




Under One Roof:

Workforce Development and “Non-Traditional” Partners Collaborating for the Benefit of Economic Development



Volume III

National Center on Education and the Economy
Workforce Development Strategies Group



June 2007





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Executive Summary

The National Center on Education and the Economy released two volumes of *Under One Roof: New Governance Structures for Local Economic and Workforce Development* over the past eighteen months. Our intent in publishing the first two volumes was to provide insights and guidance for local government decision makers who are considering structural realignments of local economic and workforce development agencies and organizations.

In the process of conducting our research about organizational realignments, we identified numerous examples of partnerships that do not involve organizational restructuring, but instead reflect innovative, mutually beneficial collaborations with organizations that typically do not work with the public workforce system. Tremendous potential exists for workforce boards, on behalf of the public workforce system, to form strategic alliances with such “non-traditional” organizations and thus significantly impact regional economic development and growth. In this publication we highlight alliances that include venture capital firms, national research laboratories, public and private universities, port authorities, manufacturing extension centers, foundations, and utility companies. A review of these varied partnerships reveals some common themes that warrant reflection by workforce development leaders:

- There are few limits on the types of economic development partnerships that can be formed. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) has tremendous flexibility, and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has been open to a wide range of projects and programs funded with WIA dollars.
- There are many organizations engaged in economic development, each varied in mission, approach, size and community impact. The number and types of organizations with which Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and other workforce development entities collaborate are numerous and diverse.
- WIBs are bounded by their own vision and risk aversion. In each example highlighted in this publication, WIB leaders actively chose to exceed the basic requirements and obligations of WIA.

Executive Summary

The seven cases profiled in this report illustrate a few of the most innovative ways that workforce boards and agencies are partnering with new organizations to meet a wide range of economic development needs. They provide interesting models and lessons useful to other organizations considering similar paths. And they illustrate how the Workforce Investment Act provides a flexible platform from which workforce boards, and other actors in the publicly funded workforce system, can—must—launch creative initiatives to meet the needs of employers and employees in their communities.

This publication is not intended to be a “how-to” guidebook. It is designed to inspire workforce systems leaders to think broadly and boldly about how they approach regional economic development and to consider which organizational partnerships might further expand their capabilities and their regional impact. In addition, we hope to demonstrate to policy makers the recent progress and potential of the publicly funded workforce system in meeting regional economic needs.



Introduction

Across the country, there is a growing interest in aligning economic and workforce development functions, strategies, and resources, and in building strong partnerships between these complementary systems. The motivations to forge cohesive partnerships include the need to make better use of increasingly scarce resources and to respond to intensifying competition for attracting and retaining companies with high-skill, high-wage jobs. Combining forces helps advance a comprehensive strategy to develop, nurture, and retain the talented workforce necessary to support industries critical to economic success.

While not always fully appreciated, evidence proves that the Workforce Investment Act provides a flexible platform from which workforce boards and other organizations engaged in the publicly-funded workforce system can—must—launch a broad range of innovative initiatives to meet the needs of employers and employees in their service areas. Workforce boards, the providers of workforce development services are invaluable contributors to vibrant regional economies. But there are limits to their impact as stand-alone organizations, without the benefit of shared leadership, resources, and expertise. Economic development organizations, as well as many other types of organizations that contribute to regional economic development, are natural partners with workforce development.

There are various approaches to building strong and beneficial partnerships between workforce and economic development organizations. The challenge is for workforce boards—both staff and board members—to recognize the value of such collaborations, and to seize the opportunity to build and sustain appropriate partnerships to meet regional needs. Partnerships are not necessarily easy to maintain, nor do they develop on their own. But their rewards are many, and their impact on local growth and development are critically important.

Within the past eighteen months the National Center on Education and the Economy has released two volumes of *Under One Roof: New Governance Structures for Local Economic and Workforce Development*. The first edition included five cases from regions where economic development and workforce development

Introduction

organizations underwent a structural reorganization to align missions, resources, and activities under one organizational umbrella. The regional examples we highlighted involved restructuring motivated by numerous factors, including increased competition for business attraction and retention, scarce resources, and the desire to create a demand-driven system which better serves the needs of the local economy.

