SECTION 1: PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

1a. Executive Summary

In response to the Department of Commerce's Good Jobs Challenge (GJC), Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA) is proposing to lead the **Rural Employers Infuse Vital Economic Success in Texas (REINVEST)** project. REINVEST will enable six rural counties, collaborating with over 46 employers and employer associations, to generate high-quality jobs for 777 workers across three sector partnerships. REINVEST will address a critical and deepening economic disconnect in rural Central Texas: the lack of skilled talent for growing industries and an insufficiently built out workforce training and support system. While the population and demand for services are growing, regional employers are struggling to hire, and rural workers are struggling to access the quality training and support systems they need to thrive. REINVEST will bridge this gap by linking various resources and stakeholders to transform how three crucial industries (skilled trades, healthcare, and finance/IT) recruit, train, and place workers into high-quality jobs. Acknowledging the importance of person-to-person relationships and local community expertise in Central Texas, REINVEST will house the sector partnerships in two separate geographies with Backbone Organizations (BOs) that bring a deep history of working with local employers, workers, and strategic partners. The sector partnerships in three western counties (Llano, Burnet, and Blanco) will be led by Workforce Network, Inc (WNI). The sector partnerships in three eastern counties (Bastrop, Lee and Fayette) will be led by Smithville Workforce Training Center (SWTC). Third Sector Capital Partners will provide project-wide technical assistance (TA) to support system development, project design, equity, sustainability, and evaluation.

1b. System Lead Entity and Backbone Organizations

System Lead: WSRCA is one of 28 Texas workforce development boards, serving nine rural counties surrounding the state's capital, Austin. A 27-member Board of Directors (51% of which represent the private sector) leads WSRCA. Its mission, vision, and values guide efforts toward regional economic growth and family self-sufficiency. WSRCA has a long history of working collaboratively with the two BOs as well as hundreds of employers, economic development corporations (EDC) in each of the six counties, chambers of commerce (COC), school districts, regional universities and community colleges, training providers, employers, and jobseekers.

WSRCA will lead overall project management; facilitate system design; fiscally oversee and process all training costs, manage Third Sector's; convene an advisory group of strategic and industry partners; and coordinate business solutions teams to mobilize employers to offer high quality jobs to training graduates. WSRCA will also support BOs in the work of designing and implementing workforce training programs. In particular, WSRCA will help BO's build out equity-centered, occupation-specific recruitment, training and support plans, and will connect BO's to other initiatives we administer including: 1)) eight "one-stop" American Job Centers (AJC) funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to support recruitment and co-enrollment of target populations; 2) the work supports offered to workers who are enrolled in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); 3) organizations implementing workforce development services under the SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T); and 4) vouchers for childcare funded by the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). WSRCA will also serve as the main point of contact with the Department of Commerce; manage project reporting; ensure that progress and successes are shared; and establish REINVEST as an inclusive development model that can be used by rural communities across the country.

Backbone Organizations (BO): REINVEST includes two BOs with deep and long experience building trust and partnership with industry partners, employers, training providers, and communities in their respective regions. This place-based knowledge is essential in rural central Texas among communities that place great value on inter-personal relationships. Each BO regularly engages local businesses and communities to design workforce training programs and will leverage these relationships to co-create training programs that meet skill needs of employers while ensuring workers gain access to a "quality job" at or above the prevailing wage for the industry and inclusive of benefits.

Workforce Network, Inc. (WNI)	Smithville Workforce Training Center (SWTC)
WNI brings over 30 years of experience managing Career Pathways Programs in the Western Area. For example, they are one of the only rural entities to have successfully set up a registered apprenticeship program for skilled trades (ST) meeting strict U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) standards of quality. WNI plans to expand this model to additional trades as part of REINVEST.	SWTC brings over 40 years of experience and was formed as a collaboration between local government, industry, training, and philanthropic organizations. It serves as the only training hub for Bastrop, Lee, and Fayette counties providing facilities for training while connecting workers to training opportunities. SWTC's parent organization, Smithville Area Chamber of Commerce (SACC), has been active for more than 100 years.

Track record of success: WSRCA has consistently been recognized as the highest performing workforce board in Texas. In 2021, WSRCA achieved 95-183% towards WIOA performance measure targets.[1] For the population groups which typically experiences more barriers to employment, WSRCA achieved 106-119% of its employment and credential rate targets. WNI ST training programs have trained 155 adults in seven high-demand occupations, placed nearly 90% of participants in jobs upon graduation and helped retain over 70% in employment after one year. In its initial round, SWTC's 2021-22 certified nursing assistant (CNA) program placed 100% of participants in jobs upon graduation and 100% of the students currently enrolled in the program's second round already have job offers. In the past 5 years, SACC has provided continuing education to over 16,000 participants.

Fundraising Plan and Track Record: WSRCA maintains an annual operating budget of over $43 million and is guided by a 5-year strategic plan that identifies local, state, and federal funding opportunities to support its goals. This plan is built on WSRCA's historic ability to access and maintain a diverse funding portfolio. It includes a combination of federal block grant allotments and discretionary grants such as a High Demand Job Training (HDJT) grant from the Texas Workforce Commission and the Rural Healthcare Initiative (RHI) administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The BOs maintain their own fundraising and sustainability plans that include strategies such as small business incubation, philanthropic partnerships, and implementation of discretionary grants. (See Section 4c for additional fundraising and leverage strategies.)

