

BUILDING A SKILLS ECONOMY

SPOTLIGHT: RURAL CAPITAL AREA, TEXAS



SCOPE: Nine counties around Travis County, TX

INDUSTRIES: Four high-demand industry sectors: advanced manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades, and information technology.

SYSTEMS: Industry sector partnerships, Skilled-Based Career Progression Lattices

NORTH STAR: Deepening community awareness of the board's role and value and strategically focusing on the gaps.

*This spotlight draws on a conversation with **Paul Fletcher, CEO, Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA)**. Drawing on over two decades of workforce development experience, he shares practical insights for boards seeking to connect employers, educators, and job seekers across diverse regions.*

Overview

Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area is one of 28 workforce boards in Texas, serving a diverse nine-county region surrounding Travis County. The region encompasses a dynamic mix of urban centers and small rural communities, some with populations of just 2,000 to 3,000 residents. Under the leadership of CEO Paul Fletcher, who has spent over two decades in the workforce development system, the board has positioned itself as the

central coordinator, or air traffic controller, connecting employers, educators, and community organizations to build talent pipelines that serve the region's evolving economy.

Key Focus Areas and Industries

The board concentrates its resources on four high-demand industry sectors: advanced manufacturing, healthcare, skilled trades, and information technology. Rather than attempting to serve all industries broadly, the board uses labor market data to validate where investments will have the greatest long-term impact, ensuring they are not funding blacksmith shops or obsolete technology.

- **In healthcare**, the board secured a \$2 million Department of Labor grant to fund a rural healthcare initiative over four years. This investment enabled partnerships with community colleges and training providers to establish healthcare training programs in rural areas where none previously existed, directly supporting hospitals at risk of closure due to staffing shortages.
- **In advanced manufacturing**, the arrival of Samsung's new fabrication facility in Taylor, Texas, catalyzed regional workforce planning. The board commissioned an independent economic impact study to map anticipated job growth, skill requirements, and talent pipeline needs, providing educators, employers, and elected officials with a shared playbook for workforce development.

The Air Traffic Controller Model

"Samsung doesn't really need us. They need us to help everybody else." – Paul Fletcher, CEO, Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA).

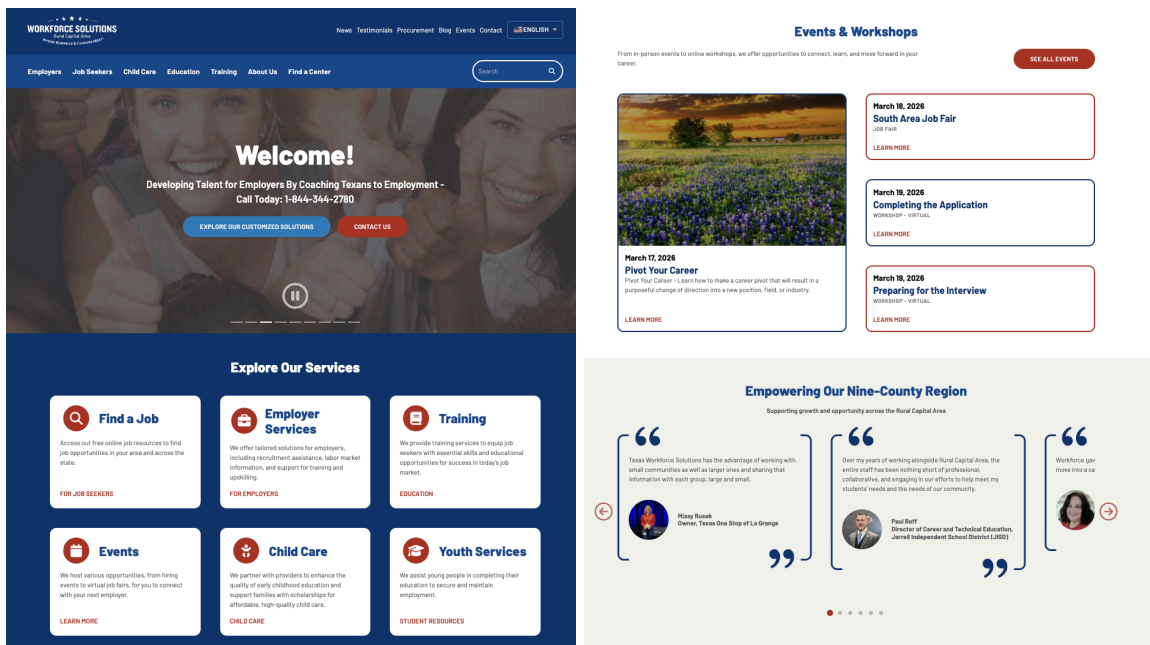
When Samsung announced its multi-billion-dollar semiconductor facility in Taylor, Texas, the board embraced its role as the region's workforce coordinator. With multiple universities, community colleges, and training providers eager to participate, the board stepped in to prevent duplication of effort and ensure resources were strategically deployed. The board recognized early that while Samsung has its own recruiting capacity, the supplier ecosystem, the dozens of companies relocating to support Samsung's operations, is where workforce development makes the greatest difference. The Williamson County economic development team even opened an office in Korea to manage

