



2026 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION FORM

APPLICANT:

Tyler Economic Development Council

Name of Community or Workforce Board

Scott Martinez, President & CEO

Contact Name and Title

smartinez@tedc.org

Email Address

903-312-4335

Telephone Number

115,000 (City of Tyler); 255,000 (Tyler MSA)

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

Scott Martinez

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.

From Survey to Skills: Building Tyler’s Forklift Workforce Pipeline

Tyler Forklift Certification Initiative

Initiative Overview

This initiative didn’t start as a program idea — it started with a problem.

As part of the *Pure Tyler Strategic Plan (2022)*, the Tyler Economic Development Council (TEDC) conducted a workforce survey of local employers to better understand hiring challenges. One issue surfaced consistently across logistics, manufacturing, and distribution sectors: companies were struggling to find certified forklift operators. The shortage was slowing hiring timelines and, in some cases, impacting operations.

That provided a clear signal from the market.

In response to the identified workforce need, Tyler Junior College (TJC) and LTS Material Handling (LTS) collaborated to develop a targeted solution — a forklift operator certification program designed to quickly prepare job-ready workers for high-demand roles. The program was fully implemented in 2025.

Material handling may not always be visible, but it underpins nearly every industry. From manufacturing facilities to distribution centers, goods do not move without trained operators. As one industry partner noted, “Everything shuts down if we are not supporting that.”

This initiative ensures that doesn’t happen — by aligning training directly with employer demand and creating a reliable workforce pipeline for critical roles.

Innovativeness

What sets this initiative apart is not just the program itself, but how it was developed and delivered.

Employer-Driven from the Start

The initiative began with direct employer input, flipping the traditional workforce model. Instead of building a program and hoping demand follows, this effort responded to a clearly defined workforce gap identified through real-time data.

Rapid Transition from Insight to Action

Once the need was identified through employer feedback, TJC and LTS worked together to move the concept to implementation, aligning training delivery with real-world industry expectations.

Built with Industry, Not Just for It

LTS Material Handling helped shape curriculum and training standards based on real-world expectations, while TJC delivered accessible, hands-on instruction. This ensured graduates are immediately job ready.

Workforce as Economic Development Strategy

By addressing a workforce bottleneck, the initiative directly supports business retention, expansion, and regional competitiveness. Employers can hire faster, operate more efficiently, and scale with confidence.

Expanding Workforce Innovation

Building on the success of the operator program, TJC launched the nation's first Forklift Technician Certification program, preparing workers to maintain and repair equipment essential to logistics and manufacturing operations. TJC is currently the only higher education institution in the country offering this specialized training, positioning Tyler as a national leader in workforce innovation.

Program Impact and Outcomes

This initiative is already producing measurable results:

- **300+ individuals trained and certified**
- **Graduates earning approximately \$20–\$25 per hour**
- **Reduced hiring delays for local employers**
- **Stronger workforce pipeline for logistics and advanced manufacturing sectors**

These outcomes reflect what effective workforce development should deliver: training that leads directly to employment and wages that support economic mobility.

By aligning training with employer demand, the program improves productivity, supports business growth, and strengthens the regional economy.

Transferability

One of the strongest aspects of this initiative is its simplicity — and that's exactly why it can be replicated.

This is not a forklift program unique to Tyler. It is a repeatable model built on disciplined alignment between employers, educators, and economic development organizations.

At its core is a scalable framework:

1. **Listen to Employers** – Identify real workforce gaps through direct engagement
2. **Stay Focused** – Target a specific, high-demand need
3. **Align Industry and Training Partners** – Foster collaboration between employers and workforce training providers
4. **Train for the Job** – Deliver short-term, practical, industry-informed training
5. **Connect to Employment** – Create direct pathways into the workforce

Because the model leverages existing institutions and focuses on coordination rather than new infrastructure, it can be implemented in any community with engaged employers and a workforce training provider. It is adaptable across industries and scalable to meet evolving workforce needs.

What makes this work is not the specific training — it's the discipline of listening, responding, and delivering results, which leads directly jobs.

Community Commitment and Leverage

This initiative demonstrates strong community collaboration, with each partner playing a clear and complementary role:

- **TEDC's survey** identified employer demand for certified forklift operators, providing the foundation for TJC and LTS to develop and deliver the program.
- **Tyler Junior College** developed and delivered the training program.
- **LTS Material Handling** ensured alignment with industry standards and real-world practices.

The program's launch was accelerated through a **Texas Mutual Safety Grant**, which fully covered tuition during the first year. This removed financial barriers for participants and enabled rapid scaling.

The initiative has also received **national recognition**, including an invitation for TJC and LTS to present at Toyota Material Handling's *Toyota Week* in Indianapolis, where the program was highlighted as a model for workforce innovation.

A video of the presentation can be viewed here: [VIEW KEYNOTE PRESENTATION](#)

By leveraging public and private resources, the partnership created a high-impact program without duplicating infrastructure — maximizing efficiency and outcomes for both employers and job seekers.

Secondary Benefits

Beyond addressing an immediate workforce shortage, this initiative delivers broader economic benefits.

It supports business retention and expansion by ensuring access to skilled labor in critical industries. It provides residents with a clear pathway into stable, well-paying jobs. And it strengthens long-term collaboration between economic development, education, and industry partners.

Equally important, it establishes a repeatable approach for solving future workforce challenges. By consistently engaging employers and acting on their input, the community is better positioned to respond to changing economic conditions and emerging industry needs.

Closing

This initiative is more than a training program. It is a simple, repeatable model for workforce development:

Listen → Respond → Train → Employ

When that cycle is working, communities are no longer guessing about workforce needs — they are meeting them. And when workforce systems are aligned with real demand, the result is not just filled jobs, but a stronger, more resilient local economy.