Ability to reach underserved workers: WSRCA has a track record of effectively partnering with community-based organizations (CBO) who serve a variety of workers with barriers. For example, WSRCA supports and works closely with three community action agencies responsible for addressing poverty and facilitating economic mobility for the region's most underserved

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[1] This included 170-200% of the measurable skills gain target, 103-122% of credential rate target, 99-165% of employment Q4 Post Exit target and 101-180% of median earning Q2 Post Exit target, across adults, dislocated workers, and youth.

populations. From Oct 2018 to Sep 2021, WSRCA served nearly 6,000 people, including 34% not financially self-sufficient, 62% women, 34% non-white, 36% Hispanic, and 12% with conviction history. REINVEST will continue to effectively engage and recruit underserved workers through referrals from the AJCs and trusted community agents. These agents include faith-based leaders; Texas A&M AgriLife agents; Career and Education Outreach Specialists; traditional and non-traditional schools such as Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs; community colleges such as Central Texas College (CTC); and public agency partners (e.g. the Probation and Child Welfare departments). REINVEST will also leverage a robust communication platform to reach and recruit underserved workers and community referral partners such as WSRCA newsletters, distributed to 130,000 subscribers monthly, and the Bastrop County Cares Healing History Series.

Staffing Plan: REINVEST will be overseen by Diane Tackett who serves as WSRCA's Chief Operating Officer. Ms. Tackett brings 23 years of experience designing and implementing workforce development solutions in the RCA. Within one month of project award, Ms. Tackett will recruit a REINVEST Project Manager to oversee day-to-day project operations. A biography for Ms. Tackett and description of the Project Manager position is included in Annex D. A Finance Specialist will manage REINVEST's day-to-day financial, contractual, and procurement matters. WSRCA's existing operations, finance, and contracts teams will provide ongoing administrative support to the project. Third Sector will collaborate closely with WSRCA staff. These efforts will be led by Sheba Rivera who brings a total of 10 years of experience in project management and reorienting publicly funded programs in support of improved and equitable outcomes. Each BO will be led by a Sectoral Manager. In the Western area, Fay Crider will serve as the Sectoral Manager for WNI. Ms. Crider brings 25 years of experience managing workforce development and training programs. In the Eastern area, April Daniels will serve as the Sectoral Manager for SWTC. Ms. Daniels brings 25 years of experience managing different businesses and has served for seven years as the Executive Director of SACC. The Sectoral Managers will be responsible for developing the training programs in each sector including recruitment partners, training partners, and wraparound service supports. Once sectors are ready to move to implementation, Sectoral Managers will recruit additional staff. A visual staffing chart and biographies for all named staff and descriptions of new positions are included in Annex D.

SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS
2a. Employer Leadership and Commitments
Throughout the development of this application, WSRCA and the BOs have engaged employers and responded to their needs. In particular, WSRCA analyzed its Real Time Information (RTI) database of over 15,600 vacancies currently being advertised by employers in the region and identified a significant need for workers in occupations that fit within the skilled trades (ST, healthcare (HC) & finance/IT (FIT) industries (Section 3b). The list of priority occupations was further refined based on need and ability to meet the definition of a "high quality job" (sufficient wage for a worker to maintain self-sufficiency and inclusive of benefits). For example, we prioritize Construction Managers and Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVN) over Machinists and Medical Assistants. A JobsEQ database was used as a validation mechanism to project the number of jobs that these sectors would need 5 years in the future. (Section 4c and Annex A). BOs also connected with hospitals, skilled trades journeymen, banks, and other employers in their counties to further validate this analysis. BOs have secured commitments from 46 initial employers and employer associations to hire 348 program graduates in quality jobs with benefits

and support the project by recruiting instructors, amending policies to support priority groups, offering scholarships, donating equipment, building out facilities, or offering internship or apprenticeship opportunities.

Employer Recruitment and Involvement on Training Programs: Given that employer and training needs vary between the Eastern and Western areas, each BO will engage relevant local partners in the design of occupation-specific training programs. For example, in the Eastern area, SWTC will build on its existing training programs for CNAs and commercial drivers and will leverage the employer representatives on the SACC board to build out training programs for FIT occupations, welders and other ST. In the Western area, WNI will leverage its network of plumber and electrician employers to expand the existing registered apprenticeship model and will leverage relationships with EDCs and industry associations to identify and engage employers in the FIT and HC sectors. For ST and HC occupations that require classroom instruction, hands-on learning, specialized equipment, and hours-on-the-job before earning a credential, BO's will need to build individual rapport with dozens of small employers to engage them as instructors, hands-on learning sites, trainee placements, as well as employers. As a starting point for each occupation, the Project Team will consider four training models currently in use: 1) local practical model, including classroom and hands-on learning with local employers – ideally including an earn-and-learn or conditional hire component; 2) out-of-county classroom training and hands-on training; 3) a hybrid where participants attend classroom instruction outside the county but complete hands-on training locally; 4) online learning (most likely to be suitable for FIT occupations). Regardless of the engagement approach and training model, the Team will work with employers to validate technical and non-technical skills needs (see Section 3b) and seek their input on training program design.

Employer Involvement on Worker Recruitment: Leveraging the outreach strategies described above, the Team will engage employers in the creation of recruitment requirements, recruitment strategies and the selection of training participants focusing especially on recruitment of previously underserved and excluded populations. In addition, WSRCA will confer with its committees of business partners which regularly discuss outreach and hiring strategies for "untapped populations" and lead county coalitions on hiring needs and building appropriate pipelines. REINVEST recognizes employers as important recruitment partners, where they will refer existing employees for upskilling opportunities and set with conditional hiring agreements for job candidates who don't yet have the requisite skills and qualifications for the position. Many employers have also agreed to participate in info sessions to target populations and offer job incentives such as signing bonuses and paid training.

