for the occupation in question offered by the petitioner and/or industry peers
- A description of efforts to source talent via local education and training institutions. If hiring directly from these institutions has occurred, provide details on the number of past hires and their current employment status
- Detailed descriptions of any formal credentials, certifications, degrees, and/or licenses required to perform this role. Please identify any local postsecondary training providers offering these credentials along with placement rates of completers
- A description of efforts to collaborate with industry peers through a trade association or similar organization to address talent shortages, retention issues, or skills deficiencies among incumbent workers

If a petitioner is requesting an occupation be added to or removed from the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list and/or an evaluation of an occupation’s scholarship eligibility, the petition should clearly make a case for why the occupation warrants an exception to be made and include supporting documents, data, and/or testimonials and surveys.

Board staff will be available to collect information on unmet need for occupations based on informal surveys of employers in the region not limited to those making the petition. Survey data in support of a petition should document demand well in excess of current or projected supply from the education pipeline, high employment rates for graduates from existing programs providing education and training for the occupation, and median wages of at least \$22.54 per hour based on 2023 OEWS wage data for the Gulf Coast Region.

Occupations added to the list as the result of an employer petition are identified on the High-Skill, High-Growth Occupation list with the letter “p” following their title.

The remaining steps to the petition process are as follows:

- 3) Internal Review and Recommendation – The Board’s staff will make a recommendation to Board staff management within 15 days of completing step 2

4) Receive a decision

The Board's chief executive officer will make a final decision within 30 days of getting a staff recommendation. Board staff will notify the petitioner via formal written response