



# How **Regional Conveners** Are Driving Pathways Infrastructure in Texas

Regional conveners play an essential role in developing education-to-career pathways infrastructure. In 2023, the [Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative](#) launched a new grant program to designate a regional convener in each of the state's workforce development areas (WDAs). Each regional convener is focused on building a region-wide strategy to address pathways infrastructure gaps and unite stakeholders around a shared regional vision. Now, two years into this innovative initiative, regional conveners are learning important lessons about regional needs and how to effectively engage cross-sector partners to build and implement systems solutions.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PATHWAYS INFRASTRUCTURE

The structure of a regional pathways system includes multiple pathways into in-demand occupations in targeted industries. This regional pathways system relies on a coalition of aligned partners from multiple sectors working together towards a common vision and goals leveraging collective resources. A regional approach to pathways includes developing strong infrastructure that prepares systems to design, scale, and sustain pathways. Infrastructure includes building shared data systems, capacity building, and communication strategies that enable cross-sector partners to effectively collaborate, embed the components of [high-quality pathways](#), and measure programmatic outcomes and systems change.

The theory of change guiding this first-of-its-kind state investment is that, if Texas can build a regional infrastructure that brings together secondary education, postsecondary education, and workforce partners to establish common goals, data collection, and processes to monitor and provide the supports necessary for students to succeed at all stages of their education and transitions to work, then we will see a strong regional workforce and ensure that our residents are prepared for jobs in the industries that power the state's economy today and tomorrow.

To execute this work, regional conveners, which hold many of the same functions as intermediaries, act as the "glue" in a regional pathways ecosystem. They are uniquely positioned to support the coordination, alignment, and infrastructure for quality pathways implementation across a region. Regional conveners provide cohesion for collective efforts to respond to a region's assets, needs, and vision. They convene partners across sectors around a common cause and lead regional pathways strategy, operationalize the work into action plans, and drive partners towards outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Many types of organizations can serve as a regional convener, including local education agencies, institutions of higher education, workforce development boards, and nonprofits. The Tri-Agency decided to invest in this critical role across all regions of the state to ensure each region has the infrastructure to support a regional pathways system.

<sup>1</sup> Kyle Hartung, Nancy Hoffman, Amy Loyd, and Derek Niño, *Intermediary Functions and Features in a Pathways System*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Jobs for the Future, November, 2020), [https://www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Intermediary\\_Functions\\_Features\\_Pathways\\_Systems.pdf](https://www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Intermediary_Functions_Features_Pathways_Systems.pdf).

## OVERVIEW OF THE TRI-AGENCY REGIONAL CONVENER GRANT PROGRAM

To develop a regional education-workforce partnership system and advance statewide pathways priorities, in April 2023 the Tri-Agency launched a grant program focused on identifying, training, and designating a Tri-Agency Regional Convener in each of the state's 28 workforce development areas. To date, 17 million dollars has been invested into two grant programs, both funded through general appropriations. The Tri-Agency tapped into existing organizations with a regional scope of work to serve as regional conveners, such as regional workforce development boards, education service centers, and institutions of higher education. Organizations eligible to apply were required to be headquartered in the WDA for which they proposed to serve as a regional convener, and their existing services and/or activities focused within that WDA.

Under the guidance and support of a Tri-Agency Steering Committee, the regional conveners are focused on developing regional pathways infrastructure and have goals to create systems that support scalable and sustainable pathways aligned with industry demand. In working towards designation, the grantees must demonstrate their proficiency in the roles and responsibilities of a regional convener through completion of grant activities aligned to four leadership domains.

After successful completion of all grant requirements and in demonstrating success in executing their strategic plans, the regional conveners will become eligible to achieve a Tri-Agency Regional Convener designation, signaling their expertise and capacity to provide ongoing leadership and coordination to advance Tri-Agency priorities across their WDA. A Tri-Agency designation will support a regional convener's efforts to engage partners and secure funding. Designated regional conveners will become a go-to partner and collaborator with state-level leadership and the designation can serve the same function as, for example, one of any of the agency's approved lists, which signal quality and priority-standing.

The second round of funding for regional conveners was launched in early 2025 to support regional conveners with preliminary designation status with implementing their strategic plans. The grant is also supporting a new set of organizations pursuing designation in workforce development areas that did not have an applicant during the previous grant cycle.

## QUALITIES OF A REGIONAL CONVENER

- Is committed to supporting the mission, vision, goals, and strategies of the Tri-Agency and can clearly translate them into a regional vision and strategic plan.
- Serves as a neutral voice for employers, institutions of higher education, and K-12 education.
- Holds expertise in the intersection between education and workforce, including how these systems can be more responsive to the rapidly changing needs of employers.
- Has experience connecting and convening regional stakeholders who play critical roles in pathway implementation.
- Thinks strategically across a workforce development area to efficiently coordinate alignment of regional pathways systems.

