

1 **Restaurant Recovery Initiative**
2 **Discussion Paper**
3

4 **Background**

5 On March 13, 2020, Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster in Texas in response to
6 the COVID-19 pandemic. Various executive orders and local health ordinances issued since that
7 time have created a state of uncertainty in business operations. Many businesses have been
8 forced to close or lay-off employees, resulting in record-setting unemployment insurance claims.
9 To help aid in the state’s economic recovery, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is
10 particularly interested in efforts that provide relief to employers and help get Texans back to
11 work.
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13 **Issues**

14 While the impacts of pandemic-related restrictions have been felt across all industry sectors, the
15 restaurant industry was hit particularly hard. Required limitations on occupant capacity and
16 changes in both hours and modes of operation have created difficulty for restaurants to open
17 safely and stay open. Restaurants need assistance in adapting to these difficult circumstances and
18 recovery and survive in the post-pandemic world. Industry needs include redesigning restaurants
19 to provide a safe customer experience, investing in new technologies, adapting business
20 operations and obtaining industry certifications for employees.
21

22 TWC endeavors to assist employers in adapting jobs to remote and contactless operations and in
23 taking advantage of these and other service delivery trends, during the COVID-19 pandemic and
24 beyond. Topics of interest include online ordering, curbside pickup, delivery, ecommerce
25 platforms, and customer service. Staff is seeking direction in a separate agenda item on using
26 donated funds to develop videos and webinars on:
27

- 28 • The Pivot of the Customer Experience – Delivery, Pick Up, Waiting, and Role of
29 Technology in Today’s Restaurant World
- 30 • Restaurant Design – Making the Most of Your Space
- 31 • Surviving Beyond the Pandemic
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33 In addition to these videos for encouraging alternate service delivery strategies, many restaurant
34 employers and Texan job seekers would benefit from access to free basic instruction and testing
35 for food handler permits and Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) certifications.
36 Providing no-cost instruction and testing for permits and certifications would minimize expenses
37 to an industry particularly devastated by the pandemic and resulting shutdowns. Many employers
38 require these permits and certifications for employment, and existing employees are required to
39 renew certifications. Restaurant owners benefit greatly from the increased protections associated
40 with certified employees.
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42 Donated funds may be available to cover a portion of the cost of providing the instruction and
43 testing for permits and certifications required in the restaurant industry. Additionally, Temporary
44 Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds are available to strengthen and improve
45 opportunities for our nation’s workforce in addition to helping employers hire and retain skilled
46 workers. The use of TANF funds to provide instruction and testing for permits and certifications

1 to workers in the restaurant industry ensures that Texas employers have a ready workforce as
2 operations continue and expand.

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4 **Decision Point**

5 Staff seeks direction on making TANF funds available in an amount not to exceed \$500,000, to
6 create and implement a Restaurant Recovery Initiative. TWC will enter into a contract with a
7 service provider to provide instruction and testing for food handler permits and TABC
8 certifications at no cost to restaurants, employees, and those seeking a job at a restaurant.

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10 In an effort to best leverage all available funding sources and to preserve TANF funds, staff also
11 seeks latitude to review the available balance of funds donated by IKEA Foundation and brief
12 Commission offices on recommendations to partially fund the Restaurant Recovery Initiative
13 with a portion of those dollars, if available.