REINVEST also recognizes that employers in the target sectors and counties may not be accustomed to offering "high quality jobs" or recruiting and supporting populations that have experienced barriers to employment, such as people with experience in the criminal justice system or immigrants who speak English as a second language. As part of the project's equity strategy, Third Sector will work with WSRCA, the BOs, and employers to develop a shared expectation of skills needed, train employers on skills-based hiring, and provide forums on the components and competitive advantages of high-quality jobs and equitable hiring and employee cultivation practices. The Team will review and align on real and perceived expectations from licensing boards with respect to background checks, drug tests, educational and language requirements.

Worker Perspective Engagement: While WSRCA and the BOs recognize the importance of incorporating worker perspectives in training program design and implementation, there aren't yet systems and processes in place to do so regularly. Third Sector will work during the system development phase to develop and implement a comprehensive worker engagement strategy. This will involve: 1) identifying relevant CBOs serving and reflecting the perspectives of the target worker groups; 2) facilitating listening sessions with the CBOs and their constituents to understand their perspectives and needs related to accessing and thriving in training programs and "high-quality jobs"; 3) developing a system by which worker perspectives can be regularly incorporated into REINVEST training program design and evaluations. Similar to employers, workers and CBOs will have input on course content, training models, and wraparound supports. Workers may also provide valuable insights on how to adjust training times, locations, and formats to maximize the program's success.

2b. Other Stakeholders and Partners

WSRCA consulted with over 100 stakeholders as part of developing the REINVEST application. A subset of these stakeholders signed letters to join or support the project and are listed in the table below. Annex B includes 38 letters of commitment from employers or employer associations and 15 letters of support from industry, training, and recruitment partners summarizing the role each partner will play on the project. WSRCA also confirmed cooperation from nine political subdivision entities across the six counties. Throughout the life of REINVEST, the Project Team will continue engaging additional stakeholders to expand the project's reach and strengthen the regional workforce training system (RWTS).

| Western Area (led by WNI)	
Training Partners	**Industry Partners (Employers)**
• Austin Coding Academy – FIT • Central Texas College – ST, HC, FIT • Texas Tech University – ST, FIT • Winn's Career Education – ST	**Skilled Trades** • Hill Country Builders Association • Centerline Services • Small employers including Complete Care Plumbing, All Power Electric Services
Strategic Partners (Other Industry & Recruitment)	**Healthcare** • Ascension Seton • Baylor Scott & White Health • Bluebonnet Trails Community Services
• Chamber of Commerce in Marble Falls • EDCs in Llano and Marble Falls • Independent School Districts in Llano and Marble Falls	
Political Subdivisions	**Finance and IT** • Williston Consulting on behalf of the Independent Bankers Assoc of Texas • Imagine Solutions • City of Burnet • Bancorp South • Pedernales Electric Cooperative • Horseshoe Bay Resort
• Burnet County Judge • Mayors in Llano, Granite Shoals and Marble Falls • City Managers in Llano, Granite Shoals and Marble Falls	

Eastern Area (led by SWTC)	
Training Partners	**Industry Partners (Employers)**
● Community Action of Central Texas – ST, HC, FIT ● Central Texas Allied Health Institute – HC ● Smithville Community Clinic – HC	**Skilled Trades** ● Spiradrill ● Quick Connect Electrical ● Small employers including Doug's Plumbing, L.F. Manufacturing, Inc.
Strategic Partners (Other Industry & Recruitment)	**Healthcare** ● Lee County EMS ● Ascension Seton
● Chamber of Commerce in Giddings Area ● Bastrop County Accountable Communities for Health ● Lee County Center for the Arts	**Finance and IT** ● CMIT Solutions ● Liveoak Technologies
Political Subdivisions	● Art Institute of Austin ● Bastrop Independent School District
● Cities of Bastrop, Giddings, Lexington, and Smithville ● Lee County Judge	● Giddings State School ● St. Marks Medical Center

SECTION 3: REGIONAL DESCRIPTION
3a. Location and Region

Assessment of region's economic state: REINVEST will bolster the economies of six rural counties (referred throughout this application as Rural Capital Area ["RCA"]), which are experiencing labor market gaps, instability, and rising socio-economic disparities compared to the more urban Travis County and counties along the I-35 corridor. This project also represents a significant opportunity to create a national model for inclusive development in rural areas.