## ABOUT THE TRPN

The Texas Regional Pathways Network (TRPN) builds regional talent pipelines that spur economic growth across the state and ensure that all Texans have the skills and credentials needed for economic advancement.

The TRPN brings together state and regional leaders to build strong educational and career pathways that prepare Texans for careers in high-wage, in-demand industries. Leaders engaged in the TRPN represent multiple sectors, including K-12 education, postsecondary education, workforce and economic development, business and industry, government, and nonprofit and community-based organizations. The TRPN currently includes two initiatives: Tri-Agency Regional Convener grantees and Regional Pathway Teams.

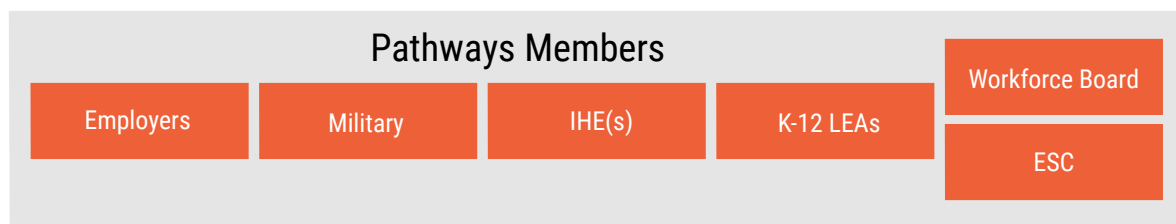
The Texas Regional Pathways Network is a shared initiative of the Tri-Agency Workforce Initiative, a collaboration among the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Texas Workforce Commission.

# REGIONAL PATHWAYS STRUCTURE

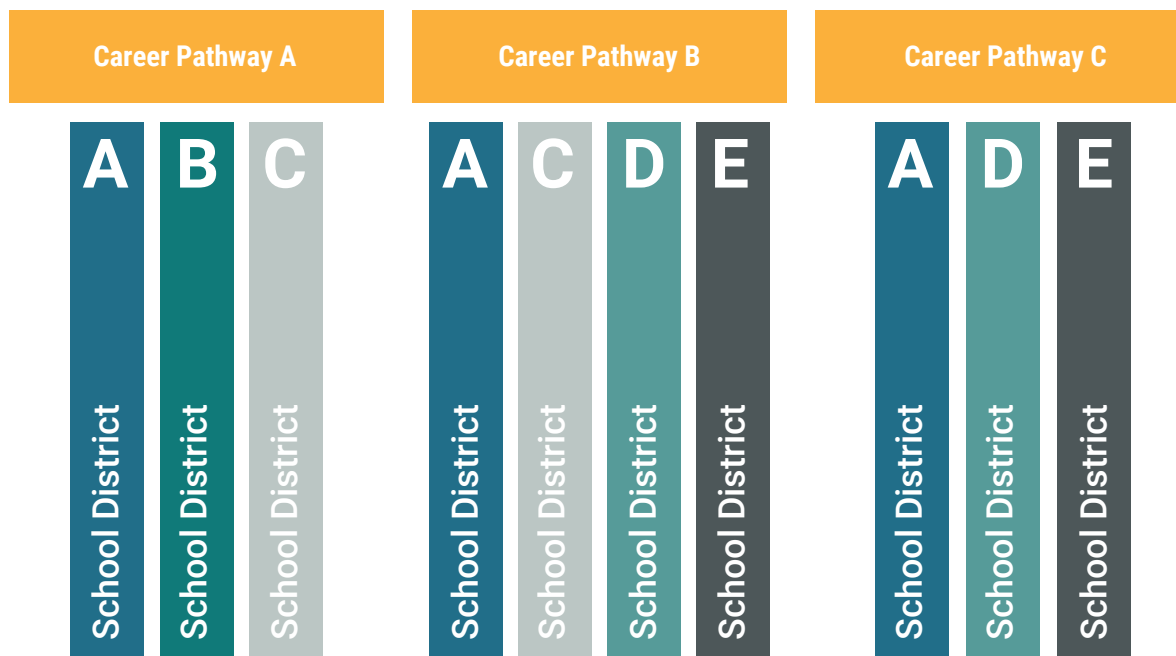
The TRPN defines regions in accordance with the Texas workforce systems definition, dividing the geography of the state into 28 workforce development areas (WDAs). In the TRPN, regional pathways systems are led by a regional convener and the regional cross-sector pathways leadership team (PLT) that they convene. This regional leadership structure sets the vision and provides resources to support cross-sector partners (workforce, IHEs, K-12 and employers) who are implementing pathways aligned to the region's identified targeted industries.

