



2026 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION FORM

APPLICANT:

Workforce Solutions Capital Area and Civic Solutions Partnership LLC

Name of Community or Workforce Board

Laura Huffman, CEO, CivicSol

Contact Name and Title

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Email Address

512-422-3948

Telephone Number

961,855

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

Yael Lawson

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.

AUSTIN INFRASTRUCTURE ACADEMY

TEDC 2026 Workforce Excellence Award — Project Summary

Project Period: Launch (March 26, 2025) – December 31, 2025 | Status: Active and Expanding

Project Overview. The Austin Infrastructure Academy redefines what economic development can be. Rather than competing for employers through incentives and tax abatements, Central Texas built a workforce-first economic development strategy: designating mobility and infrastructure (M+I) as a target sector, designing career pathways from a 10-year occupational forecast, and integrating the region's training and education actors into a single coordinated Academy that any job seeker can navigate from one entry point.

The vision came from Austin Mayor Kirk Watson, who in 2023 launched the Mobility and Infrastructure Workforce Sector Initiative to address a defining regional challenge: \$25 billion in capital improvement projects programmed through 2040, including the I-35 expansion, Project Connect light rail, Austin-Bergstrom International Airport expansion, and the Austin Convention Center redevelopment. Without a coordinated workforce response, those projects risked stalling. Workforce Solutions Capital Area (WFSCA), the state-designated workforce board for Austin-Travis County led by Executive Director Yael Lawson, holds institutional authority for the Academy. WFSCA convenes the Sector Partnership, deploys City funds, and integrates Academy programming with its broader workforce, childcare, and career-navigation infrastructure. CivicSol, an economic and workforce development strategy firm, designed the Academy's strategic framework and service delivery model. Austin Community College (ACC) anchors the training infrastructure. The Academy publicly launched on **March 26, 2025**.

I. Innovativeness

The Academy is not another jobs program. It advances four innovations that together upend the traditional economic development paradigm.

- **Mobility and infrastructure designated as a target economic development sector.** Traditional economic development competes for employers through incentives. The Academy treats workforce as the strategic asset and designates a sector, M+I, around which to build coordinated regional capacity. That designation reframes the region's \$25 billion capital pipeline as economic development infrastructure and makes a coordinated workforce response the central act of regional economic strategy. M+I is now the region's second-largest employment sector, surpassing healthcare and advanced manufacturing.
- **Career pathways and curriculum designed from a 10-year occupational forecast.** Most regional training systems build curriculum around what providers already teach. The Academy reverses that logic. Central Texas's first-ever M+I labor and demand forecast, projecting 81% workforce growth to 404,033 workers by 2040 and identifying that regional training programs currently meet only 40% of annual demand, drove the design of five demand-defined occupational tracks: construction, skilled trades, fleet maintenance, frontline mobility and operations, and supervision. Pathways were then mapped to existing and new training capacity, ensuring the system builds toward demand that does not yet fully exist.
- **An ecosystem operating as one Academy.** Training providers, K-12, ACC, unions, community-based organizations, employers, and project sponsors do not naturally cooperate. They compete for funding, students, and credit. The Academy's design forces them to function as a single coordinated system from the job seeker's point of view: one entry point, one career navigation experience, an integrated training marketplace, integrated wraparound supports (childcare, transportation), and integrated job placement. The National Association of Workforce Boards recognized this design with its 2024 Trailblazer Award, naming the initiative the most innovative workforce program in the country.

- **Free, employer-designed stackable credentials at the training core.** Through ACC, the Academy delivers an 8-week, 144-hour Mobility and Infrastructure Construction Core program, fully funded for participants, that produces four industry-recognized credentials simultaneously: OSHA 10, CPR/First Aid (Heartsaver), the Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3), and an ACC Occupational Skills Award. The curriculum was co-designed by Austin-area employers for direct entry into apprenticeships and entry-level employment.

II. Transferability

The Academy is a paradigm, not just a program, and its design is explicitly modular and replicable. Any Texas community facing concentrated infrastructure, semiconductor, energy, or federal-law-driven investment can adopt the framework.

- **Methodology and playbook are documented.** The 2023 sector report *Building a Robust Labor Force to Deliver Generational Infrastructure* provides published methodology for sector-targeting and labor demand forecasting that other regions can adapt. CivicSol's Spring 2025 *Austin Infrastructure Academy Strategy Report* documents the full Academy design, including a seven-strategy service delivery framework (Recruitment, Customer-Centric Navigation, Training Marketplace, State-of-the-Art Campus, Connection to Jobs, Capacity and Governance, and Performance Metrics), governance structure, stakeholder engagement methods, and 13 distilled focus-group insights. Together these documents make the framework directly usable by peer regions.
- **Governance is portable.** The Leadership Group (chaired by Mayor Watson with Travis County Judge Andy Brown), the Design Committee, and the tiered Sector Partnership of employers, training providers, project sponsors, community-based organizations, and economic development entities can be assembled in any region with comparable projects.
- **National recognition signals replication value.** The 2024 NAWB Trailblazer Award has positioned the Academy as a peer-reviewed model drawing inquiries from workforce boards and economic development organizations across the country.

III. Community Commitment and Leverage

The Academy represents one of the largest coordinated public-private workforce investments in Central Texas history, assembled through a phased commitment stack substantially in place by the close of 2025.

- **Public investment.** The City of Austin allocated \$5 million from its FY 2024-25 budget to launch the Academy, formalized through an interlocal contract with WFSCA approved by City Council on October 10, 2024 (following the March 7, 2024 Council resolution formally establishing the Academy). Travis County contributes through both direct partnership and its complementary \$75 million affordable childcare initiative, which strengthens the Academy's wraparound service capacity.
- **Educational infrastructure investment.** ACC committed \$200 million from its 2022 General Obligation Bond toward establishing a permanent Academy home on a 76-acre site in Southeast Travis County, adjacent to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. That commitment culminated in the acquisition of a 560,000-square-foot facility, what will become ACC's second-largest campus and a regional hub for

advanced manufacturing, building construction technology, automotive technology, welding, and HVAC training.

