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2 **TWC & IKEA Partnering in the New Texas Economy Discussion Paper**
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4 **Background**
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6 On December 1, 2020, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) Commission accepted a generous donation from
7 the IKEA US Community Foundation in the amount of \$4,900,125 to fund a variety of TWC initiatives that support
8 Texans and Texas businesses impacted by COVID-The goal is to equip and enable individuals with information and
9 tools to advance in their career through educational tools and programs including apprenticeship, online learning
10 platforms, grants and real-time labor market and jobs information. Texas businesses will also be supported
11 through industry data analytics, online training videos, and tools to help adapt jobs to remote and contactless
12 operations.
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14 **Proposed Initiatives**
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16 Should the proposed projects be approved to move forward, division leaders are preparing for expedited
17 implementation in order to respond to the challenges created by the COVID pandemic and to respond to a new
18 economy. Initiatives include:
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20 **1) Pre-Apprenticeship - Request for Application (RFA)**

21 Pre-apprenticeship is defined as a set of strategies designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a
22 Registered Apprenticeship program and has the following elements including approved training and curriculum;
23 opportunities for under-represented populations to receive educational services and exposure to Registered
24 Apprenticeship programs; access to support services; and provides meaningful hands-on training to participants.
25 Pre-apprenticeship programs promote diversity, enhance job placement, and improve participant outcomes
26 including gains in literacy and numeracy as well as credential attainment. Local workforce boards, independent
27 school districts and community, technical and public state colleges are eligible to apply. The primary goal is for in
28 and out of school youth to gain experience and credit towards entry into a Registered Apprenticeship program or
29 post-secondary education. Funds will be made available through the RFA allowing training costs such as
30 curriculum, tuition and instructor costs and for the purchase of basic tools and safety equipment that support job
31 training. For example, grantees may purchase equipment such as hard hats, boots, safety vests, tape measures
32 and goggles.
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34 **2) Program Consumables for Training Projects – Included in RFAs**

35 Additional funds will be made available through RFAs, Jobs and Education for Texans (JET) and the Pre-
36 Apprenticeship RFA noted above and potentially others, allowing consumables to be provided that will support
37 job training. For example, grantees typically purchase training equipment through the JET grant, and these
38 additional funds will allow them to purchase the consumables that are used with the equipment. Consumables
39 are one-time use that must be directly tied to the training and examples include welding rods for welding
40 projects and medical supplies for healthcare projects, such as disposable gloves, plastic containers and syringes.
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42 **3) Texas Specific Retail Survey – Contract(s)**

43 TWC is interested in helping retail employers across the state understand how to prepare and modify
44 services based on consumer behavior changes and new trends as a result of COVID. Since the pandemic began,
45 customers have been changing their buying habits including an increase in online ordering, and TWC wants to
46 understand how these consumer changes will impact retailers. The study will seek to address key research
47 questions including:
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- Will customers continue to order online?
- When will customers return to instore purchases, or will they return?
- How have trends changed as it relates to discounts, sales, and coupons?
- How are consumers getting their news (email, social media, etc.)?

4) Retail Data Analysis – Grants to Boards

Sophisticated data currently exists using customer cell phone data that shows when customers are in the area, where they eat, shop, frequency of visits to the area, and a host of other important pieces of data that can be used to inform business marketing strategy and workforce development. Boards will select a combination of local rural and urban businesses to participate so they may better understand how they can leverage this information to hire their workforce as customer demand dictates as well as design marketing strategies that target their known customers.

5) Online Retail and Restaurant Videos for Urban and Rural Businesses – Contract(s)

Texas businesses have been able to adapt to the new COVID-19 realities including online ordering, curbside pickup, delivery, ecommerce platforms, and customer service practices, - and continue to successfully adapt as the market changes. This project is designed to develop a series of videos for restaurants and retail employers to train their workforce online and take advantage of these trends today and into the future.

6) MyTXCareers Job Matching Portal

The MyTXCareers job matching portal allows Texas employers to search for job seekers and to allow jobseekers, who otherwise might not use Workforce Solutions or TWC program services, to find jobs quickly with an abbreviated registration process. The portal features resume upload, directs users to WorkInTexas (WIT) and other online learning opportunities and services.

7) Helping Offices Manage Electronically (HOME) – Competitive Application-Based Approach

COVID-19 impacted the Texas and national economy and resulted in a number of Texas businesses temporarily closing for the safety of employees and customers. Employers were required to close doors or to transition to employees teleworking and often to longer term remote, contactless service, sometimes at a high cost and requiring new expertise. Not all Texas employers have the resources to adapt to a new environment, and thus, many job seekers that have not returned to work. Supporting employers in adapting jobs to telecommute positions as well as transitioning to remote and contactless operations allows employees to continue contributing to the employer’s mission while also supporting their families and our state’s economy. Funds will be distributed to boards, for support to local businesses who need assistance with transitioning in this new environment. Funds may be used for costs associated with: digital marketing, signage, moving salesonline (website development cost and contactless payment technology such as QR and POS), expanded email platforms, and developing online webinars/ videos to replace in person services (such as ZOOM, webex for virtual price quotes, initial consultations or site visits as needed for plumbers, painters, internet service providers, home construction and repairs, etc).

Decision Points

Staff seeks guidance on implementing the initiatives outlined above, and requests latitude to make adjustments to address the technical aspects of these initiatives, for maximizing the donated dollars in the amount of \$4,900,125. The initiatives include:

- 1) Pre-Apprenticeship
- 2) Program Consumables for Training Projects
- 3) Texas Specific Retail Survey

97 4) Retail Data Analysis
98 5) Online Retail Videos for Urban and Rural Businesses
99 6) MyTXCareers Job Matching Portal
100 7) Helping Offices Manage Electronically (HOME)