

**NextForce**

# Developing & Reimagining Opportunities for Youth

Connecting Youth to Workforce and Education  
Opportunities

[www.borderplexjobs.com](http://www.borderplexjobs.com)

# Supporting Youth in the El Paso Region.

As a workforce development board, Workforce Solutions Borderplex is dedicated to supporting education and workforce opportunities for youth in the region.

It's no secret that the youth of today are often dismissed, and this includes those defined as WIOA youth - or young adults who are both out of school and out of work. As one of the hardest to reach populations, Workforce Solutions Borderplex initiated a plan to redefine what it means to be a WIOA youth. Hearing directly from the youth themselves, WSB found that a lot of outreach and communication toward this population failed because many 18 to 22-year-olds don't necessarily define themselves as youth.

To counter this, WSB adjusted their outreach, communication, and programming to highlight instead that these individuals constitute the next generation of the workforce and instead referred to these individuals and their associated programming as NextForce.

Through NextForce, youth are connected to projects, opportunities, and employers that allow them to gain experience, develop new skills, and to earn money. They may also have the opportunity to work with mentors on a peer-to-peer basis or with case managers who further support their success

# What Constitutes WIOA Youth?



The U.S. Department of Labor defines WIOA youth as individuals between the ages of 14 and 24 who face barriers to education and employment with an emphasis on youth who are both out of work and out of school, though some funding is allocated for youth in school but who are out of work, including internship opportunities for students in college.

## About WIOA



The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was passed into law in 1998 and works to align various workforce development organizations and programs across the nation in order to increase access to opportunities, especially for those who are historically underserved.

# NextForce Projects

Through the NextForce program, Workforce Solutions Borderplex has implemented projects, programs, and partnerships to further support WIOA youth.



## **Digital Transformation Services Project**

To help businesses in the borderland transition to newer technologies, WIOA youth were connected to these organizations to serve as consultants, helping them to install helpful computer software and technology like security cameras. Through DTS, 380 employers in the region were served over a year and a half period.



## **Nonprofit Operations Support**

To support nonprofits, especially during the pandemic, WIOA youth were connected with nonprofit leaders in the region to provide operations support, getting their hands wet with a wide range of skills.



## **Opportunities for College Students with Disabilities**

Working with the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at the University of Texas at El Paso, Workforce Solutions Borderplex connected students with disabilities to internships in the area.



## **Upscaling Digital Literacy**

Through this initiative, Workforce Solutions Borderplex worked with UTEP to place college interns with local businesses and about 20 low-income families to help them come up to speed with their digital literacy.



## **Migrant Farmer Communities**

Under this project, the children of migrant farm workers - and often underserved population - were connected to employment and internship opportunities to help them gain skills and earn wages.

# NextForce Projects (Cont.)



## **Foster Youth Focus Groups**

Wanting to better support foster youth in the region - many of whom qualify as WIOA youth and face many disadvantages compared to their peers - Workforce Solutions Borderplex organized focus groups to hear directly from foster youth in the region in order to better understand their needs and implement initiatives to connect them with jobs and internships.



## **Gen Z Surveys**

As Gen Z, who fall within the age range defined as WIOA youth, begins to enter the workforce - marking the fifth generation to currently work - Workforce Solutions Borderplex conducted surveys with Gen Z youth, using the information to better their outreach, programming, and future initiatives.



## **City Re-Engagement Center Opportunities**

Partnering with the City of El Paso's Re-engagement Center, Workforce Solutions Borderplex connects WIOA youth with engagement opportunities provided by the center.



## **Childcare Support**

Collaborating with schools offering career and technical education, Workforce Solutions Borderplex connects WIOA youth with childcare organizations to support their capacity - something that was negatively impacted by the pandemic. Participants walk away with new skills and have gone on to work in childcare or take on entrepreneurial opportunities to open their own childcare businesses.



## **Aerospace and Defense at UTEP**

Adding to El Paso's budding aerospace and defense scene, Workforce Solutions Borderplex worked with UTEP to connect WIOA youth with opportunities in the field.

# Challenges Overcome

In addition to redefining what it means to be a WIOA youth and adjusting outreach accordingly, Workforce Solutions Borderplex encountered challenges based on unavoidable changes in society.

## The COVID-19 Impact

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on the workforce and education, from layoffs and financial hurdles to a decline in mental health for many people. These impacts also affected young workers. Jobs typically held by youth - such as fast food and retail - decreased and those who were in school felt the impact of remote learning and mental health struggles amongst their peers and teachers.

Utilizing COVID funding, Workforce Solutions Borderplex initiated projects to better serve and understand youth in order to provide effective programming during the pandemic and beyond. These projects included a podcast series, in which they heard directly from youth about how the current state of the world was impacting them and both their education and employment opportunities, and a series of career development videos to increase their knowledge of the workforce on a remote basis. WSB staff connected with high school students, related to them, and gave them a voice to project through the podcast. These projects helped to not only better understand the youth of today and their needs but also proved WSB to be an ally for WIOA youth attempting to navigate the workforce and education systems.



## A Multi-Generational Workforce

Another societal challenge faced by many in the workforce today is the fact that for the first time ever, five generations are working together all at once. While each generation brings their own unique skills and perspectives, each generation also presents and faces unique challenges. One such case is the perception of one generation to the generation below them and so forth.



# Program Goals



An ever-growing and ever-evolving program, NextForce works to create programs, projects, and opportunities for youth in response to societal needs, changes, and demands.

## Program Funding

Funding is received primarily through governmental sources in support of WIOA initiatives. The majority of the funds are applied to programs and initiatives geared toward youth who are both out of school and out of work, though a small percentage of funds are applied to support opportunities for individuals in school but out of work.

## Successes & Outcomes

Through these initiatives, Workforce Solutions Borderplex has been able to support hundreds of young adults in the borderland region, helping them to develop skills and earn wages while working with local businesses. These efforts have also allowed WSB employees to develop a better understanding of what today's youth and the next generations need, how to better communicate with them, and to implement programming that supports the youth of tomorrow.