



2026 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION FORM

APPLICANT:

The Borderplex Alliance

Name of Community or Workforce Board

Natalie Littlefield Pond

Contact Name and Title

Natalie Littlefield - Chief Strategy Officer

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Email Address

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

877,858 MSA

TEDC Member Name (TEDC membership is held by the individual, not the organization)

SUMMARY and INSTRUCTIONS:

Please attach a brief description of the workforce development initiative. Within this description, address the award criteria of Innovativeness, Transferability, Community Commitment and Leverage, 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, 2025. 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 within the award year.

Important Information:

- The submittal must be the application page and four conventionally formatted 8.5" x 11" pages. Therefore, no more than five (5) pages in total for the award submission. Any award submissions that exceeds the five-page limit will be disqualified.
- The project or program may not have been submitted previously for a TEDC Workforce Excellence Award.

Please submit this completed nomination form and your project summary via email to Crystal at crystal@texasedc.org on or before 5:00 PM, Friday, May 8, 2026. You may also submit up to five (5) photographs of your workforce project as separate jpeg or png files.

Application Fee: There is a \$100 fee to apply for the TEDC's Workforce Excellence Award. An invoice will be generated upon receipt of the application.

I. INNOVATIVENESS

The program or project demonstrates innovative approaches to institutional, financial, technical or legal aspects of workforce development, talent attraction and economic development.

The Integrated AI Workforce and Leadership Training Program addressed one of today's most pressing workforce challenges: preparing workers to integrate emerging technology while preserving the human qualities that drive trust, communication, and performance.

Rather than delivering a traditional technology course, the program connected artificial intelligence to core workplace competencies. Participants learned responsible use of tools such as ChatGPT, effective prompting techniques, how to recognize misleading information, and best practices for using emerging technologies in professional settings. At the same time, the training reinforced empathy, active listening, consultative questioning, communication, critical thinking, and leadership.

The program was especially relevant for financial sector professionals, where customer trust and responsiveness remain essential. Raiz Federal Credit Union participated in two customized four-hour sessions for 29 call center and frontline employees. The model was also adapted for 14 regional professionals through Progress 321 and approximately 120 students through the UTEP Miners Leadership Summit.

The curriculum was informed by employer needs identified through the 2024 Business Services Industry Skills Gap Report and refined through conversations with learning and development teams and IT professionals. This ensured the training aligned with real workforce priorities rather than generalized technology trends, translating employer-identified technology and service-skill gaps into a practical workforce development model for a high-demand regional industry.

The initiative also demonstrated innovation through rapid growth and adaptability. Originally designed to deliver two customized trainings, the program expanded to four sessions serving frontline employees, regional professionals, and university students. By combining technology awareness with professional skill-building, the initiative equipped participants to adapt to workplace change while remaining competitive in an evolving economy.

“Through our partnership with The Borderplex Alliance, we were able to reach audiences across industry, finance, non-profits, and education, creating opportunities for future collaboration. Upskilling has the greatest impact when it is practical, approachable, and equitable, giving participants a clear path to apply emerging technology in their day-to-day work.” — Ivan Gris, Co-founder of Boost Human and Deputy Chief Technology Officer, City of El Paso.

II. TRANSFERABILITY

The program or project shows potential use by other economic development agencies, workforce groups or practitioners for similar opportunities or solutions. The program or project

should be readily transferable to comparable situations in other communities.

The program is highly transferable due to its modular structure, which allows content to be tailored by employer, industry, audience, and skill level. Started in 2025, its adaptability has already been demonstrated through implementation with multiple target groups:

- Raiz Federal Credit Union: Customer service, communication, empathy, consultative questioning, and responsible workplace technology use.
- Progress 321: Leadership development, communication, presentation preparation, and professional effectiveness.
- UTEP Miners Leadership Summit: Career readiness, workforce adaptability, and maintaining the “human advantage” in a changing workplace.

While the initiative initially focused on financial services, it was successfully refined to serve business services, emerging professionals, and other workforce audiences. This demonstrates that the model can respond to workforce needs across multiple industries, professions, and age groups.

The structure can be readily replicated by economic development organizations, workforce boards, chambers of commerce, educational institutions, and employer partnerships. Core elements include employer-informed curriculum design, flexible training formats, practical technology instruction, responsible-use guidance, leadership development, soft-skills training, and participant feedback.