- **Phased private and philanthropic investment.** Phase 1 research and strategy were sponsored by Capital Metro and Austin Transit Partnership. Phase 2 service-delivery design was funded by Google, Texas Mutual, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, and the Texas Workforce Commission. Major employer-investors include AECOM, HDR, HNTB, JE Dunn, CapMetro, Austin Transit Partnership, and Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. The Associated General Contractors of America (Austin Chapter), LiUNA, and the Texas AFL-CIO contribute training pathway alignment and union job placement.
- **Sector Partnership scale.** The Mobility and Infrastructure Sector Partnership includes 140+ member organizations spanning private employers, public agencies, K-12 (Austin ISD), higher education (ACC), labor, and community-based organizations.
- **Sustained executive engagement** from Mayor Watson, Judge Brown, the WFSCA Board under Executive Director Yael Lawson, the ACC Board of Trustees, and the multi-tiered M+I Leadership Group reflects civic commitment well beyond the financial commitments above.

IV. Measured Objectives

In its first nine months of operation (launch through December 31, 2025), the Academy delivered measurable results across awareness, access, training, employment, and equity. Performance data are drawn from WFSCA program reporting to the City of Austin Economic Development Department. The Academy is designed for **mindful growth**, intentionally pacing trainee throughput to match employer hiring readiness on the \$25 billion capital pipeline rather than maximizing enrollment volume ahead of demand. These results do not include training and outreach outcomes with ACC, trade unions, or community-based organizations.

- **Awareness at scale.** Direct outreach engaged 757 local job seekers in 2025. The Academy's integrated marketing campaign generated more than 29.5 million impressions, building unified regional brand awareness for M+I careers in the first nine months alone.
- **Access exceeded contract goal.** 430 unduplicated clients enrolled in the Academy and received career coaching, case management, training scholarships, support services, and job placement assistance. Enrollment exceeded the 300-client contract-term goal by 43% in the program's first year.
- **Training and credentials.** 97 clients began occupational training and 50 successfully completed, a 79% completion rate (50 of 63 exited) that tracked just below the 80% contract goal in year one and has since climbed above it. Completers earned credentials across high-demand M+I occupations, led by Electricians (19), Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers (13), HVAC Mechanics and Installers (12), and Carpenters (6). All Construction Core graduates earn OSHA 10, CPR/First Aid, MC3, and ACC Occupational Skills Award credentials.
- **Employment.** 38 Austinites obtained or improved employment through the Academy in 2025. Employers hiring Academy participants range from major regional employers (Lyft, Facility Solutions Group, Austin Energy, AIRCO Mechanical, City of Austin) to small businesses across construction, mobility, fleet, and operations. UI employment data typically reflects a two-quarter reporting delay, so 2025 placement totals will continue to grow as data finalizes.

- **Wage outcomes.** For City-funded Academy participants who completed the program in 2025, average post-Academy annual salary reached \$42,714, compared to a pre-Academy average of \$24,960. That is a wage gain of \$17,754 per participant, roughly a 71% increase. Academy occupational tracks lead to family-supporting wages including Operations and Supervision, Skilled Trades, General Construction, Fleet Repair and Maintenance, and Frontline Mobility.
- **Equity and barrier removal.** 97 clients received training scholarships in 2025, with average wraparound services investment per trainee of \$6,203 (childcare, transportation, scholarships, and related supports). Training participants reflect the communities the Academy was designed to reach: 36% Black or African American, 35% Hispanic or Latino, and a growing share of justice-impacted residents. These are populations historically underrepresented in M+I careers.
- **Strategic framework completed and published.** The Spring 2025 *Austin Infrastructure Academy Strategy Report* established the seven-strategy service delivery framework now guiding Academy operations and providing a transferable playbook for peer regions.

V. Secondary Benefits

The Academy's design produces ancillary economic and community benefits well beyond its direct training outcomes.

- **Regional affordability.** Family-supporting infrastructure wages, many at prevailing wage rates, directly counter Austin's growing affordability gap, enabling residents to remain in the community as costs rise.
- **Project delivery and tax base.** A skilled local workforce reduces reliance on out-of-region labor, keeps wages circulating in Central Texas, and lowers the risk of cost overruns and delays on the \$25 billion regional capital program. That preserves anticipated tax base growth and economic activity tied to project completion.
- **Workforce diversity.** Women currently represent only 14% of the M+I workforce. The Academy's intentional outreach, including the Q3 2024 Women in Trades pilot, is expanding access to high-wage careers historically closed to women, people of color, veterans, justice-impacted residents, and residents of underserved zip codes.
- **Childcare ecosystem strengthening.** Academy-driven demand for childcare, in coordination with Travis County's \$75 million childcare initiative, reinforces broader investment in the regional provider network and benefits working families well beyond Academy participants.
- **Educational pipeline, K-12 through degree.** Academy participants flow into ACC degree and continuing education programs, including the Bachelor of Applied Technology in Manufacturing Engineering Technology. Sector Partnership engagement with Austin ISD shapes how K-12 students learn about and prepare for M+I careers, building the long-term talent pipeline that will sustain Central Texas through the next two decades of capital delivery.

The Austin Infrastructure Academy demonstrates that workforce strategy, designed and governed as economic development, can build a regional labor force at the speed and scale that generational infrastructure investment requires. The model is working in Central Texas, and it is ready to be adopted elsewhere in the state.