

Emerging Industry Workforce Development Pilot Program Discussion Paper

Background

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) prioritizes skilled talent pipelines for high-wage, high-demand emerging industries like renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, and nuclear energy. To support these industries, TWC collaborates with local workforce boards, colleges and universities, and other partners to ensure Texas workers have the skills employers need.

Nuclear energy is a vital part of Texas' energy portfolio, providing reliable electricity and high paying jobs. Nuclear energy in Texas is a growing industry. A new plant is currently under development in South Texas, and current nuclear reactors in Texas employ around 2,000 workers with an average wage over \$170,000

Issue

The Texas Legislature recognizes the importance of a skilled nuclear workforce. Senate Bill 1535 (SB 1535) directs TWC to create and manage, by rule, an advanced nuclear energy workforce development program. This involves collaboration with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to design training programs and curriculum for colleges and universities. To ensure the statewide program is effective, a pilot program is proposed to test different approaches and identify best practices before creating an advanced nuclear energy workforce development program, in the event funding for this program becomes available. With the passage of SB 1535, TWC is directed to develop a strategic plan and customized curriculum requirements for degree and certificate programs. Upon approval by THECB, the curriculum requirements can be used by Texas' IHEs. The pilot program will provide an opportunity to learn the most effective ways to support workforce development in emerging industries and offers a chance to experiment with different approaches and identify what works best.

Although the Texas Legislature did not specifically provide funding for SB 1535, existing federal funding can be used. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides federal funds to states for workforce development activities. These WIOA funds can be used to support the development or expansion of current nuclear energy training programs through a pilot program that would establish a talent pipeline for this industry. This pilot program could help program participants cover the costs of training and obtaining necessary certifications.

Decision Point

We are requesting approval to use \$1.5 million in WIOA funds to create a grant program that serves as a pilot project for developing the advanced nuclear energy workforce.