



# 2022 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

## NOMINATION FORM

### APPLICANT:

Workforce Solutions Borderplex

Name of Community or Workforce Board

Bianca Cervantes, Communications Director

Contact Name and Title

Bianca.Cervantes@borderplexjobs.com

915-252-0712

Email Address

Telephone Number

250,001 and above

Community Population (as of the most recent census or as officially marketed)

Leila Melendez (must be individual TEDC member, not organization)

TEDC Member Name

### SUMMARY:

Please attach a brief description of the workforce development initiative. Within this description, address the awards criteria of innovativeness, transferability, community commitment, measured objectives and secondary benefits. Please provide the start date of the project and completion date, if applicable.

**The program or initiative is to be for the period of January 1 to December 31, 2021.** Please provide measurable results for that 12-month period. The workforce development initiative can be a long-term project, however, it must show measurable results in the award year. The nomination can be no longer than five conventionally formatted 8.5" x 11" pages (including the one-page nomination form).

**Please submit this completed nomination form and your project summary via email to Amy Swank at [amy@texasedc.org](mailto:amy@texasedc.org) on or before 5:00 PM, Friday, May 6, 2022.** You may also submit up to five (5) photographs of your workforce project as separate jpeg files.

Questions regarding the Workforce Excellence Award program or procedures should be directed to Amy Swank, Vice President, Texas Economic Development Council, [amy@texasedc.org](mailto:amy@texasedc.org), 512-480-8432.

TEDC 2022 Workforce Development Committee Chair  
Christine Allen, Lubbock Economic Development Alliance

## **Nextforce Solutions – Multimedia Consultants for [Rise & Grind](#) and [Workforce Wednesday](#)**

**Start Date: August 12, 2021**

**Premiere Date: October 13, 2021**

**Season ongoing**

During the span of COVID-19, the youth population experienced varying degrees of life disruptions ranging from family dynamics, education quality, mental stability and the world of work, among other challenges. These tectonic shifts forced the semi-permanent collapse of day-to-day norms, leaving a blank canvas for reparative, sustainable solutions in the realms of workforce and economic development.

In response, Workforce Solutions Borderplex (WSB) adapted to pandemic restrictions and repercussions while maintaining a mission to inspirationally connect to youth while infusing the quality of education with a hands-on, holistic skills development approach. Pre-pandemic, WSB relied on Grind Talk, a TANF-funded Career Outreach program in partnership with Texas Workforce Commission to connect to youth in the classroom. This future-planning empowerment initiative guides students through career preparation and vision building. In *normal* circumstances, the program proved successful as Grind Talk outreach specialists engaged with thousands of students in high schools across the region. When schools faced the pandemic's unpredictable and intermittent closures, virus exposure, and tough adjustments of online schooling, a new solution was necessary for not only the Grind Talk program application, but to revitalize students' morale both in present context and future envisioning. This apex of inspirational demand birthed a new approach to developing youth for the workforce despite the longstanding pandemic cloud. The young workforce, deemed as our Borderplex **Nextforce**, would collaborate to revive the Grind Talk initiatives at a critical time for their age group and deliver [Rise & Grind](#), a production project that addressed the principles of career prep, resurrected student motivation, and became the new core principle in youth career readiness for WSB.

### **Innovation**

Some background on the foundation of [Rise & Grind](#) involves the collision of needs in 2019 that ignited its production precursor, Workforce Wednesday. In this high school partnership that involved a media technology class, WSB took its need for cost-efficient production services into the studio-modeled classroom. In a win-win collaboration, Workforce Wednesday became a weekly Youtube broadcast that promoted WSB success stories, programs, and services while providing extensive hands-on experience to students as the directors and producers of the project. This collaboration model was replicated and expanded to more schools with an innovative, repurposed approach to create [Rise & Grind](#), a Youtube edutainment series that applied the principles of Grind Talk career readiness.

In the Grind Talk production round, WSB scaled the impact of hands-on classroom workforce development to three high schools focusing on multiple industry skillsets: Journalism & Creative Storytelling, Media Production, and Marketing with a healthy dose of Project and Logistical Management. WSB tapped into the eager talent available in classrooms that would invoke a new sense of purpose within the curriculum. Beyond awakening their motivation, the project provided a safe platform for students to express themselves authentically absent of "grown-up" lecturing as they later revealed in their enthusiastic feedback.

