



2025 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION FORM

APPLICANT:

Name of Community or Workforce Board

Contact Name and Title

Email Address

Telephone Number

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

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, 2024. 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 Amy Swank at amy@texasedc.org on or before 5:00 PM, Friday, May 9, 2025. 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.



A great place to learn about Terrell's rich history and bright future.



Background:

The WINGS: Adult Education Program of Riter C. Hulsey Public Library has seen explosive growth thanks to a partnership and grant funding from the Terrell Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The Hulsey Public Library and the EDC have historically had a strong, long-term partnership striving to improve adult literacy, but in recent years, their partnership has deepened as neighboring cities lack library services and the demands grow exponentially. In 2022, under the new leadership of the WINGS: Adult Education Coordinator and with the help of EDC grant funds, the WINGS program adjusted its direction by selecting bona fide, trained educators to instruct classes, and expanded its course options to include online and in-person class options for GED preparation, three levels of English Second Language learning, Digital Skills Courses, Citizenship Preparation, Career Skills Classes, Lifelong Learning, and Tutoring. That year, changes resulted in unprecedented growth of the program, with over five hundred students now enrolling annually. The latest addition to the program, The WINGS: Career & Testing Center, which is a start-up, third-party Pearson Vue and PSI authorized testing facility, did not exist in any capacity until March 2024. End-of-year student feedback in May 2023 revealed factors that were making it difficult for students to schedule and take their education and professional exams. There were three specific issues prohibiting students from easy access to exams: limitations of personal technology resources, distance to testing facilities, and long appointment wait times.

Although most major test providers provide online remote testing options, there are specific internet, device, and environment requirements that must be met to successfully access testing portals. Many of

the rural students enrolled in the WINGS GED Program were disappointed to learn that the Internet service at their home was not adequate for online testing. Others were not able to test remotely because their computer did not have a current operating system, a webcam, or the storage capacity to launch test applications. At least two students shared testimonies of how they were unable to complete their exams remotely due to external noise or motion in the room, and another three students attempted to book the Library's soundproof meeting booth to take their exam and found it was insufficient. The need for a dedicated space or site equipped with current technology that met all the requirements and eliminated these testing hurdles was very apparent through the volume of feedback being provided to the Coordinator.

A large number of students were actively seeking to test online remotely because there was no local testing center in Terrell, Texas, or all of Kaufman County. According to recent census data, Kaufman County, the eastern county adjacent to Dallas County, is among the top two fastest-growing counties in the US. Despite its population, the closest testing centers were located over 40 gridlocked miles away in Dallas, Texas, or 65 miles away in Tyler, Texas. With no transit system serving this explosively growing suburb, unless a person had reliable transportation to commute over an hour one way, there simply was no other option for taking an exam beyond attempting to take it remotely.

The third challenge that students faced when attempting to schedule an exam at a testing facility in Dallas or Tyler was that there were no available appointments. Students attending WINGS GED class would contact the Coordinator in panic because when they searched through the list of local testing facilities, the soonest dates available were 3-6 months out. Desperate to try to find a way to expedite their tests, students, as well as people from the region who were not associated with the WINGS GED Program, were calling Hulsey Public Library to inquire about the long wait times and to see if the WINGS Program could administer their exams. They were disappointed to discover that we were not a testing facility and typically concluded the conversation with a request for WINGS to begin administering tests.

Innovativeness:

Prompted by the student feedback of the spring semester, during the winter of 2023, the WINGS Coordinator began contacting other test sites and researching the websites of Pearson VUE and PSI to determine what it would take for the WINGS Program to become an authorized testing provider. After attending a Terrell Economic Development Corporation meeting to give a presentation about WINGS Programs, in April 2024, a fourth reason to open a testing center in Kaufman County was introduced. During the meeting, the Corporation was presented with survey data from business owners, and it included some of the problems local businesses were facing. One major topic discussed was that there were limited options available to grow the knowledge and skills of the local workforce with licenses and certificates, because there was no place for their employees to learn or take skill exams. Expansion of the WINGS Program to include a Testing Center became a new business item for the Corporation, which approved additional funding to begin the center.

Transferability:

Pearson VUE is the State of Texas' partner test provider for the majority of its licensed and regulated industries, including the GED exam. PSI is another professional test provider that handles professional and academic exams, like healthcare and law exams. Both companies are actively looking for new locations around the globe to become partner testing sites, which makes replicating this program in other communities similar to Terrell quite viable. Their websites provide easy access to guides about what it takes to become a test center.