Texas Capital Area Counties and Population Size
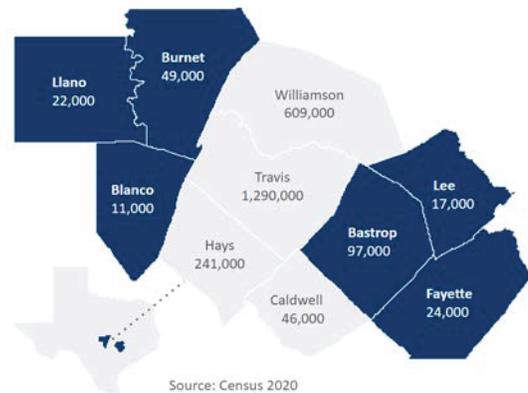
Employers in the RCA have been restrained due to the lack of qualified workers. Although the economic potential is strong, WSRCA's regional plan highlighted low workforce participation as a key issue stagnating economic development. Over the last decade, RCA has seen a rise in retired individuals moving to the area which has increased the demand for ST and HC services while clinics and nursing homes struggle with staff shortages. Larger employers including Tesla, Samsung, and Amazon are relocating operations to neighboring counties and will need skilled workers in ST and FIT. While these developments carry potential, they risk alienating existing residents who do not possess requisite skills to gain meaningful employment from these businesses. In underserved communities, education levels are disproportionally lower, poverty rates are disproportionally higher and hundreds face barriers to employment, such as untreated mental health or substance use disorders[2] and experiences with the criminal justice system. As these workers struggle with the rising costs of living, they are pushed even further from economic opportunity as they are unable to afford the tuition and related costs associated with reskilling or upskilling to meet employer needs.

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[2] According to 2020 County Health Rankings, RCA has only 113 mental health providers (which includes behavioral health counselors) at an average ratio of 3,589:1, compared to a ratio of 340:1 in Travis County.

Across the RCA, 11% of families live in poverty, compared to 8% in the urban central counties. While the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that unemployment rates in the RCA are between 4-6%, the American Community Survey 2015-2019 (ACS) indicates that 40-65% of prime working age people in the RCA do not participate in the labor force, suggesting that the actual unemployment is much higher.

The lack of adequate local training opportunities creates a tragic domino effect: younger workers move out of the area in pursuit of training opportunities and do not come back once their training is complete, resulting in loss of human capital and leaving behind an older workforce close to retirement. According to the ACS, the prime working age population (25-54 years old) in RCA is 33% of the total RCA population and has decreased by 12% in the last decade. In Travis County prime working age population is 49% of the total and has increased by 3% in the last decade.

These rural counties need workforce training centers and job opportunities located close to home; internet service scholarships to access online programs; transportation for training sessions that require travel for in-person/hands-on components; as well as other wraparound services such as reliable childcare.

REINVEST is an opportunity to disrupt this cycle for Texas RCA by building a RWTS that harnesses the potential, grit, and drive of its residents and connects them to affordable, locally accessible training programs in high-growth, high-quality occupations. Graduates will then possess the requisite skills demanded by local employers, access high-quality jobs and put their time, resources, and energy back into the RCA economy.

3b. Employer Hiring and Worker Skill Training Needs

Employer hiring needs: Based on employer input, local reports, articles on industry shortages, and analysis of three RCA job demand (see Annex A), REINVEST selected ST, HC and FIT as target industries.

- **ST:** Between 2015 and 2020, Central Texas saw 57% growth in transportation and warehousing and 24% growth in construction.[3] COVID-19 accelerated this trend, leading to short staffing in ST roles ranging from plumbers to commercial drivers.[4]
- **HC:** Higher-skilled roles such as LVNs and RNs are particularly needed in the RCA with more than 850 current job ads for RNs alone. In the 2018 Future of Rural Texas Poll, only 26% of rural Texans gave high ratings for access to drug abuse and addiction treatment – validating the need for more behavioral health counselors.
- **FIT:** In RCA, as well as across the nation, employers are looking to hire people with finance and IT skills. WSRCA has started to confirm the participation of employers in neighboring counties who are in serious need of these workers, which will allow trainees to grow their competencies at regional businesses with opportunities for hybrid or in-person work.

Skilled Trades			Healthcare			Finance & Information Technology		
968	1906	116	1506	828	127	463	991	39
Job Postings in last 6 mos	Projected jobs in next 5 yrs	Employer commitments	Job Postings in last 6 mos	Projected jobs in next 5 yrs	Employer commitments	Job Postings in last 6 mos	Projected jobs in next 5 yrs	Employer commitments

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[3] Capital Area Council of Governments, "2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy." (See Annex C.)

[4] Community Impact Newspaper, "Staffing shortages continue to plague a variety of industries…," October 4, 2021,

Worker Skill Needs: As described in Section 4A, this project will equip workers with the technical and non-technical skills that employers need. A search of the most requested skills across all 15,000 active job postings in the RTI database not only validated the chosen sectors but also provided a clear view of what future training programs should focus on. While a bachelor's degree was highly requested, the time involved in this degree means it is beyond the scope of REINVEST to provide, and we focus instead on skills and credentials that can be completed withing the project timeline.

In-Demand Skills			
Technical Skills			**Non-Technical Skills**
Skilled Trades ● Tractor-Trailer Trucks ● Plumbing ● Ability to Lift 41-50 lbs ● Ability to Lift 51-100 lbs	**Healthcare** ● Health/Wellness ● Long-Term Care ● Nursing ● Medication Admin. ● Pediatrics ● Medical Terminology ● Patient Care	**Finance & IT** ● Microsoft Office / Outlook / Excel / Word ● Personal Computers ● Keyboarding/Typing ● Information Security	● Work Ethic / Reliable ● Flexible / Adaptable ● Communication ● Teamwork ● Detail Oriented / Organized ● Interpersonal Skills ● Customer Service ● Problem Solving ● Self-Motivated

Target participants served: This project will prioritize historically underserved populations including immigrants, women, and low-income individuals. See Section 4e for more information on the Target Demographics, Regional Need, and Strategies.