In mid-August of 2021, the WSB Communications Department and large group of 50+ students were challenged to transfer the in-person classroom experience of Grind Talk into a virtual, engaging delivery. After several months of ongoing health and economic crises, online schooling fatigue, and spikes in mental health concerns, the solution would require more than a replication of Powerpoint slides and voiceovers to effectively inspire a captivation for post-high school career preparation. Innovation emerged not from the grown-ups guiding the youth, rather, from a platform where youth were given the leadership reigns to guide themselves. In a span of six weeks and over 2,000 combined hours, [Rise & Grind](#) was produced as a six-part Netflix-like series with a dramatic story arch integrating principles of career readiness and access to preparatory state resources. The triple-school collaboration was comprised of WSB's original [Workforce Wednesday](#) Media Tech class from Riverside HS, a Theater Drama class from Hanks HS, and a Marketing class from Montwood HS.

Theater students worked as a multi-project management team to establish a story line, consult and co-write screenplays and relatable dialogue, and rehearsed tirelessly to deliver authentic performances. On the production end, the group assisted a professional crew with set design, direction, schedule coordination and technical assistance.

The Media Tech students repurposed screenplays into digestible newscast-like Grind Talk blurbs to reinforce the lessons learned for the duo-protagonist drama as part of a final scene wrap-up for each episode. This project refined their skills in logistical management, writing, and journalistic presentation. Students also polished off production skills in the areas of equipment handling, studio timing and coordination, and audio/video editing with components in animation.

In the world of Communication and Outreach, the Marketing Class created teacher toolkits associated with each episode lesson to incentivize viewership in classrooms. The group acted as the *Montwood Marketing Agency* to develop, pitch, and execute a promotional strategy for [Rise & Grind](#) that involved social media marketing, public relations, guerilla tactics complete with campaign budgets and project management. The Montwood team submitted their project to DECA Inc., a non-profit organization that prepares emerging marketing leaders that led them to win local and state DECA competitions.

Above developing strong industry-specific skills, the high-pressure making of the Rise & Grind project for these students organically implemented the soft and hard skill components of Grind Talk to include leadership, problem solving, time management, budgeting, teamwork, and conflict resolution among several others. The Rise & Grind production is now a staple for the Grind Talk Outreach Specialists, whom have resumed in-person classroom presentations that now integrate the edutainment component of the series.

### **Transferability**

Utilization of the Nextforce for organizational objectives of a workforce development board while synchronously benefitting the youth project developers is an easily transferable ecosystem malleable to a multitude of industries and organizations. In the case of multimedia consultants:

1) The production of effective *edutainment* content by way of youth collaboration with concurrent implementation of an organization's program objectives was mutually beneficial. The [Rise & Grind](#) series succeeded in implementing youth career readiness objectives that favors the both the creators of the series in direct skills development and its respective youth audience consuming the material. All touchpoints are replicable in following a template guide for execution.

2) [Workforce Wednesday](#) expanded our organization's capacity with the integration of untapped, fresh talent available in the Nextforce, fusing workforce development with the education sector. This too is an easily replicable project provided the right team is in place to execute. (See their self-titled story about the inaugural group here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rp1R11\\_nt4&list=PLsBQ4aZuAZwzYOYLFJOzxGV\\_Ef0gbH4cv&index=76](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rp1R11_nt4&list=PLsBQ4aZuAZwzYOYLFJOzxGV_Ef0gbH4cv&index=76))

Further, the models for Rise & Grind and [Workforce Wednesday](#) is adaptable to any organization seeking to innovate and connect with youth while connecting operational opportunities and solutions. An effective team would be comprised of members with expert knowledge in journalism production supplemented with a contracted film production team and the willingness of a Nextforce faction in partnership with a local school district. The backbone of project execution lies on project management proficiency and aptitude for motivating and communicating with youth while providing a platform that cultivates confidence, agency and creative visualization. These components, when orchestrated effectively, can align seamlessly with organizational objectives. Every touchpoint of both approaches can be replicated and tailored to address the intended community and are not exclusive to workforce development organizations or the multimedia industry.

