TEXAS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

2025 WORKFORCE EXCELLENCE AWARD NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION FORM

APPLICANT:

Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas

Name of Community or Workforce Board

Lynn Hoffman - Senior Innovation Manager

Contact Name and Title

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Email Address Telephone Number

2,615,088

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

Kent Andersen

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.

2025 Workforce Excellence Award Nomination

Nominating Organization: Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas (WFSDallas)
Project Name: *Google STAR Fiber Optic Workforce Training Initiative*

Launched in January 2023, the *Google STAR* (Skilled Trades Advancement Readiness) workforce development initiative is a transformative, equity-driven pilot program designed to increase access to high-demand skilled trades careers for underrepresented populations—including women, BIPOC individuals, veterans, and others historically excluded from these pathways. Developed and implemented in collaboration with local partners, STAR targets communities near Google data center site in Midlothian, Texas, and runs through April 2025. The initiative offers an intensive, bootcamp-style training model focused on fiber installation and aligned with future expansion into mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) trades. Each six-week cohort of 12–15 participants receives a comprehensive blend of hands-on fiber training (installation, termination, testing), technical instruction (OSHA 10, BICSI Installer 101, Forklift), and job readiness support (soft skills, mentorship, resume coaching). By removing systemic barriers—such as financial hardship, lack of industry access, and training availability—STAR helps prepare participants for living-wage employment and entry-level skilled trades roles upon completion. With tailored outreach, wraparound services, and ongoing mentorship provided by WFSDallas, Google and its supplier partners, the STAR initiative builds a more inclusive talent pipeline, strengthens local economies, and sets a scalable model for community-based workforce innovation.

I. INNOVATIVENESS

The *Google STAR* initiative is a workforce development model that exemplifies innovation through its strategic public-private partnership between WFSDallas and Google Data Centers. Launched in 2023, this program delivers a multi-level, phased training approach to prepare historically underrepresented job seekers—including women, BIPOC individuals, and veterans—for careers in fiber optic infrastructure. The initiative uniquely integrates:

- **Industry-informed curriculum** (OSHA-10, BICSI - The Building Industry Consulting Service International, Inc. - Hands-On Certification and Written Exam, Forklift Operation, and CPR),
- **Financial incentives (**$1000 stipend, and gas cards)
- **Equipment and supplies** (Tools, bags, and laptops)
- **Flexible hybrid training models** (online + in-person),
- **Employer-driven design** (engagement from firms like ABLE Communications, E2 Optics, and Real Network Services),
- **Proactive program redesign**, adjusting recruitment and screening based on cohort feedback and employment outcomes.

This project is a powerful example of an adaptable, equity-centered pipeline that connects infrastructure investment with long-term employment opportunities in high-demand, emerging tech sectors.

II. TRANSFERABILITY

The program's structure is easily replicable in communities experiencing data center and broadband infrastructure growth. Key components—including the use of national certifications, strategic employer partnerships, and inclusive outreach strategies—can be applied by economic development entities across Texas and nationally. With Google's footprint in multiple regions, this model is designed for scale and localization, enabling replication in rural and urban communities alike. Lessons learned and best practices include:

- **Targeted outreach strategy** to re-engage recently laid-off individuals with transferable skills, ensuring rapid reentry into the workforce
- **Live virtual information sessions** designed to provide transparent insights into job roles, work environments, and career pathways
- **Comprehensive in-person assessments** to evaluate candidates' aptitude, mindset, and job alignment, ensuring strong job-to-candidate fit
- **Accelerated hybrid training model** integrating flexible online learning with structured in-person support for maximum accessibility and retention
- **Robust job readiness curriculum** focused on enhancing resumes, application techniques, and interview performance to boost hiring outcomes
- **Industry-aligned exam preparation tools** to improve certification pass rates and job placement in high-demand fields
- **Consistent employer engagement** throughout training to ensure program relevance and seamless talent pipelines
- **Targeted financial incentives** to reduce barriers related to transportation, equipment, and training costs, improving participation among underserved populations

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III. COMMUNITY COMMITMENT & LEVERAGE

WFSDallas leveraged significant public-private-philanthropic collaboration to drive program success:

- **Corporate Partner:** Google provided funding, strategic input, and visibility to the trades pipeline.
- **Public Workforce System:** WFSDallas recruited, screened, and supported job seekers through case management and wraparound services.
- **Employer Ecosystem:** Multiple companies participated in training sessions and interviews, with some offering direct hires.

- **Veterans Services & Local Nonprofits:** The program emphasized outreach to priority populations including returning citizens, women, and veterans, deepening community impact.
- **Expanded Broadband Career Pathways:** The program's success in the sector has led to a collaboration with Registered Apprenticeship programs and sponsors providing high-wage work-based learning opportunities in the region

This collaboration empowered the initiative to maximize both financial and human capital, creating sustained value across sectors.

IV. MEASURED OBJECTIVES

Google Data Centers granted $316,820 to the Google STAR Fiber Optic initiative. The initiative set out to train and employ 36 individuals from underserved communities for sustainable fiber optic careers. 2024 outcomes include:

- **14 enrolled participants**, including **3 veterans**.
- **10 completers** of BICSI hands-on training, **1 withdrew.**
- **7 job placements** into career-track positions with an overall **employment rate of 63%**.
- **Average starting salary** of **$18 to $21 per hour**.
- **Average cost per trainee** was $3,932.

Overall outcomes:

- **42 enrolled participants** across five cohorts (2023–2025), including **8 veterans**.
- **35 completers** of BICSI hands-on training.
- **27 job placements** into career-track positions with an overall **employment rate of 67.5%**.
- **Significant earnings increases**, as seen in success stories like Darin Jackson and Rodrick Cody, who transitioned from precarious employment or near homelessness into full-time careers in high-demand industries.
- **Average cost per trainee** was $5,047.

Each cohort improved upon the last, with employment rates ranging from **60% to nearly 88%** depending on employer engagement and participant readiness.

V. SECONDARY BENEFITS

The project produces multiple ancillary benefits:

- **Diversification of the skilled trades** workforce with stronger inclusion of women, people of color, and veterans.

- **Expanded employer awareness** and engagement in fiber optic training, supporting long-term local hiring pipelines.
- **Reduced barriers to employment** through wraparound support and OSHA, CPR and Forklift certification, enhancing participant confidence and economic stability.
- **Strengthened infrastructure** for future broadband and data center development by building a ready local workforce.

Additionally, the initiative has generated **regional awareness and momentum** around fiber optics as a viable career path—previously unfamiliar to many in the community.

Conclusion

The *Google STAR* initiative represents the gold standard in workforce excellence—merging innovation, inclusion, and impact. It proves that when industry, government, and community partners align around shared goals, they can transform lives, create equitable access to growing industries, and build the foundation for inclusive economic development.

WFSDallas is proud to submit this initiative for TEDC's 2025 Workforce Excellence Award and looks forward to sustaining and scaling this impactful partnership in the years ahead.