The second edition featured additional local and regional examples of restructuring between workforce and economic development, focusing on models in Boston, Phoenix, and St. Lawrence County, New York. In each case, we met with key leaders in each region to understand the motivation driving the shift in governance structures, the nature of the changes, the enhanced capabilities that resulted from the changes, and the impact of these efforts.

Our intent in publishing the first two volumes was to provide insights for local government decision makers who are considering structural realignments of agencies and organizations.

While researching organizational realignments, we noted numerous examples of partnerships that do not involve organizational restructuring. Instead, creative and mutually beneficial collaborations were developed with organizations that typically do not work with the public workforce system. Tremendous potential exists for workforce boards, on behalf of the public workforce system, to form strategic alliances with such “non-traditional” organizations and significantly impact regional economic development and growth. Such organizations may include venture capital firms, national research laboratories, public and private universities, port authorities, manufacturing extension centers, foundations, and utility companies—organizations with which it may not be possible, or desirable, to consider changes in governance as part of a partnership. Because these organizations fall outside the orbit of general purpose local or regional economic development entities that most frequently lead efforts to recruit, retain, and expand businesses, they do not fit the original model featured in volumes one and two of the Under One Roof series.

This report profiles seven such examples. The locations are geographically and economically diverse and the cases represent a cross-section of organizations and approaches. The examples were not selected because they epitomize what is often referred to as “best practice.” Rather, they illustrate a few of the truly innovative ways that state and local workforce boards and workforce agencies are forging a wide range of partnerships with organizations with whom the workforce system has not often worked in the past to meet a wide range of economic development needs.

They provide interesting models and lessons useful to other organizations considering similar paths. And they offer insights into the potential of, and challenges to, building partnerships between workforce development entities and the many, varied organizations whose work impacts economic development.

This publication is not intended to be a “how-to” guidebook. It is designed to inspire workforce systems leaders to think broadly and boldly about how they approach regional economic development, their role in that effort, and also to consider which organizations might further expand their capabilities and their regional impact. In addition, we hope to demonstrate to policymakers the advancements and potential of the publicly-funded workforce system in meeting regional economic needs.

This publication is organized as follows: Following this introduction, each profile provides a short summary of the partnership, a description of the roles and responsibilities of the WIB and its partners, a short overview of the partnerships goals, outcomes and next steps, and a brief glimpse of lessons learned. The volume concludes with a final section highlighting common features and lessons drawn from across these profiles.

NCEE is indebted to the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration for their support of this work.



Fresno, California—

A partnership between the Fresno WIB and California State University-Fresno supports and expands one of the Central Valley's high-growth industries—irrigation and water technology.

Summary

It's a well-known adage that economic development should be built around a region's competitive advantage. Consider the South's historic low cost of labor and land that served to attract manufacturing from the North. Or Norman, Oklahoma's development of a cluster of companies specializing in predicting violent weather based on its location in "tornado alley".¹

Fresno County, California—located in the San Joaquin Valley—is known for both agriculture and persistent water management challenges. Fresno County is the largest single agricultural-producing county in the nation; growers gross over \$4.6 billion annually from the production of more than 260 commercial crops. Every dollar received by Fresno County producers results in the economic extension benefit of approximately \$3.50 to the total economy of the county.

A core part of the agriculture industry's success is Central California's water technology industry, comprised of manufacturers, distributors and dealers of irrigation and related components, pumps and equipment, filters, water meters and hydrants, electronic controls, flow measurement equipment, water quality measurement, and sensor technology components. A survey of the local water technology industry reported more than \$750 million in annual sales and a combined payroll of more than \$180 million.

“We're developing the Silicon Valley of water technology here in Fresno County, and the WIB is a key player in making that happen.”