Community Commitment and Leverage:

Within weeks of that initial EDC meeting, the WINGS Coordinator was approached by City officials with the opportunity for WINGS Programs to expand programming into a local historic building. It was obvious from the 18 months of feedback about testing challenges that the expansion needed to include a place for local residents to take exams. The Coordinator prepared Google Slides presentations and a multipage Google Doc proposal about what the facility would require to be a testing center and presented the project to the EDC, Terrell City Council, and the Friends of Hulsey Public Library Board during the Spring of 2024.

The project took on various titles during this phase, but eventually, the Coordinator settled on WINGS: Career & Testing Center. Including WINGS in the name was a way of connecting the new project to the Library's existing Adult Education Program. That Program had been dubbed the WINGS Program in honor of the thousands of WWII British pilots who learned to fly at the first US civilian training school located in Terrell, Texas. Carrying on the legacy of Terrell being a world-changing place for adults to learn important skills and train for their careers was a strong contributing factor in beginning the Testing Center.

The EDC agreed to help start the facility and awarded the WINGS: Career & Testing Center Project \$30,000 in grant funds. The start-up grant funds from the EDC were used to purchase 15 second-hand cubicles, executive chairs, computers and monitors that met the IT specifications of the testing providers, a CCTV monitoring system, site servers, and various items like noise-canceling headphones. The City Council approved the project and secured the physical location in May 2024. The facility would be housed in a historical train depot located on City property but owned by Star Transit. The City also agreed to pay utilities and oversee the maintenance of the facility. Other organizations, including Texas Workforce Solutions and the Friends of Hulsey Public Library, agreed to help provide staffing for the facility.

Measured Objectives:

A grand opening for the facility was announced for Saturday, October 5th, in conjunction with the annual Historic Mural Walk event. The local Chamber of Commerce and City included the grand opening and ribbon cutting as part of the official events and featured it in all of their publicity flyer and media posts for the larger event. The *Terrell Tribune Newspaper* took photos and featured the ribbon cutting

on its Facebook page and in the following weekend edition of the newspaper. Brett Allen, an adventure traveler whose videos have been featured on all the major networks and has thousands of followers on YouTube, filmed the Ribbon Cutting and included the footage in one of his episodes. In addition to Mr. Allen, a large crowd of citizens, the Mayor, Council Members, Chamber Members, and various board members from local non-profit organizations came together for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and toured the facility's 15 testing stations, four classrooms, and mini-museum honoring Terrell's rich heritage.

Since the grand opening, the Testing Center has thrived. Brochures and a webpage were created providing basic information to the public about the hours of operation and how to contact the individual testing service providers to schedule exams at the Testing Center location, which is open 6 days a week. Within its first month of opening, the Testing Center administered over 50 exams. The next month, the numbers doubled, and within twelve weeks of opening, the Center faced overbooking issues, maxing out scheduling.

From birth to realization, the project took nine months, and Terrell has gone from having no testing options to offering testing services to a mix of GED students, educators, electricians, real estate reps, healthcare providers, law students, and many more professionals. The site now averages administering over 60 exams in one week, with discussions of an expansion already occurring.

Secondary Benefits:

The Testing Center is attracting people from well beyond Terrell who are coming to take their exams. People are traveling from other towns like Plano, Dallas, Commerce, and Tyler to take exams at this location. Many of them admire the charm of the facility and appreciate that the space has been repurposed for a positive purpose, noting that the space is more pleasant than other facilities they've tested at that were described as having outdated equipment, unclean, cold, and uninviting.

The revitalization of a historic downtown building repurposed for the community has promoted goodwill between the residents and the City. Individuals who have driven past the Test Center, which is the former Texas Pacific Rail Depot, are stopping in to get tours. There has been so much interest that it has led to the addition of a small museum in the original ticket booth area of the building. The Terrell Heritage Museum has loaned the Testing Center items from their archives to display. It had been a welcome space for testers on break and tourists alike.

Additionally, the facility is located adjacent to local small businesses that are benefiting from the new exposure to their businesses. Test Center staff are frequently asked about the shops, and recommendations are requested for the best coffee place or lunch spot. Others indicate that they are planning daytrips back to Terrell so they have more time to tour the museums, view the murals, or attend one of the town's special events.