Expansion of the Texas HireAbility Campaign

Discussion Paper

# Background

In 2016, as the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs transferred from the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), TWC partnered with the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities and Texas Workforce Solutions to launch the Texas HireAbility campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness among employers about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities.

The campaign is now in its third year and coincides with National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) each October. NDEAM was established by Congress in 1945 to celebrate the contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce and to emphasize the importance of ensuring that all Americans have access to services and supports that enable them to work. During the annual Texas HireAbility campaign, TWC and its partners feature resources for employers and conduct a statewide series of awareness activities and hiring events for job seekers with disabilities. Activities are conducted primarily in October but may also take place in other months depending on the event.

# Issue

The Texas HireAbility campaign’s hiring events and awareness activities recognize employers for hiring individuals with disabilities, creating inclusive workplaces, and partnering with TWC’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program to implement strategies that provide training and employment for students and adults with disabilities. Recognizing employers for their partnership and commitment to an inclusive workforce is an effective way to acknowledge those employers and encourage adoption of similar practices among other employers in the same industry or community. It is also an effective strategy for TWC-VR staff to introduce technical assistance and support available to employers that hire individuals with disabilities.

The effectiveness of this practice could be enhanced by implementing a statewide strategy to recognize these employers and provide them with opportunities to share effective practices with the broader employer community.

# Decision Points

Staff seeks direction on expanding the Texas HireAbility campaign to include implementation of an employer recognition strategy and an annual employer forum to promote effective practices and share resources available to employers to recruit, hire, train, and retain qualified individuals with disabilities.

**Decision Point #1**

Staff seeks direction on the proposed strategy of recognizing businesses with at least 10 percent of their Texas-based workforce that is comprised of people with disabilities, as follows:

* Up to 100 employers would be recognized each October.
* Employers may nominate themselves or be nominated by Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards), local TWC-VR management, or a local mayoral or county committee that works in partnership with the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities.
* Each year, the first 100 employers nominated that meet the established criteria would receive a decal and a certificate. The decal can be displayed at their business location. Additionally, an electronic decal would also be provided for the employer’s use on its website and social media.
* To the extent feasible, recognition decals and certificates would be presented at Texas HireAbility events by TWC Commissioners or their designees, Boards, and/or local TWC-VR management.
* To be included in the 10 percent, employees must be working:
* full- or part-time, with part-time employment being at least 15 hours per week; and
* in competitive, integrated employment as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and its implementing regulations, as follows:
* At minimum wage or above, and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities in similar positions with comparable skills, experience, and training
* In a competitive labor market setting, in which the employee with the disability interacts with employees without disabilities and with other individuals without disabilities (for example, vendors and their customers) to the same extent that employees without disabilities in similar positions interact with these individuals.

TWC-VR would coordinate the employer recognition strategy in partnership with its Workforce Development and External Relations Divisions.

**Decision Point #2**

Staff seeks direction on establishing an annual employer forum, hosted by TWC, the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities, Texas Workforce Solutions, and community partners, taking the following into consideration:

* The annual forum would be patterned after the successful 2017 and 2018 employer forums coordinated by the office of TWC’s Commissioner Representing Employers. These events were conducted in partnership with the Texas Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities, Texas Workforce Solutions, and local community partners.
* The annual forum would be hosted by the TWC Commissioners and would feature employers and partnerships that promote hiring individuals with disabilities and creating inclusive workplaces. The forum would include resources and information about effective and innovative strategies for recruiting, training, hiring, and retaining employees with disabilities.
* The location of the forum would rotate each year to enable TWC to highlight successful partnerships and effective strategies across the state.
* The forum would be conducted each October.
* Local hosts for each forum may include Boards, postsecondary institutions, employers, and other community partners and organizations.

TWC-VR would coordinate the annual forum in partnership with its Workforce Development and External Relations Divisions.