3c. CEDS Alignment

CEDS Alignment: The Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) serves as the Economic Development District for Region 12 which includes the RCA. CAPCOG manages the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and REINVEST has made sure to align with the 2020-2025 CEDS (See Annex C for a Letter of Support from CAPCOG). The CEDS prioritizes regional resilience, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, and workforce development. REINVEST will advance these priorities by facilitating collaboration between employers, trainers, and workers, expanding training access in high-growth industries, elevating small businesses as employer partners, and facilitating broadband access. It will also prioritize workers from historically underserved groups (see section 3b) in clear alignment with CEDS's acknowledgement that racial disparities "limit the region's ability to achieve its full economic potential."[5] A key aspect of collaboration will also include leveraging other federal and non-federal funding sources further explained in Section 4c.

SECTION 4: IMPACTS OF THE REGIONAL WORKFORCE TRAINING SYSTEM
4a. Project Components

This project will include all three project phases, but different sectors will operate on different timelines given the strength of their existing workforce training systems. For example, ST has a comparatively strong network of training partners, training models, and employer commitments and will move into program implementation within 9 months of project award. FIT occupations have yet to build out their training programs and fully mobilize employers so their system development and program design phased will be longer (see figure below). For specific activities and benchmarks envisioned in each phase, see Section 5b.

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[5] Capital Area Council of Governments, "2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy." (See Annex C.)
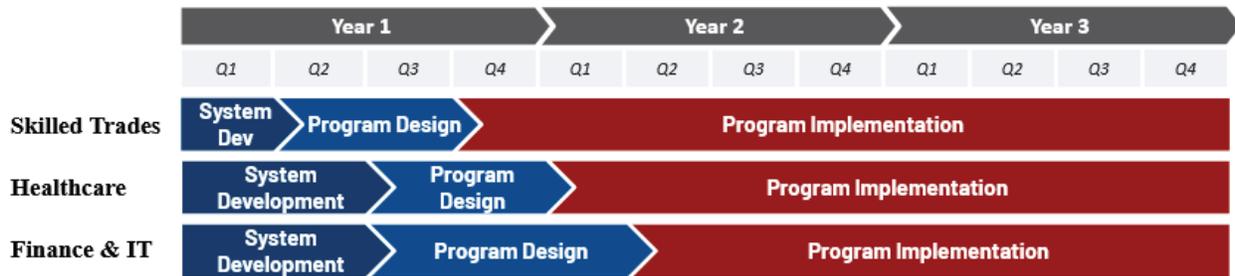
REINVEST has great potential to capitalize on specific opportunities facing the region and also tackle structural challenges. Many of these are outlined in Section 3a above. They include the opportunity presented by an influx of new residents and larger businesses as well as the ability to tackle the persistent disconnect between employer skill needs and locally available training opportunities. The disproportionally higher barriers that some population groups experience to workforce development opportunities is addressed as well.

While WSRCA operates many workforce development programs including the RHI, these efforts do not sufficiently meet employer needs for qualified workers. More importantly, the existing efforts have not involved building a local system that comprehensively connects industry, strategic, and community partners. While BOs have started building ST workforce development systems in their respective areas by engaging one employer at a time, plumbing and electrician training programs are just now getting started and other ST occupations aren't included at all. No workforce training system for FIT exists. While REINVEST will leverage these other efforts – especially the RHI – the employer demand is sufficiently high that REINVEST services and training programs will complement rather than duplicate other efforts.

Factors that contribute to the region's workforce challenges: Industry needs in the RCA are shifting quickly. Mining, oil, and gas—once the lifeblood of local economies in Bastrop and Lee counties—has dwindled by 20% over the past five years, spurred by a 2017 coal mine closure. ST, HC, and FIT occupations are accelerating, with an estimated 5-year demand of over 15,000 jobs in the related Career Technical Education (CTE) clusters, according to JobsEQ data. Comparatively lower levels of educational attainment are another barrier for workers to access high-quality jobs. According to the 2020 Census, only 21% of people have a bachelor's degree or higher in RCA, compared to 50% in Travis County and 38% nationally. While many training partners have been identified for REINVEST, a lack of training equipment and facilities make it hard for them to run trainings locally which means students must travel—sometimes 100 miles in a day—to attend training in neighboring counties. Leveraging HC and ST employers' spaces for training has started showing promise in a few instances but this approach has not yet been built to scale across occupations and the region. The lack of broadband impedes remote work and online learning: 20-30% of households in RCA lack broadband access compared to 13% in neighboring Travis County.[6] The comparatively higher cost per worker trained is also a challenge. Since employers in the RCA are generally small, they only hire 1-5 workers at a time which means development practitioners must therefore invest a lot of time and effort to engage dozens of employers as participants in the program while more urban centers may be able to rely on fewer, larger employers or employer associations. The total number of jobs that can be committed in a rural area with a total population of 205,000 is also much lower compared to

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[6] Capital Area Council of Governments, "2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy." (See Annex C.)

more populated, urban centers with populations in the millions. For these reasons, rural communities are de facto underserved since they are often passed over in favor of geographies that can secure more jobs overall and provide a greater cost per job ratio for funders.

Factors that contribute to the region's workforce strengths: The broader Austin region has led the state and nation in population growth.[7] The RCA, in particular, is resilient, community-centered and equipped to efficiently mobilize investments. ST and HC pilot training programs exist on a small scale, demonstrating strong partnerships, execution, and the potential to scale. The HDJT grant in Burnet and Llano counties is training 22 workers in plumber and medical assistant roles, and includes a DOL-sponsored Registered Apprenticeship Program, and RHI is helping to meet some (but not all) of the need for nurses and other healthcare jobs. SWTC recently opened a new HC and ST training facility which is ready to accept new students. Across the three sectors, 12 training partners (See Section 2b) stand ready and willing to develop, scale and implement training programs in each of the priority occupations, in many instances bringing courses locally to RCA that previously only existed in urban centers. All 38 employers have also committed to providing requisite training, equipment and hands-on learning opportunity for workers supported by REINVEST (see Annex B for analysis of supports offered by employers).

