

Counties at Work

Tarrant County, Texas Case Study

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About NACo:

The [National Association of Counties](#) (NACo) **strengthens America's counties**, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to:

- **Advocate county priorities** in federal policymaking;
- **Promote exemplary county policies** and practices;
- **Nurture leadership skills** and expand knowledge networks;
- **Optimize county and taxpayer resources** and cost savings; and
- **Enrich the public's understanding** of county government.

The National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) is a non-profit organization recognized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service as a 501c3 public charity providing education, technical assistance and research to counties. NACoRF's mission is to ascertain, develop and distribute knowledge about county governments and training of public officials, prospective public officials and other interested parties.

About NACo's Landscape Analysis:

In partnership with the [ECMC Foundation](#), NACo conducted a national landscape analysis on counties' role and decision-making authority in post-secondary education. This analysis identified impactful county efforts including directly allocating local funds, pursuing regional and intergovernmental partnerships to leverage federal resources and coordinating post-secondary education systems with county systems, such as health and human services, as well as with local private industry. Such efforts maximize educational and employment opportunities and increase access for residents. Recently, counties have led and supported their post-secondary education institutions in mitigating local challenges related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Through an electronic survey and group and individual interviews, NACo examined how county leaders:

1. Make decisions affecting the post-secondary education sector;
2. Allocate public funding impacting higher education institutions;
3. Create partnerships with the post-secondary education sector to strengthen its connection with other systems; and
4. Work to slow the spread of COVID-19 in post-secondary education settings.

In conjunction with NACo's report ["Counties At Work: Counties Support Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Opportunities for Residents."](#) NACo published a set of case studies sharing county examples and best practices in creating cross-sector partnerships with higher education systems to improve economic resiliency and mobility, workforce preparedness, educational attainment and gainful employment for residents. County leaders representing local colleges and universities, workforce boards and human services agencies participated in a series of interviews with NACo to share their local efforts and best practices. For more information, please contact Rashida Brown, Associate Program Director for Children, Youth and Families at rbrown@naco.org or Arabella Pluta-Ehlers, Program Manager for Children, Youth and Families at aplutaehlers@naco.org.

Counties Support Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Opportunities for Residents

Tarrant County, Texas Case Study

Interviewee: Commissioner Roy Charles Brooks, Tarrant County, Texas; Past President, NACo

County name, state: Tarrant County, Texas

Rural, suburban, or urban: Urban

Population: 2,102,515

Poverty rate: 12.0%

Unemployment rate: 3.5%

Number of post-secondary education institutions in the county: 32

Student enrollment in the county's post-secondary education institutions: 163,418



About Tarrant County, Texas

Tarrant County, Texas is the third largest county in Texas and located in the north-eastern region of the state. The county maintains a civilian labor force of just over 1 million workers, with the largest industries being retail, financial services, engineering, technology health care and social service assistance.ⁱ

The county role in post-secondary education

Similar to other counties in Texas, Tarrant County is governed by a Commissioners Court comprised of a county judge and four commissioners. Because the county operates under Dillon's Rule, most of the power and authority of the county is determined by the state constitution and legislature.ⁱⁱ While the county does not have direct decision-making authority in higher education (i.e., university programming, operations and other functions), county government leaders are deeply involved in collaboration activities with post-secondary education institutions and in connection with local workforce development board and health care centers. Cross-sector leaders meet regularly to improve educational attainment and job readiness opportunities for residents within the region.

Funding for post-secondary education institutions and programming

Higher education institutions within Tarrant County are managed and funded by their respective governing entities and therefore, do not typically receive funding from the county. For instance, Tarrant County College (TCC) is governed by a board of trustees comprised of seven members elected by the voters of Tarrant County. TCC's

board has the ability to leverage local taxes to fund the school's operations and the construction of their physical facilities. TCC's largest revenue sources are supported by local taxes, tuition and state appropriations.ⁱⁱⁱ

While Tarrant County does not regularly allocate funds to its post-secondary education institutions, the county provides funding for university research focusing on health disparities and other issues. For example, the County Commissioners Court approved a \$1 million grant for the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and Texas Health Resources to conduct a research study examining the effects of COVID-19 on high-risk populations and exploring the socio-economic, racial and ethnic factors of approximately 45,000 residents living in Tarrant and Dallas counties. Findings from the study will be used to create equitable public health strategies for local communities.^{iv}

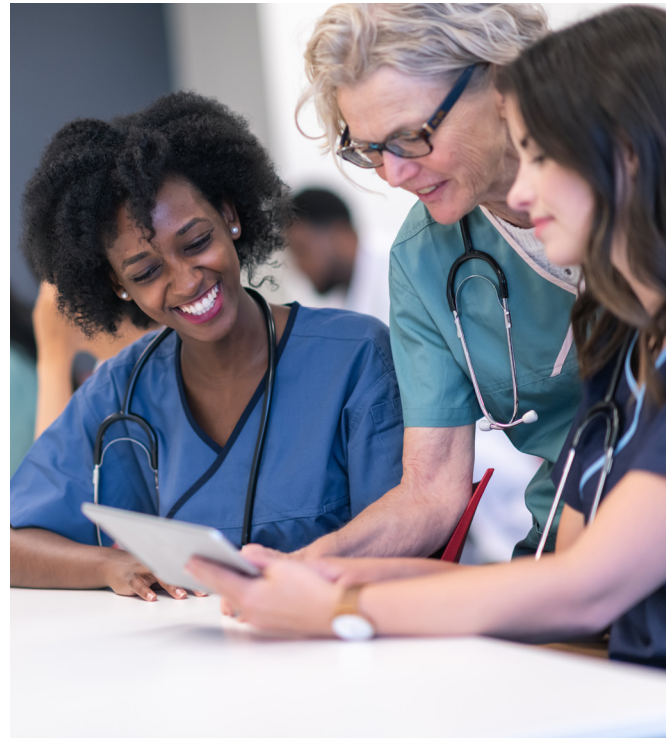
Coordination and collaboration for improved workforce outcomes