the flow of incoming companies, and the workforce board participates directly in pitch meetings to communicate the region's talent development infrastructure.

A key insight: major employers like Samsung and Tesla serve as catalysts for industry awareness. Their high-profile presence draws people into advanced manufacturing careers who might never have considered the field, expanding the overall talent pool for the entire sector.

Building Community Visibility

After a candid board retreat where three out of four employer panelists admitted they did not know what the workforce board was, Fletcher made community visibility a top priority. The board hired a communications professional from the news media who brought established relationships with journalists and an understanding of how to craft compelling stories. Media outlets now proactively contact the board for commentary on unemployment trends, layoffs, and economic development, generating consistent, free publicity that builds brand awareness across the employer and educator communities. This shift from reactive to proactive communications has been transformative for the board's standing in the region.



Source: <https://workforcesolutionsrca.com/>

Industry Sector Partnerships

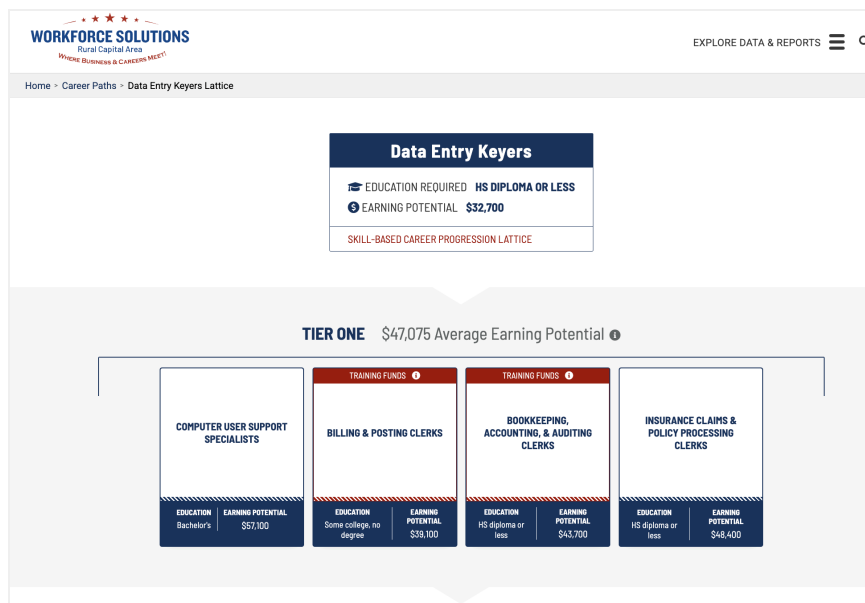
The board is building industry-sector partnerships that will serve as mini workforce boards for each target industry. These partnerships bring together groups of like-minded employers who collectively determine training priorities, curriculum needs, and credential requirements. The long-term vision is for each partnership to become self-sustaining through member dues and employer-funded contributions, reducing reliance on traditional federal funding streams. To support this shift, the board recruited a staff member from the Boston area with experience in an employer-funded workforce development model. This cross-regional knowledge transfer is helping the board introduce new funding and program strategies while avoiding pitfalls encountered elsewhere.

Supporting Workers with Career Progression Lattices

It can be difficult for workers seeking career advancement to identify personalized pathways to achieve their professional goals. Rather than a fixed stair-step career ladder, career progression more often takes place along a *lattice model* that incorporates lateral or even downward movement, depending on life circumstances, but reinforces upward mobility through upskilling, and is much more representative of today's work-life experience. The WSRCA Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices are designed to address this objective by visibly highlighting the dynamics of strategic career mobility and the importance of a skilled workforce.