*Dr. Zoldoske, Director
International Center for Water
Technology*

*California State University,
Fresno*

¹To hear a National Public Radio story on Norman Oklahoma's economic development efforts built around its particular knowledge of and experience with tornados, visit: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1384345>

Fresno, California

Yet in spite of this clear economic value, employers in the region's water technology industry face a shortage of skilled employees for occupations such as welders and CNC operators. Individually, the businesses were having little success capturing the attention of the region's education and workforce development organizations. In response, the Fresno County WIB (FCWIB) and California State University-Fresno (CSUF) began organizing employers in the water industries to identify common challenges and develop effective responses. Working jointly, the FCWIB and CSUF have built strategic plans to address the needs identified within the water industry. A central aspect of this response was CSUF's establishment, in collaboration with the FCWIB, of the International Center for Water Technology in 2001.

The purpose of the Center is to educate, promote, and assist in the development and adoption of innovative technologies that improve water utilization, reduce energy demand, and positively impact air quality.

WIB & Partner Roles

In order for companies to compete successfully in the growing global marketplace, they need a combination of a trained workforce capable of and willing to continually upgrade their skills, support for the development of innovative technologies and practices, international business training, and business counseling. The Center provides all of these services to employers, while supporting general industry expansion and increased employment opportunities for residents. Through the leadership of the FCWIB-CSUF partnership, California's Central Valley has the opportunity to become the leader in water reuse and conservation technology.

CSUF, through the Center's expertise, advances water science technologies worldwide through numerous activities:

- Business and Technology Development Assistance
- Business planning and international trade assistance
- Identifying funding sources

- Research and Development
- Laboratory and applied product testing, evaluation and product development
- Partnerships to identify “Water Smart” technologies
- Water treatment demonstrations
- Industry Testing and Certification
- Hydraulic performance testing
- Certified water quality testing services
- Independent performance certification for pumps, water meters, and backflow devices
- Education and Training
- Business/workforce training
- Water technology conferences
- Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) training ²

The FCWIB supports the Center’s budget for staffing. Specifically, the Center uses the FCWIB’s funds for workforce education and training, the development of effective pipelines of new workers entering the industry from the region’s public schools, training and support for exporting products, and accessing grant assistance. Of the Center’s approximately \$4 million annual budget, the FCWIB provided approximately \$191,500 in fiscal year 2005-2006, and \$155,000 in fiscal year 2006–2007. These contributions were initially considered, and approved, by the FCWIB’s Business and Industry Committee as part of the FCWIB’s support for sector initiatives.

² For more information about SBIR, visit: <http://www.sba.gov/SBIR>

Goals, Progress & Next Steps

The FCWIB and CSUF partnership has successfully supported employers within the water technology-irrigation industry. The following activities have brought real value to the industry, individual companies and employees:.

Workforce Development Assistance

- Incumbent Worker Training
- Supervisor training programs are available for front-line supervisors, to help increase their ability to retain and advance workers; and
- There is better coordination among a range of education/vocational training providers, including the One-Stop system and the community colleges, of employers' requirements for manufacturing and technical training.
- Placement Assistance
- As a result of the intense focus on this industry, the FCWIB staff's understanding of the industry and its workforce needs has greatly improved;
- The FCWIB created a free job bank for all employers within the industry, and more than 100 jobs have been posted to date; and
- The FCWIB hosts a job fair every March, at which industry employers meet with an average of 100 students from community colleges and high schools.
- Pipeline for Future Workers
- Development of a CD for high school students and career counselors to raise awareness of career choices and career ladders in the industry;

- Arrangement for the community colleges to include vocational training programs on approved provider lists, thereby allowing the FCWIB to pay for training directly applicable to jobs in the industry;
- Coordination of an internship program for community college students, wherein interns are paid a higher than normal wage in exchange for a commitment to graduate.