4b. Alignment with EDA

Alignment with recovery and resilience investment priorities: This project aligns with EDA's Recovery and Resilience investment priorities as it supports economic diversification in counties that have experienced shocks. This region has faced several recent natural disasters, including fires, floods, an ice storm, a hurricane, and the pandemic. Previous industry anchors in the economy such as mining, coal and gas are waning. Throughout the pandemic, hospitality and tourism were decimated here as elsewhere across the globe. As explained in Section 3c, Employers in ST, HC, and FIT sectors have struggled to find talent to sustain or expand their businesses. Investing in these sectors will diversify the economy and strengthen the region against future shocks.

Alignment with other EDA Priorities: This project aligns with EDA's equity priority by prioritizing traditionally underserved populations and communities within geographies that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic prosperity. It aligns with EDA's Workforce Development, Technology, and Environmental Sustainability priorities by bridging workforce strategies and employer needs, building the region's technological capacity, and supporting skills needed for clean energy jobs. In particular, increasing workers in the IT field and many of the ST occupations will build talent likely to be needed by clean energy employers like Tesla and a new solar farm being built in the area.

4c. Number and Type of Jobs

Income Gains and New Jobs: Completion (C) and placement (P) numbers are projected from the actual results of similar programs. Expected total annual incomes from 777 jobs is over $37.5M and expected annual income gain (increase in incomes based on "prior level jobs") of $14.4M. Based on project plans and program durations, REINVEST will place about 300 workers in jobs in Year 1 and Year 2 and an additional 477 workers in Year 3.The table below outlines occupations and estimates of recruitment (R), C and P. Third Sector will work with WSRCA and BOs to engage employers to align on a definition of a "quality job" that includes competitive wages and benefits and will prioritize employers able to make this commitment.

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[7] CAPCOG General Assembly, September 2021, based on 2020 Census

Job Type (Occupation)	Need (Projected Jobs – PJ)[8]	Participants Recruited, Completed & Placed)	Impact (Projected Annual Income - PAI / Income Gains – IG)[9]
SKILLED TRADES – 166 job commitments across 25 employers and employer associations			
Residential Plumber	308 PJ	96 R, 82 C, 77 P	PAI: $39K; IG from Plumber Helper: $16K
Residential Electrician	349 PJ	52 R, 44 C, 42 P	PAI: $49K; IG from Electrical Assembler: $13K
Certified HVAC Tech	179 PJ	71 R, 60 C, 54 P	PAI: $42K; IG from Electrician Helper: $16K
Welder	207 PJ	36 R, 31 C, 29 P	PAI: $41K; IG from Team Assembler: $14K
Commercial Driver	662 PJ	200 R, 180 C, 162 P	PAI: $39K; IG from Light Truck Driver: $17K
Construction Manager	267 PJ	60 R, 54 C, 49 P	PAI: $77K; IG from Supervisor: $14K
HEALTHCARE – 127 job commitments across 8 employers and employer associations			
Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN)	169 PJ	75 R, 68 C, 62 P	PAI: $46K; IG from Phlebotomist: $17K
Registered Nurse (RN)	285 PJ	65 R, 59 C, 53 P	PAI: $68K; IG from LVN: $22K
Behavioral Health Counselor	113 PJ	30 R, 26 C, 24 P	PAI: $45K; IG from Community Health Worker: $22K
Allied Health Technician[10]	261 PJ	45 R, 41 C, 36 P	Average PAI: $39K; IG from Medical Assistant: $10K
FINANCE & IT – 55 job commitments across 13 employers and employer associations			
IT Occupations[11]	240 PJ	95 R, 86 C, 81 P	Average PAI: $64K; IG from IT Support: $34K
Bookkeeping Clerk	404 PJ	100 R, 80 C, 68 P	PAI: $35K; IG from Data Entry: $14K
Accountant & Loan Processor/Auditor	347 PJ	55 R, 44 C, 40 P	PAI: $61K; IG from Bookkeeping Clerk: $26K

Target Demographic Breakdown: At least 50% of recruitments, completions, and placements will be people with low incomes (below 200% federal poverty level or eligible for programs such as SNAP, WIC, TANF). At least 33% of recruitments, completions, and placements will be people who reflect other characteristics that increase the probability of facing barriers and being underserved. These include 1) immigrants, 2) people of color, 3) individuals with conviction history or in recovery or 4) women entering a ST or FIT occupation. Given the supports envisioned for underserved populations, REINVEST will aim for equal completion and placement rates for these populations as for the general population.

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[8] Projected Jobs (PJ) represents 5-Year Demand (Jobs EQ data). See Employer Needs Table in Annex A for more information.

[9] PAI are developed from projected median wages in JobsEQ data for the 6 counties. Projected IGs are developed from the projected median or entry level wages (as appropriate) of prior jobs. Prior jobs are based on the career lattices in the 2019 RCA report "The Future is Ahead of You" and WSRCA experience.

[10] Allied Medical Technician includes 11 possible occupations as defined by Bureau of Labor Statistics carrying unique Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes. They range from Phlebotomist to Paramedic and Physician Assistant.

