Final Project Report (FPR)

To: Katelyn Kasberg
From: Ray L. Belk, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, PMP
Subject: Final Project Report: The Five-Stage Workforce Development Lifecycle Project

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Project Title: The Five-Stage Workforce Development Lifecycle Project
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Final Project Report: The 5-Stage Workforce Development Lifecycle Project

This Final Project Report (FPR) addresses:
1. Description of the project.
2. The overall budget.
3. How the work performed met program criteria.
4. Results of the project.
5. Challenges and lessons learned.

Description of the Project

The initial input for the need for the Model originated from the validation and recalibration phase of the 2020 Texas State Transportation Innovation Council (TxSTIC) Workforce Development – Job Description and Recommended Training Guide project. Numerous county and city stakeholders were asked as a part of the closeout of that project what resources would most benefit them as a continuation of that project or a new project. The overwhelming response was ways to attract and retain Public Works (PW) and Road and Bridge (R&B) employees. The project was proposed for the 2022 cycle and was selected. It exists as TxDOT RTI Project 5-9055-01.

Independent research was conducted by the consultant, Ray L. Belk, for this project, using end-user inputs obtained from attending numerous conferences and educational events and instructing courses while representing the Texas Local Technical Assistance Program (TxLTAP) over 18 months to get a baseline for project submission to the STIC. Questions were asked of counties and municipalities on what Workforce Development (WFD) activities the TxLTAP Center could provide in addition to the then-current services.

Questions were also posed to the TxLTAP Advisory Committee during meetings in 2021 and 2022 and the Texas Association of Counties Educational Committees.

Touchpoints were made with the following personnel in counties and municipalities to obtain a solid baseline for the project.

County Judges and Commissioners	City and County Engineers
City and County Human Resource Officers	City and County Risk Officers
City Managers/Administrators	City and County Auditors
City and County Talent Acquisition Officers	County Road and Bridge Administrators
City Public Works Directors	

The input from end-user stakeholders was captured in spreadsheet format and used as reference points to develop the draft model's research line and content outline.

Project Proposal Initial Research
Based on the end user inputs, preliminary research was conducted to determine the number of stages or phrases that would:
- Not be overly simplistic.
- Not be too complex.
- Not contain numerous subordinate phases or steps under a particular stage.
- Address the needs of end users.
- Not a replication or tweaked employee lifecycle model.
- Be geared toward the PW and R&B employee segments.
- Stages can be used independently of others or in combinations or all stages of the Model.

Initial Outline and Contents
As previously described, the project's initial outline and subsequent contents were based on end-user inputs. After researching numerous other workforce development lifecycle models, the sequence of the Five Stages was formulated.

> ❖ **Five Stages Pre-Defined as Part of the Project Proposal**
> When the project proposal was made to the TxSTIC, the cycle sequence and wording below were used and have not changed since its inception.
> - Recruiting and Attraction (R&A)
> - Onboarding (OB)
> - Training and Development (T&D)
> - Engagement and Evaluation (E&E)
> - Succession Planning (SP)

Project Product Research

❖ **Industry Best Practices**
Research of numerous WFD Lifecycles was conducted to determine the best practices for each stage that apply to the public sector. Selection of topic bullet points to be used in each stage included:
- Does the reference or topic apply to Local Public Agencies (LPAs)?
- Can the reference or topic be easily implemented by LPAs?
- Can the reference or topic be worded in terms easily understood by LPAs?
- Is the reference or topic scalable, or can any LPA of any size use it?
- Is the reference or topic applicable to any LPA regardless of geographic location in Texas?
- Is the reference or topic realistic for any LPA to use?
- Can the reference or topic be modified or presented to primarily benefit PW or R&B departments within an LPA?
- Can the reference or topic be implemented without significantly impacting the LPA's budget?
- Can the reference or topic be expanded by providing on-site technical assistance from the TxLTAP Center?
- Do the references or topics complement one another and not present conflict from one stage to another?

Using these questions as a guide, ideas, models, graphs, references, etc., were examined to develop a narrative for each Model stage.

❖ **Experience Based Guidance**
Many components are the original work of the project lead researcher (Ray L. Belk, TxLTAP Consultant), whose experience in workforce development, solutions, and implementation spans 45 years in the public and private sectors—having this unique insight as to the challenges, unique needs, and constraints that both the public and private sectors face in workforce development programs allowed for comparisons that the municipalities and counties may leverage to actively compete for talent and "level the playing field" in the acquisition and retention of PW and R&B employees.

❖ **EDC 6 Strategic Workforce Development**
The project lead researcher, Ray L. Belk, served as a development member of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Everyday Counts (EDC) Round Six (2021 – 2022) Strategic Workforce Development (SWD) team. Having the unique insight as to the development and implementation of the SWD innovation, it was realized that many components and resources of the SWD that are focused on highway construction workers at the national level could be modified and rescoped to provide information to Texas LPAs to address their level of needs. No narrative language is used verbatim in this project's products and _Guide._ Instead, concepts of how the information is provided, depth of data, and resources to offer were followed as a template for developing the _Guide._

Technical Memo 2.A, provided to RTI on December 28, 2023, outlines in detail the five key sections of the Guide.