Business Development Assistance

- Through the partnership, employers have access to intensive workshops and ongoing training in international business and Small Business Innovative Research;
- Entrepreneur support in water technology is provided through the Central Valley Business Incubator, a 501(c)3 that has assisted nearly 1700 businesses in the region. The Incubator is beginning to target the water technology-irrigation industry, and will partner with the Center to combine general business start-up support with industry-based expertise in testing, technology, quality control, and identifying export markets; and
- The industry's employers enjoy improved access to the Federal government's nearly \$4 billion in small business innovative research (SBIR) grants through training and grant-writing assistance from the FCWIB and the Center.

As part of its business development assistance, the Center has coordinated seven trade missions to expand water technology trading partners for more than 20 water technology companies from the Central Valley region. These trade missions have gone to Mexico, Chile, and Argentina. In addition, the Center presented its first-ever water technology industry conference, held at CSUF on April 1–3, 2007.

To support its goal of assisting entrepreneurial companies in the water and irrigation industry, the California State University-Fresno campus recently opened the Water and Energy Technology Incubator, a \$4 million collaboration between Fresno State's

Fresno, California

International Center for Water Technology and the Clovis-based Central Valley Business Incubator, is a state-of-the-art laboratory and business incubator meant to be a proving ground for cutting-edge technologies in the water and energy fields. Known as the WET Incubator, the complex will contain testing and monitoring equipment, as well as a 22-foot-deep test pit where pumps, water meters and other devices can be evaluated in recirculated test water that will be the lifeblood of the new facility's tenants. Experts predict the incubator could soon be a focal point for technological and commercial breakthroughs for one of the central San Joaquin Valley's vital industries.

Lessons Learned

The FCWIB believes working with the University and more closely with the employers has provided FCWIB with a better understanding of the gap between employer's skill requirements and the qualifications of workers currently available in the community. The FCWIB recently completed a targeted six-industry employment study and is now working with the local colleges to identify gaps between vocational training provided and the demands demonstrated by employers.

Further, the FCWIB better understands that serving the industry's employment needs requires a more refined and sophisticated process to assess the skills of job seekers to ensure that they would be an appropriate fit in their occupations of interest, and be most likely to remain in a job and grow within the company and industry. Further, the FCWIB realizes that improved employer services require a deeper level of knowledge of the industry's requirements, trends, outlook, strengths, and challenges than it had prior to this initiative.

Contacts

Pam Lassetter
Assistant Director
Fresno County Workforce Investment Board
3302 N. Blackstone Ave., Suite 221
Fresno, CA 93726
559-490-7132
plassetter@workforce-connection.com

Dr. Zoldoske
Director
International Center for Water Technology, at
California State University, Fresno
559.278.2066
davidzo@csufresno.edu



Northern California —

Venture capital, with both its funding and its access to business expertise, is leveraged by the WIB to support entrepreneurs and small businesses in rural Northern California.

Summary

The Northern Rural Training & Employment Consortium (NoRTEC) is the administrative entity for the Workforce Investment Board that represents nine rural Northern California Counties: Butte, Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Siskiyou, Shasta, Tehama, and Trinity. This nine-county region has just under 600,000 residents and covers 31,000 square miles—19 percent of California’s land mass, but less than two percent of the state’s population. Businesses are very small in this remote, rural region; 90 percent have fewer than five employees, and full-time human resource managers are relatively nonexistent. Given these facts, NoRTEC identified its primary customer as small business. To serve this customer, NoRTEC offers recruitment services, on-the-job training, and a broad range of related human resources support, such as assistance with the development of personnel policies, creation of employee handbooks, training on labor law compliance, and customer service training. NoRTEC is the only public or private entity in the region that combines a cadre of certified human resources support personnel, a trusted relationship with the business community, and an understanding of community support resources to identify, recruit, and support small businesses with fast growth potential.