Tarrant County's colleges and universities partner with workforce development boards on activities that promote positive educational and employment outcomes for residents. Tarrant County's workforce development board,



“Tarrant County has developed a close and even symbiotic relationship [with institutions to ensure that students, faculty and other staff are healthy and safe during COVID-19].”

-Commissioner Roy Brooks



Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County (WSTC) is funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, which falls within the state’s authority and oversight. However, WSTC is operated at the county-level and assists local residents by providing them with services and supports that promote job readiness skills. WSTC leads community stakeholder meetings where participants advise on workforce readiness programs that support the unique skillsets of job seekers and discuss the needs of local employers. WSTC collaborates with post-secondary institutions to connect students with job opportunities. Since it was established, WSTC has provided nearly 5,000 students with adult education and literacy services and connected approximately 26,000 job seekers with employment.^v

To advance the county’s workforce efforts, Tarrant County’s Resource Connection facility operates as a one-stop center for individuals seeking education, employment, health or human service services. The 300-acre campus, owned by the county, houses nearly 40 different county agencies and community-based organizations that assist hundreds of clients daily. Having these services co-located in one facility helps streamline case management and improves consumers’ access to services. The Resource Connection describes itself as “a mecca for public-private collaboration,

cross-agency cooperation and service integration.”^{vi} For students who are experiencing economic hardships, post-secondary education institutions coordinate with this center to offer services that increase their access to food and housing, which are often barriers to higher education attainment.

In Tarrant County, post-secondary education institutions and hospitals are key partners, with medical centers hiring directly from the county’s university and college medical and nursing programs. In August, the County Commissioners Court approved a \$1.9 million contract, funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, to provide North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth’s (HSC) students with resources and materials for conducting contract tracing in partnership with the Tarrant County Public Health Department (TCPHD). The partnership allowed 90 students to be employed part-time and gain hands-on training in a public health emergency while helping to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the community.^{vii}

Slowing the spread of COVID-19 in post-secondary education settings

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists, post-secondary education institutions within Tarrant County are reopening in a variety of ways. TCPHD works with each institution to accommodate their needs, particularly on health, safety and operations. In weekly meetings, the department convenes community stakeholders such as city managers and councils, state legislative delegations, school districts and administrators as well as hospital personnel to share information and assess the impacts of the pandemic across the community.

Cross-sector partners bring data to stakeholder meetings to help inform decisions on COVID-19 and help mitigate its impacts. The county then compiles this data into a COVID-19 dashboard to give a holistic picture of the developing situation in the community.^{viii} TCPHD uses this data to advise and offer guidance to post-secondary education institutions

in the county on protocols for on-campus learning and how best to respond to spikes in cases. Additionally, while the county did not have the authority to allocate CARES funding to these institutions to cover pandemic-incurred costs, officials were able to supply personal protective equipment (PPE) to educational institutions and community-based organizations.

Conclusion

Overall, due to Dillon's Rule, Tarrant County's decision-making authority in post-secondary education systems and its ability to fund them is limited. However, the county has strong partnerships with post-secondary education institutions to support students' educational success and help meet the county's workforce development goals. The importance of these existing partnerships has become even more evident during COVID-19 and have allowed for a strong collaborative effort to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on the community.



Endnotes

ⁱ Tarrant County, Texas. (n.d.). *Labor Force and Employers*. <http://www.tarrantcounty.com/en/administration/staff/economic-development-coordinator/financial-status/labor-force-and-economic-base.html>

ⁱⁱ National League of Cities. (2016, December 13). *Cities 101 — Delegation of Power*. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/cities-101-delegation-of-power/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tarrant County College. (2021, January 28). *Board of Trustees*. <https://www.tccd.edu/about/administration/board-of-trustees/>

^{iv} UT Southwestern Medical Center. (2020, July 10). *UT Southwestern, Texas Health launch collaborative study to better understand COVID prevalence in DFW*. <https://www.utsouthwestern.edu/newsroom/articles/year-2020/dfw-covid-prevalence-study.html>

^v Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County. (n.d.). *Who We Are*. <https://workforcesolutions.net/about-us/who-we-are/>

^{vi} Tarrant County, Texas. (n.d.). *Resource Connection of Tarrant County*. <https://www.tarrantcounty.com/en/resource-connection/About.html>

^{vii} Smith-Pinckney, D. (2020, August 19). *HSC, Tarrant County Public Health work together to increase COVID-19 contact tracing*. The University of North Texas Health Science Center at Forth Worth. <https://www.unthsc.edu/newsroom/story/hsc-tarrant-county-public-health-work-together-to-increase-covid-19-contact-tracing/>

^{viii} Tarrant County, Texas. (n.d.). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Tarrant County*. <https://www.tarrantcounty.com/en/public-health/disease-control--prevention/COVID-19.html>

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