Project Budget

All project expenditures were made in alignment with the Project Agreement criteria.

How the Work Performed Met Program Criteria

All work detailed in the Project Agreement was met or, in some cases, exceeded. The high-level work completed includes the following, but are detailed in the various project reports:

- Engagement of a Subject Matter Expert team composed of LPA stakeholders.
- Development and publication of a 5-Stage Model to Attract and Retain Employees for Public Works and Road & Bridge Departments for Texas Cities and Counties (aka the *Guide*)
    - Version 1 of the *Guide* was published in February 2023, and Version 2 in January 2024. Version 2 was updated based on refinements and recommendations from the TxDOT Project Team, end users, and the SME Engagement team.
    - The G*uide has been distributed at all conferences, seminars,* and educational workshops attended by TxLTAP or the consultant since February 2023.
    - Eight tri-folds addressing various components of the *Guide* were developed and distributed at conferences, seminars, and educational workshops.
    - QR Codes were developed and displayed at conferences and seminars.
    - All hard-copy resources have been placed on the TxLTAP website.
- Development and delivery of the new LTP405 Developing Employee Performance Plans and Conducting Evaluations course, delivered 12 times from January – August 2024, with 179 attendees completing the course.
- The LTP405 course will be added to the regular TxLTAP course catalog for continued delivery with all other TxLTAP courses.
- Articles were drafted and published in the TxLTAP *Better Roads, Safer Roads* quarterly publication and in the July 2023 and 2024 *County Progress*, the Texas Association of Counties publication distributed to all county personnel in Texas.
- Outreach via Constant Contact was used throughout the project to notify the subscription members of the *Guide*, conference, workshops, links to resources, etc.
- Two workshops were conducted in July 2024 at the University of Texas at Arlington campus with 39 attendees from three counties and 17 different cities for a comprehensive introduction and deep dive into the 5-Stage Model and to discuss and problem-solve their challenges.
- Technical assistance was delivered on-site and off-site throughout the project, as detailed in the Implementation Project Report P1.
- Validation of the use of the various stages was completed in the TM6 and P1 reports.

Results of the Project

Based on polled data results from 57 cities and counties exposed to the 5-Stage Model, the development and implementation of the project deliverables have been highly successful. All Technical Memorandums, Semi-Annual Reports, Research Report 1, and Implementation Product Reports P1, P2, and P3 detail the various levels of acceptance and implementation by Local Public Agencies (LPAs) across the state. The workshops conducted (detailed in Implementation Product Report P3) capture the level of engagement of LPAs to use the 5-Stage Model as either a starting point for them to augment current programs or improve existing programs.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The challenges and lessons learned from the project are identified and shared:

- *Senior management leaders need to be identified and serve as champions*. Organizations need to have a champion who will kickstart the process and keep the fire going on the project.
- *The more departments involved or, at a minimum, informed, the better*. The more key decision-makers brought to the table at the beginning (such as using the 5-Stage Model), the higher the acceptance rate will be. If some departments can opt out of the process, keep them informed of progress if they choose to join later.
- *Don't try to do it all at once*. The advice was to resist the temptation to implement all stages of the Model at once, but it could lead to premature failure. It was recommended that the most essential stages be picked and implemented first.
- *An office or team needs to take the lead and be the prime leader of the project*. A defined office or team must be vested with implementing the project to mitigate the possibility of premature project failure. The team or office should be closely aligned with the senior management champions to ensure that communications and actions are always in alignment.
- *Ask, "Is this the best we can do?"* After an organization had developed an implementation plan and before launching it, it was advised to ask their team to step back, look at what they were getting ready to do, and ask if it was the best they could do now. They were advised to scale back some, add some steps, or, after careful consideration, keep it the way it is and implement it.
- *Budget in advance*. Organizations were advised to begin adding budget line items well in advance of implementation to funding for programs that they might not have in place. For example, if they start offering relocation expense reimbursements, career ladder increases, etc., they might set up their program for an early failure if they do not have a budget.
- *Reassess and pivot as business conditions dictate*. Advice was provided that as the project progresses, periodically (suggested every three months for the first year) to analyze progress, roadblocks, challenges, and areas that can be accelerated. Change the schedule and efforts to match the organization's realistic goals.
- *Stop fixating on salary and focus on benefits*. Many cities and counties continued to focus on salaries only as their roadblock to attracting and keeping good employees. The advice given was to accentuate all of the other benefits and growth
- *In some cases, it's better to do something and ask permission later.* The PW or R&B departments in several organizations shared that they simply went ahead with implementing various phases of the 5-Stage Model and then shared the results with elected officials or senior leadership rather than asking to take on the process due to internal politics.