## Tri-Agency TRPN Oversight: TEA, THECB, and TWC

### Regional Convener in a Regional TRPN System



### Targeted **Career Pathways** (Industries/Occupations)



# REGIONAL CONVENER GRANT AWARDEES

Through a competitive grant process, twenty-two organizations were awarded regional convener grants, including:

- 12 workforce development boards
- 5 education service centers\*
- 4 nonprofits

\*One education service center was awarded grants for two WDAs

Grantees for the 2025-2027 grant cycle are grouped into two focus areas, planning and implementation. Regional conveners focused on planning work across partners throughout the grant project to lead strategic planning and complete grant activities that demonstrate their proficiency in the roles and responsibilities of a regional convener. Regional conveners focused on implementation work across partners throughout the grant project to implement their strategic plans and continue to build a sustainable regional pathways infrastructure. Implementation grantees completed the planning activities as part of the 2023-2024 grant cycle.

## Planning Grantees

Workforce Development Area (#)	Grantee
North Texas (3)	Workforce Solutions North Texas
Tarrant County (5)	T3 Partnership
Greater Dallas (6)	North Central Texas InterLink
Concho Valley (12)	Concho Valley Local WFB
South Texas (21)	ESC 1
Texoma (25)	Workforce Solutions Texoma

## Implementation Grantees

Workforce Development Area (#)	Grantee
Panhandle (1)	ESC 16
North Central (4)	FACT Education
Northeast (7)	Workforce Solutions Northeast TX
East Texas (8)	Tyler Business and Education Council
West Central (9)	Workforce Solutions of West Central TX
Borderplex (10)	ESC 19
Heart of Texas (13)	Workforce Solutions Heart of Texas
Capital Area (14)	ESC 13
Rural Capital (15)	Workforce Solutions Rural Capital
Deep East (17)	Workforce Solutions of Deep East Texas
Golden Crescent (19)	ESC 3
Coastal Bend (22)	Workforce Solutions Coastal Bend
Lower Rio (23)	ESC 1
Cameron County (24)	Workforce Solutions Cameron County
Central (26)	Workforce Solutions Central TX
Gulf Coast (28)	Workforce Solutions Gulf Coast

# LEADERSHIP DOMAINS AND GRANT ACTIVITIES

The deliverables and activities of the grant are structured around four leadership domains with associated essential functions based on focus area. Regional conveners will be assessed against these in the designation process.

Leadership Domain	Essential Functions   Planning	Essential Functions   Implementation
<b>Regional Alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Identify, coordinate, and sustain a regional cross-sector pathways leadership team</b> to support the planning, monitoring, and continuous improvement of regional pathways.</li> <li>• <b>Complete a regional asset map and gap analysis for quality pathways</b> that identifies regional in-demand industries and occupations and assesses existing pathways-related programs and infrastructure.</li> <li>• <b>Develop a regional strategic plan</b> for planning and executing high-quality pathways that includes a shared regional vision for quality pathways, shared regional goals, a two-year action plan, and sustainability plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Continued coordination of a cross-sector pathways leadership team</b> to support the planning, monitoring, and continuous improvement of regional pathways</li> <li>• <b>Implementation of a regional strategic plan</b> that includes implementation of two-year action plans aligned to goals and metrics. Implementation plans include actions to align pathways into targeted industries and implement strategies for work-based learning, employer engagement, and communications.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Work-based Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Plan for high-quality work-based learning programming</b> that serves K-12 and postsecondary students to address identified gaps from the asset map and gap analysis.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support, monitor, and scale quality regional work-based learning</b> across multiple partners aligned to targeted industries.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Develop and maintain a regional data infrastructure</b> to monitor key metrics and data to drive decision making.</li> <li>• <b>Identify key metrics</b> aligned to regional strategic plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Maintain regional data infrastructure</b> to monitor key metrics and data to drive decision making.</li> <li>• <b>Monitor key metrics</b> aligned to regional strategic plan.</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Plan a regional communications strategy</b> that includes strategies for streamlining and communicating information across the region.</li> <li>• <b>Serve as a hub of resources and information</b> related to quality pathways implementation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Implement a regional communications strategy</b> that includes strategies for streamlining and communicating information across the region.</li> <li>• <b>Execute technical assistance and communications efforts</b> to deliver critical information to stakeholders.</li> </ul>

## REGIONAL PROGRESS AND LESSONS

The planning stages of regional convener work focus on establishing a cross-sector pathways leadership team followed by in-depth research into the strengths, assets, gaps, and opportunities in the region through rigorous labor market analysis and surveys, interviews, and focus groups with cross-sector groups.