NoRTEC advocates securing angel investors and/or venture capital for those small businesses identified as having the potential for fast growth as a key strategy to serving the small and emerging business community. NoRTEC’s “Regional Competitiveness Network” is a network of locally-based angel and venture capital investment groups ready to invest in locally-based entrepreneurs with business ideas suited for fast growth. The ultimate aim is economic development resulting in enhanced employment opportunities for rural Northern California, which aligns perfectly with NoRTEC’s core mission and vision.

Northern California

To implement this Network, NoRTEC partnered with Golden Capital Network. Golden Capital Network (GCN) is a networking, training and consulting organization that leverages private equity and public entrepreneurship initiatives for promising entrepreneurs, service providers, private equity investors, and economic developers in thirteen Western states. GCN manages over \$3 million in entrepreneurship and economic development funds from a range of public entities, including: the federal Economic Development Administration; Community Development Block Grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service; the California Department of Technology, Trade and Commerce; State and local Workforce Investment Boards; and California's Employment Training Panel.

WIB & Partner Roles

NoRTEC's business services program, a partnership with over 1,000 businesses, chambers of commerce, developers, banks, realtors, and economic development specialists, is key to the success of this endeavor. NoRTEC advances businesses by providing a skilled and flexible workforce and a wide range of human resource services. As a result, NoRTEC has extensive knowledge about the business community in its nine counties, ideally positioned to identify those companies well-suited and prepared for growth worthy of venture or angel investments.

The primary responsibility of NoRTEC is to contact the small businesses and entrepreneurs in the nine county region and to identify their initial needs and potential for growth. Depending on NoRTEC's assessment, the business may be referred to a local economic development council, a small business development center, a community college for access to contract education, or Golden Capital Network for support in identifying and accessing capital resources. NoRTEC's responsibilities also include the development of criteria and curricula for capacity building and business/employee training.

Golden Capital Network's responsibilities include organizing and staffing venture capital and angel investor groups, and providing screening of and training for selected entrepreneurs on how to maximize the likelihood of receiving funding to capitalize their emerging businesses.

GNC also recruits, organizes and provides staff support to these local investors, and assists them in creating pools of dedicated investment capital for local businesses in their communities. These organized groups of investors are critical participants in this initiative. These investor groups are located throughout Northern California, prepared to invest in local ventures with fast growth potential. They are linked to the GCN's central hub investment fund and its extensive network of other larger venture capital funds if they require additional rounds of investment capital to scale their product or service on a statewide, national, or global basis.

Goals. Progress & Next Steps

As the partnership has grown and matured, GCN has gained a better understanding of NoRTEC's value, and likewise, NoRTEC has gained a better understanding of how to best partner with GCN. In the near future, NoRTEC will assume a non-voting seat on GCN's investment review board, bringing to GCN its extensive knowledge of the Northern California economy and the thousands of small businesses in the region. In addition, GCN will benefit from NoRTEC's invaluable human resources and workforce development support for its business clients not already being served by NoRTEC. This emerging relationship will benefit NoRTEC, GCN, and those businesses seeking to grow across Northern California.

Another important goal of the Network is to improve its tracking and measurement methods. NoRTEC currently has an easy-to-use tracking system in place. This system will be enhanced and updated to allow for better tracking of the businesses identified for participation in the Regional Competitiveness Network, including their success in securing venture or angel investments, and the impact over the short and long-term of these investments.

Northern California

Lessons Learned

1. Establish credibility. The local business community likely will be skeptical of a government agency being able to provide much assistance. Venture capitalists and angel investors will be even more wary. Start small, a business at a time, and build on accumulated strengths and successes, establishing a reputation and a record of success as a valuable business partner.
2. There are entrepreneurs with good ideas everywhere, even in rural areas. Be patient. Those with fast growth potential are much fewer in number, and farther between, yet it only takes one or two to make a significant difference for a community and the region at large.
3. Identify locally based investment groups. If investor partners are from out of your area, they may entice your entrepreneurs to follow the money and leave your service area. In addition, having local investors contributes to the development of a self-sustaining business environment in the region, and will provide a strong base for future entrepreneurs and small businesses.
4. Golden Capital Network and other similar entities are essential. It is a big job to form and staff investor groups and prepare potential entrepreneurs for presentations to the investors.