### **Community Commitment and Leverage**

The detriment of educational quality in the pandemic era has yet to be fully realized for years to come, with the domino effect threatening future economic and workforce progress. WSB and partnering school districts understand this, as educators have frontline visibility to the mental and academic fallout as a result of COVID-19 that will ultimately impact the quality of incoming talent pools for the future workforce. Committed to remedying bleak future outlooks, WSB is dedicated to the application of the Nextforce concept with continuance of Workforce Wednesday, future [Rise & Grind](#) seasons, and the evolution of integrating education and workforce development with future economic prosperity in mind. Additionally, repeated integration of state-funded career readiness and college preparation tools will supplement youth with definitive sources for planning.

By leveraging formula funds such as WIOA, SNAP, and TANF in collaboration with support from local school districts, WSB will commit to expanding the Nextforce initiative beyond multimedia consultants with the integration of business solutions spanning multiple industries.

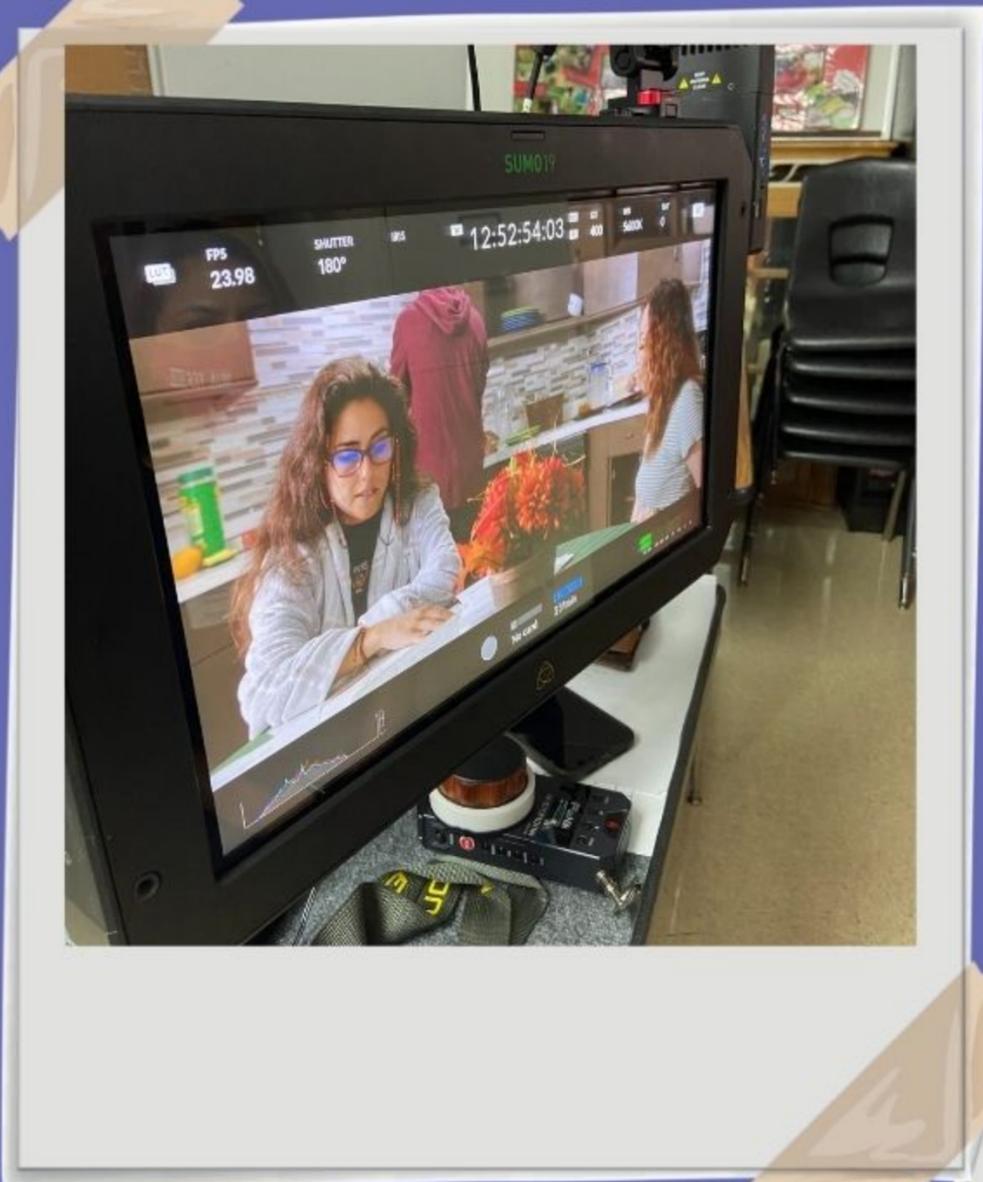
### **Measured Objectives**

The goals of the Workforce Wednesday and [Rise & Grind](#) projects were multi-pronged. Project leadership by way of allowing the flow of raw, visionary energy from students ignited a fire of creativity and innovation. Originally, Workforce Wednesday aimed at providing youth with hands-on experience while building WSB brand awareness and promoting programs and services. With extensive success on both fronts in Workforce Wednesday's collective production of 85 stories and 60 Riverside HS students, the concept evolved into the solution for the Grind Talk: [Rise & Grind](#) initiative. Pre-COVID-19, Grind Talk had succeeded in engaging with thousands of students in hundreds of classes on the topics of career readiness, labor market information and future planning motivation with the support of TANF funds. The onset of the pandemic shuttered Grind Talk's ability to outreach and inspire during 2020, however during the final months of 2021 upon publishing of the [Rise & Grind](#) series in October, the episodes have reached over 6,000 students in classrooms. Singular Youtube views equate to full classroom 'viewing parties' averaging 20-30 students per view. Focus groups with students and teachers reveal the storyline is effective with career readiness retention and boosting confidence in future planning.