### TIMELINE OF KEY GRANTEE ACTIVITIES

Establish a cross-sector pathways leadership team

Complete a regional asset map and gap analysis to inform strategic planning

Create a shared vision and goals for regional pathways

Develop a five-year regional strategic plan

Implement the regional strategic plan

Through the asset mapping process, grantees in the first cycle analyzed labor market information and leveraged regional industry and education insights to identify priority industries and occupations to focus on strengthening pathway efforts. Each region identified 3-5 priority industries:

- 100% of regions prioritizing Healthcare
- 65% of regions prioritizing Manufacturing
- 59% of regions prioritizing Information Technology
- 59% of regions prioritizing Education
- 53% of regions prioritizing Construction or Skilled Trades
- Other priority industries identified by one or two regions include: architecture, aviation, finance and insurance, government, protective service, and transportation

Each region created unique goals to reflect the needs of their region. Common goals across regions include increasing enrollment and completion rates in secondary and postsecondary programs of study aligned to targeted industries, growing work-based learning infrastructure and programming aligned to the Tri-Agency Work-Based Learning Framework, and strengthening cross-sector collaboration and capacity.

A little over two years into this work, the regional convener teams have learned important lessons about engaging partners and new insights about regional needs.

- **Differing needs across regions:** Each workforce development area in the state varies in geographic size, population, primary industries, and available resources. Due to this, regional approaches cannot be one-size fits all for WDAs. Even within regions, there is a wide range of assets and gaps. Through the asset map and gap analysis, several regional convener teams were able to more clearly see the parts of their workforce development areas that needed more support, particularly rural communities. The aim of this work is to develop coordinated systems and infrastructure for the entire region, and in doing so, regional conveners must thoughtfully consider how to create differentiated solutions to address gaps in specific areas of the region.
- **Pathways awareness among stakeholders:** Through talking to a diverse set of stakeholders across the region, regional conveners uncovered that there are significant gaps in awareness of viable pathways. Education stakeholders need a better understanding of the labor market and good pathways into in-demand occupations. Employers lack an understanding of pathways into their in-demand occupations and how they can contribute towards student success. To address this, regional conveners executed cross-sector pathways summits and designed targeted technical assistance activities.
- **Engaging cross-sector partners:** Developing and deepening relationships takes a lot of time and intention. Regional conveners dedicate substantial time to understand each partners' needs and capitalize on their knowledge and expertise. However, it is also important to convene cross-sector partners together around regional infrastructure and pathway strategies versus keeping stakeholder groups siloed. Over time, partners saw the value in engaging together to design or inform solutions collaboratively.
- **Pathways Leadership Team engagement:** Focusing on regional infrastructure has forced deep conversations among leadership team members to identify how to execute and sustain changes needed in the region. Cross-sector partnerships are developing organically among the members as a result of regularly convening together. However, for some teams, maintaining consistent engagement is a work in progress. Regional conveners have stayed nimble and adjusted their convening approaches as the priorities of the grant evolve. Two years in, several conveners added subcommittees and industry advisory groups to more efficiently coordinate and monitor strategic plan activities.
- **The power of data:** Collecting and sharing regional data has strengthened relationships with cross-sector partners. Leading conversations with data has resulted in stronger alignment and buy-in when making decisions and identifying strategies to address regional needs and build infrastructure. Particularly with employers, there is a lot of interest in reviewing labor market information because it paints a better picture of the region.

“ This grant has created opportunities for greater alignment with state initiatives. Our team developed our strategic plan goals in alignment with Tri-Agency priorities: pathways, support, infrastructure.

- Regional Convener Grantee

“ We now have partners proactively reaching out to us for insights, resources, and to include us in new funding opportunities aligned to our strategic plan.

- Regional Convener Grantee

“ We discovered a lack of awareness of pathways among different stakeholders and disparities in access to opportunities across the region. [This led to] creating strategies to address these in our strategic plan.

- Regional Convener Grantee

## LOOKING AHEAD

Returning regional convener grantees will begin executing their two-year implementation plan, included as part of their strategic plan, and continue working towards designation. New grantees for newly added workforce development areas will follow a similar path of convening a cross-sector team, assessing regional assets and gaps, and developing a strategic plan. Establishing a strong regional pathways infrastructure—with a regional convener in every workforce development area— ensures all regions are equipped to meet the evolving needs of students, employers, and communities.