[11] IT Occupations similarly include 6 possible occupations with unique SOC codes and ranging from Computer Network Support Specialist to Information Security Analyst and Computer User Support.

Plan for measurement and tracking of key outcomes and metrics: Building from the job placement and demographic breakdown goals identified above, Third Sector will work with WSRCA and the BOs to establish clear metrics at the input, output, outcome and impact levels; assess the accuracy, frequency, and relevance of potential data sources; establish a data collection strategy built on WSRCA's DocuWare platform; develop bidirectional feedback loops with workers and employers; and sketch an initial continuous improvement and learning process. Through this effort, REINVEST will be well equipped to routinely capture and review performance and use quantitative and qualitative data to revise operational, programmatic and administrative procedures. Once project data is collected, WSRCA will cross-reference individual participants with the Workintexas.com (WIT) platform which houses all of Texas' state employment data, thereby enabling REINVEST to track short as well as longer term outcomes related to education, employment and wage earnings.

Leveraging additional resources: REINVEST will align with current or proposed investments as described in Section 5c and utilize other initiatives and coalitions defined in Sections 1b, 2a, and 2b to support development, design and implementation. In total, we expect to leverage $4,843,586 in additional resources summarized by stakeholder below.

WSRCA	Western (WNI)	Eastern (SWTC)
Explore co-enrollment and supports administered by other programs including WIOA, Childcare and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and discretionary grants from federal, state, and philanthropic sources	Leverage training infrastructure developed with support from other sources including Marble Falls, Burnet, and Llano EDCs, HCBA, and Texas Workforce Commission.	Utilize three no-cost facilities from SWTC partners and leverage training infrastructure developed with support from various foundations as well as the City of Smithville and Bastrop County.
Third Sector Capital Partners	Third Sector will offer three months of pro-bono TA	

4d. Project Achievability

Examples of this solution achieving outcomes, research, and groundwork: WSRCA has collaborated with the BOs on several workforce efforts. The REINVEST sectoral partnership model mirrors the place- and sector-based approach that WSRCA applies in its WIOA Title 1 activities as well as the RHI (HC) and HDJT (ST) pilot programs. The FIT programs will build upon a successful partnership between WSRCA and CyberDefenses, which provided online security training in Texas for 26 organizations and 112 individuals across 16 classes.

Feasibility: REINVEST is feasible within the grant period and budget for three distinct reasons:
1. Efficient organization: The place- and sector-based approach enables BOs to effectively engage and mobilize local employers, training and support providers and workers.
2. Realistic projection of employment targets: Employment targets are based on the track record of WSRCA programs, results of similar region programs, employer commitments, stakeholder input, and regional economic planning priorities (See Section 3b and 4c).
3. Third Sector TA: Since 2011, Third Sector has helped 40 communities and clients achieve equity and performance goals while adhering time and budget parameters.

4e. Target Demographics of Participants

Core to REINVEST's equity strategy is the goal to build economic opportunities for people in rural communities who have historically been underserved by economic development projects and business investments. The project will also focus on the subpopulations listed in the table below. Based on stakeholder consultations, these subpopulations experience disproportionally

lower access and higher barriers to training opportunities, more economic hardship, and higher likelihood of workplace discrimination. Below are descriptions of each group's situation in the RCA or across broader areas where relevant.

Low-income, SNAP, TANF, WIOA	In recovery or with conviction history	Immigrants and people of color (POC)	Women
Rationale			
11% Residents in poverty **15%** Residents uninsured	**16K** Residents with SUD **65%** Increase in pretrial incarceration since 2000	**33%** Latino/Hispanic **9%** Foreign Born	**4x** as many women left the U.S. labor force as men **31%** Children living with single-parent - often mother
Strategies			
Provide housing, transportation, internet, and cost of education supports as described in Section 5C.	Referrals to enroll in Behavioral Health Counselor trainings as appropriate. Embed fair chance hiring topics in employer engagement. Use Checkr.com for limited background checks.	Explore integrated language and training approaches with providers. Work with partners who successfully engage POC (e.g. ACC: 34% Hispanic and 25% non-white).	Childcare supports as described in Section 5C. Referrals to Christian Business Women, which prepares women for the workplace.

Plan for ensuring that benefits are shared: Supported by Third Sector, the Team will track and review results quarterly to address and problem-solve disparities in access or outcomes (See Section 4c for metrics). The Team is well-poised to recruit workers from target demographic groups through partnerships with experienced providers who serve workers facing barriers, including POC-owned training providers such as Central Texas Allied Health Institute (CTAHI).

Project Impact on Communities: This project will directly benefit 777 workers and 100+ employers. It will indirectly benefit nearly 3,000 family members of the workers; and over 60,000 community members desperate for healthcare.[12] See Section 4c for projected annual income gains ($38M). The multiplier effect of dollars changing hands several times before leaving the community will help to sustain the wider population.

SECTION 5: FUNDING REQUEST, PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION
5a. Estimated funding request
The Team has built a bottom-up budget based on historic costs for similar trainings in ST and HC occupations as well as provider estimates for expanding their trainings to more locations in the RCA. Given the focus on workers experiencing barriers, the budget also includes reasonable costs for wraparound supports not covered by other sources. WSRCA and the BOs have included necessary administrative costs to effectively run the program while relying heavily on the TA offered by Third Sector to help ensure a continued focus on impact, equity and sustainability. In total, REINVEST is budgeted at $12,087,373 which amounts to a cost per worker of $15,556. This amount includes $496,656 for System Development, $993,312 for Project Design and $10,597,405 for Implementation. The Team is also offering $4,843,586 in leverage as described in Section 4c. A full description and breakdown of costs is included in the Budget Narrative.