The screenshot shows the Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area website. At the top left is the logo with the text "WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS Rural Capital Area" and the tagline "Where Business & Careers Meet!". At the top right is a navigation link "EXPLORE DATA & REPORTS" with a menu icon and a search icon. The main content area contains a mission statement: "Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA) is committed to empowering employers and job seekers by identifying best practices in workforce development and delivering programs and tools to leverage the existing knowledge and skills of workforce customers to set them on a pathway to career success." Below this is a paragraph explaining the purpose of the Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices. A dark blue header with white text reads "Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices". Underneath, there is a list of 18 job titles arranged in three columns:

- Carpenter Helper
- Childcare Worker
- Computer Network Support Specialist
- Construction Laborer
- Data Entry Keyer
- Desktop Publisher
- Electric & Electronic Equipment Assembler
- Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Equipment Assembler
- Electrician Helper
- Extraction Worker Helper
- File Clerk
- Home Health Aide
- Hotel & Motel Desk Clerk
- Light Truck & Delivery Services Driver
- Medical Assistant
- Medical Equipment Preparer
- Personal Care Aide
- Secretary & Administrative Assistant
- Semiconductor Processing Technician
- Team Assembler
- Tire Repairer & Changer
- Vehicle & Equipment Cleaner



Source: <https://www.ruralcapitalheadlight.com/skill-based-career-progression-lattices>

Bridging the Rural Training Gap

Recognizing that many residents live up to 90 miles from the nearest training facility, the board has invested in two key strategies to improve access:

- **Online Learning:** The board partners with Metrix Learning to provide an online training platform that delivers credential-based learning for residents who cannot commute to in-person programs.
- **Local Delivery:** Skilled trades training is now delivered in rural communities, often taught by local practitioners, such as a plumbing business owner teaching evening classes, bringing instruction directly to where people live and work.



Source: <https://workforcesolutionsrca.com/for-training/reinvest>

Looking Ahead: Strategic Priorities

The board has identified two overarching near-term priorities.

1. **First**, deepening community awareness of the board’s role and value across all segments, employers, educators, elected officials, and job seekers.
2. **Second**, strategically focusing limited board resources to fill gaps not covered by other organizations, acting as the ‘plaster over the cracks’ that creates a seamless surface of support for the region’s workforce.

Central to both goals is strengthening partnerships with the 36 independent school districts across the nine-county area, ensuring that Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs produce talent aligned with local employer needs, and continuing to build self-sustaining industry sector partnerships that reduce dependence on any single funding source.

Lessons Learned

*Drawing on over two decades in workforce development, **Paul Fletcher, CEO of Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA)**, shares lessons learned for boards navigating similar experiences in connecting employers, educators, and job seekers across diverse regions.*

01	If Employers Don’t Know You, You Can’t Help Them
02	Be the Air Traffic Controller, Not the Airline
03	Anchor Employers Are Awareness Catalysts
04	Bring Training to People, Not People to Training
05	Diversify Funding Before You Have To
06	Approach AI with Caution and Clear Boundaries

[!\[\]\(10f8862fc183b400327470ea85afe9ae_img.jpg\) Read the full list of lessons learned.](#)

Learn More

To learn more, visit the following resources:

<u>Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area (WSRCA)</u>	Workforce Solutions Rural Capital Area is a community partnership providing no-cost recruitment and employment services to businesses and job seekers in the Rural Capital Area of Texas.
<u>Skills-based Career Progression Lattices</u>	The WSRCA Skill-Based Career Progression Lattices are designed to address this objective by visibly highlighting the dynamics of strategic career mobility and the importance of a skilled workforce.
<u>REINVEST</u>	REINVEST will enable seven rural counties (Burnet, Blanco, and Llano in the west and Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette, & Lee in the east) to generate high-quality jobs for 777 workers across sector partnerships in Healthcare, Skilled Trades, Finance, and Information Technology. The population and demand for services are growing, employers are struggling to hire, and rural workers are struggling to access the quality training and support systems they need to thrive. REINVEST will recruit, train, and place workers into high-quality jobs.
<u>Employee Skills Training</u>	As an employer, it's important that you have a highly qualified and skilled workforce. There are several resources at our disposal to upgrade the skills of your current employees or train new employees with a specific skill set.
<u>Hiring Red, White, and You! Veteran Services</u>	Hiring Red, White & You! is a collaborative initiative backed by all 28 Texas Workforce Solutions development boards, the Texas Workforce Commission, the Office of the Governor, the Texas Medical Center, and the Texas Veterans Commission. This statewide hiring event connects Texas veterans and their spouses with employers who recognize the value of the skills, discipline, and unique qualities that come from a military background.