Because the program does not require costly equipment or advanced infrastructure, it can be implemented in both regional and local communities. It is especially relevant for industries where technology is changing workplace practices while human interaction remains essential, including financial services, customer service, healthcare, logistics, education, and professional services. The model is also transferable to Texas communities such as San Antonio and Laredo, which share similar industry, border, and logistics dynamics with the Borderplex region.

III. COMMUNITY COMMITMENT AND LEVERAGE

The program or project makes it possible for others to achieve a greater impact by joining public/private participation or by intergovernmental or state/local involvement to leverage resources.

This initiative brought together economic development strategy, employer input, technology expertise, and educational audiences to address regional workforce needs. The Binational Technology Council transformed skills gap findings into action by designing and launching the program, while Boost Human delivered the training sessions. Raiz Federal Credit Union engaged frontline employees, Progress 321 expanded access to regional professionals, and UTEP’s Miners Leadership Summit extended the initiative to university students preparing to enter the workforce.

This partnership structure allowed the program to leverage existing community platforms instead of building new systems from scratch. Employer meetings, professional networks, and university leadership programming became direct channels for workforce readiness and professional development.

The initiative also demonstrates how regional research can lead to regional action. By aligning economic development organizations, employers, technology partners, and educational institutions, the program created a coordinated response to workforce change.

“By integrating Artificial Intelligence into our leadership framework, we are preparing leaders with stronger decision-making and strategic foresight. Partnering with the Borderplex Alliance was essential in turning this vision into reality and launching a leadership workshop that engaged at least 25% of our membership.” — Analisa Cordova, Executive Director of Progress321.

IV. MEASURED OBJECTIVES

Results demonstrate a specific objective that the program or project was able to achieve.

Program performance exceeded initial objectives in both scale and reach, demonstrating strong regional demand for customized workforce training focused on emerging workplace technologies and professional development.

Actual outcomes significantly surpassed initial goals:

- 4 customized training sessions delivered
- Approximately 160 individuals reached
- Approximately 10 times the original participant target served
- Tailored curriculum developed for each audience
- Participant completion achieved for all delivered sessions

Initial objectives included:

- Deliver 2 customized training cohorts
- Serve a minimum of 16 participants
- Enroll at least 8 employees per cohort
- Develop curriculum tailored to employer skill needs
- Achieve 100% participant completion

Training outcomes included:

- Raiz Federal Credit Union: 29 call center and frontline employees trained through two customized four-hour sessions focused on communication, customer interaction, and responsible technology use.
- Progress 321: 14 regional professionals trained through a one-hour leadership workshop centered on workplace effectiveness and communication.
- UTEP Miners Leadership Summit: approximately 120 students reached through a one-hour discussion on career readiness and the future of work.

Participant feedback from the Raiz training sessions demonstrated strong satisfaction and workplace relevance:

- 94% reported being very satisfied with the training content.
- 88% reported that the topics covered were highly relevant to their daily work.

Participants identified learning the ChatGPT tool, recognizing misleading information, avoiding bias, empathy exercises, and active listening as some of the most valuable topics presented.

These results demonstrate that the initiative went beyond introducing a new concept. The program connected technology to real workplace needs, strengthened professional development opportunities, and validated strong regional demand for customized workforce training. By expanding from two planned trainings to four delivered sessions serving approximately 160 participants, the initiative demonstrated both the flexibility of the model and the growing need for workforce adaptability across industries.

V. SECONDARY BENEFITS

Produces ancillary benefits to other economic activities in the area.

The program strengthened workforce readiness and professional development across the region by helping participants understand how emerging technologies can support, rather than replace, essential human skills.

For financial institutions, the initiative showed how technology can improve customer interactions, communication, and workplace effectiveness. For regional professionals, it demonstrated how technology can enhance leadership, presentations, and daily operations. For university students, it provided timely guidance on preparing for an evolving workforce while maintaining strong human-centered skills.

The program also helped shift the regional conversation around artificial intelligence from uncertainty to opportunity by teaching participants how to use emerging technologies responsibly, confidently, and effectively. Additional benefits included increased regional awareness, greater participant confidence, expanded collaboration between economic development organizations and technology leaders, and validation of a training model that can be adapted across industries.

Overall, the Integrated AI Workforce and Leadership Training Program transformed an identified employer need into action, exceeded its original objectives, and created a replicable framework for preparing workers, students, and professionals for the future of work. These benefits support broader economic activity by strengthening the regional talent pipeline and helping high-demand industries adapt to technological change while preserving the human skills that drive long-term competitiveness.