5b. Anticipated System Development, Program Design, Program Implementation projects
As visualized in Section 4a, REINVEST is applying for funding for all three project phases. As each occupation and sector completes the agreed upon activities and achieves the benchmarks laid out in table below, they will move on to the next phase.

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[12] Workers + family members (about 3.5 people per family in Texas): 1,500. Estimating annually a nurse serves 500 patients and a counselor 300 clients, over 6Plu0,000 people could benefit from additional healthcare staff.

Activities and Benchmarks by Phase		
System Development	**Program Design**	**Program Implementation**
Activities: • Validate occupations • Review data, measurement & learning strategies • Strengthen employer relations & confirm commitments • Engage worker organizations • Confirm training partners for each occupation in each region **Benchmarks:** • Secured employer commitments • Confirmed occupations & training partners	**Activities:** • Collaboratively design training programs and models for each occupation in each region • Set up facilities and secure equipment • Align on outreach & recruitment strategies • Design wraparound support strategies **Benchmarks:** • Training program plans • Signed MOUs and funding subcontracts with training providers	**Activities:** • Recruit & enroll participants • Facilitate trainings • Deliver supportive services • Regularly review data & adjust program as needed • Explore sustainability options **Benchmarks:** • Participants recruited, completed trainings & placed in jobs • Continuous improvement plan • Sustainability plan

5c. Anticipated Barriers, Mitigation Strategies and Sustainability

Barriers to participants will become barriers to project success. Therefore, individual training plans will include each participant's relevant support services. Potential barriers and mitigation strategies are included the table below:

Potential Barrier	Mitigation Strategy
Housing is expensive compared to wages	Provide cost of living stipend per month to participants (and evaluate effect on results). Partner with hotels for housing during in-person classes or on-the-job hours.
Lack of transportation options	Work with the Central Area Rural Transportation, Hill Country Transit, Uber, and local church vans to bring participants to sites. Cover personal transport costs (repairs, fuel).
Lack of affordable, quality childcare	Leverage the CCDBG to cover a full year of childcare for eligible families.
Cost of supplies; equipment availability	Provide scholarships for supplies. Engage employers to donate or support with procuring supplies and equipment.
Need for workers to start new businesses to fill labor market gaps	Leverage entrepreneurship program with Texas State University and small business services in Austin. Explore creating small business incubator programs with local Chambers of Commerce.
Lack of broadband access	Provide stipends for high-quality internet such as Starlink. Engage carriers through a Communications Coordination Group to explore expanding access to rural areas.
Possibility of toxic or discriminatory workplaces	Engage employer partners on skill-based fair hiring and quality jobs. Explore employer training program "Workplace Stability" to reduce turnover and improve employee relations.
Difficulty adapting to new jobs	Refer up to 130 select workers to "Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin' By World," to investigate how to develop resources to make change in their lives.
Course times and availability	Provide opportunities for night classes and expand transportation and childcare options to facilitate attendance, particularly for full-time workers (see above).
Complexity of enrollment process and coursework	Provide mentors for life-coaching, navigation, and completion support. For LVN and RN students, provide a health care education professional to clarify terms, address learning needs, and study habits for successful completion.

Ongoing support to workers: WSRCA's service plan includes job search and matching through WIT, the state's largest database of job postings; close collaboration with hiring employers; and dedicated case managers to facilitate connections between workers and employers. These efforts will be complemented by the Team's navigation support staff, including mentors who stay connected for the first year after graduation. Partnering employers will also offer on-the-job training to qualify for credentials and build work experience as well as on-the-job mentoring. The project will also continue many of the supportive services listed above for 3-6 months after job placement to facilitate transition into self-sufficiency.

Sustainability of system: Planning for system sustainability will begin in the second year of the project. WSRCA will work with Third Sector to convene the BOs, employers, and community partners to identify and elevate opportunities to sustain occupation-specific training programs through other means once the REINVEST project ends. For example, local foundations such as the St. David's Foundation and Episcopal Health Foundation in the Eastern area and Burnet and Llano EDCs in the Western area, have all supported BO's training programs in the past and may be encouraged to do more as the regional workforce training system grows and becomes stronger as a result of REINVEST's support. WSRCA will also sustain the relational infrastructure established under REINVEST by facilitating quarterly leadership meetings with the BOs, community leaders, and employers to discuss lessons and insights from the project that can be applied to other programs. Communication collateral including project highlights, impact briefs, lessons, and growth strategies will further solidify the project's ability to spur and inform future workforce training efforts.

Alignment with other initiatives: Most supportive services align with current or proposed investments: new buildings by the Texas Housing Foundation will supply more housing, the Central Area Rural Transportation and Hill Country Transit provide reservation-based ridership programs, Smithville Chamber's video training programs and networking opportunities, and the Texas State Small Business Development Office's online monthly workshops will integrate into entrepreneurship programs. This project will scale and leverage the successful training models (e.g., plumbing and nursing) and providers (e.g., CTC and CTAHI) referenced in Section 4a. BCACH is working with local organizations (such as faith-based organizations) to create a Collective Impact Initiative that will continually engage workers to understand their hopes and needs, a model the Team will explore scaling to align worker and employer needs.