Additionally, the [Rise & Grind](#) and Workforce Wednesday initiatives tap into the foundational principles of economic development with the day-to-day efforts each student invested into the programs. The continuous exposure to both projects as part of their studies cemented an array hard and soft skills not commonly present in academic curriculums. The project allowed for work experience to be baked into classroom instruction, with the ingredients of Nextforce intellect that brought a flavor to the youth audience no grown up could have ever concocted. Impact of the program has yet to be measurable with data, but the benefits are enough to perpetuate the Nextforce Solutions concept into a commonplace concept within the Workforce Solutions programmatic model organization-wide. In a post-pandemic workforce, the Nextforce generation needs a Nextforce mindset to thrive.

### **Secondary Benefits**

Both Workforce Wednesday and Rise & Grind project provided extensive work experience with brand journalism and effective storytelling, media relations, production, project management, marketing, soft skills, and continuous career readiness mentorship from Communications experts at WSB. With Workforce Wednesday, the productions educated the general public about programs and services that changed the mistaken stigma of identifying WSB as the unemployment office while reinforcing the impact of success stories and brand awareness. The Texas Workforce Commission in April of 2020 requested a statewide presentation from WSB to educate a Texas-sized audience about the development and execution of Workforce Wednesday to inspire similar brand journalism concepts throughout the state. In March and April of 2022, WSB was invited to present the Rise and Grind project at the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP) and the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) as an innovative approach to workforce development utilizing social media. The sequel to Workforce Wednesday with Rise & Grind expanded to three schools, further driving the efficacy of workforce development and education partnerships, a model that will be replicated in future program objectives at WSB. This youth Nextforce model is the future of not just workforce development, but the foundational necessity for economic development practices involving digital literacy, early childhood education and childcare, entrepreneurship and so much more. Workforce Solutions Borderplex will lead the way in allowing youth to lead themselves across all sectors.



**QUIET ON SET!**



# ***TEEN PRODUCTION TEAM***



# **TEEN PROMOTION AGENCY**



## ***HOW IT'S GOING...***

- **Empowering Teens Behind the Scenes**
- **Mobilized the Future Workforce**
- **Provided a Platform for Youth Voices**
- **Created an Opportunities For Work Experience**
- **Career Prep Tools for 100+ Students in the Making**

- 6 episodes, 6 bumpers, 1 trailer and 47 minutes of EDUTAINMENT
- 15+ Topics and Soft Skills Covered
- Full Grind Talk Rebrand
- Grind Talk Toolkit Integrated Into New NextforceSolutions.com website
- **And we're only just getting started!**