Contacts

Charles Brown
Executive Director
cbrown@ncen.org
NORTEC
7420 Skyway
Paradise, CA 95969
(530)872-9600 wk
(530)872-5647 fax

Jon Gregory
530-893-8828 x103
Golden Capital Network
155 E. Third Avenue
Chico, CA 95926
P: 530-893-8828
F: 530-893-8927



Northwest Missouri—

Proven microenterprise models support the WIB's strategy to build a culture of successful entrepreneurship throughout rural Northwest Missouri.

Summary

Entrepreneurs are an important part of the rural landscape and economy, both in Northwest Missouri and across the country. Many promising ideas for the creation of new enterprises never receive the necessary support to test their viability. Many are never realized or fail due to lack of financial resources, lack of proper planning, or insufficient support from the community.

In the northwest region of Missouri, approximately 16,000 individuals report at least 20 percent of their income from self-employment. Full-time entrepreneurs in the region earn an average salary of \$23,850 in the rural area and \$29,650 in the St. Joseph area. Over 500 new businesses are started in the region each year, approximately 70 of which are started by individuals who are below the federal poverty level.

To improve the likelihood that Workforce Investment Act (WIA) eligible individuals receive the necessary support to start and grow their own businesses, the Northwest Workforce Investment Board (NW WIB) is creating a network of service providers under the umbrella of the Northwest Micro Enterprise Training and Support Program (NWMETS).

About Hometown Competitiveness

The Hometown Competitiveness (HTC) approach was developed by 4 partner organizations, all located within Nebraska: (1) the Heartland Center for Leadership Development, (2) the Nebraska Community Foundation, (3) the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, and (4) the Center for Rural Affairs, HTC encourages communities to become actively involved in nurturing local enterprise in three specific areas: (1) Saving Main Street and other key businesses through planned ownership succession; (2) Creating new wealth and good jobs by helping entrepreneurial companies that have the potential to breakthrough to a broader product line and/or a larger market; and (3) Using local charitable assets to support entrepreneurship development.

Linn and Grundy counties have established HTC boards which include banking industry representatives. These boards will serve as the review committee for the \$5,000 in start-up expenses offered by the NW WIB for their respective counties.

HTC Website: www.nebcommfound.org/HTC.htm

Northwest Missouri

The NWMETS program will offer financial support for training and start-up costs to individuals who have an interest in starting their own business and are registered with the WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Adult or Older Youth programs (who have an income that does not exceed 150% of the federal poverty level) or are registered with the WIA Dislocated Worker Program. The program is designed to give the NWMETS participants every chance to make their business venture grow and succeed.

While all new business development within the region is welcome, the NW WIB and its strategic partners will encourage an increase in new businesses that could reduce skill gaps and shortages identified in the recent Northwest Skills Gap Planning (SGP). These include:

- Allied Health Professions
- Skilled Laborers
- Manufacturing Laborers and Operators
- Correction, Security, Compliance Officers
- Truck Drivers
- Insurance and Financial Claims Adjustors, Examiners, and Investigators

WIB & Partner Roles

The NWMETS project will work with two entrepreneurial movements in the region. The first is the Hometown Competitiveness (HTC) approach, a developmental framework that helps community volunteers focus on strategies to strengthen leadership, youth development, entrepreneurship and charitable assets. The Northwest counties of Grundy and Linn have embraced HTC in order to provide a comprehensive approach to rural community development.

About Enterprise Facilitation

Ernesto Sirolli developed Enterprise Facilitation, an approach to new business creation that helps individuals identify and use their unique talents and passions to create a business. Sirolli-trained coaches help participants remove barriers to success, focusing on what they do well. Sirolli teaches that no single individual possesses the skills and passion to perform more than two functions of operating a business—marketing, production or financial management—and cannot operate a business effectively without assistance in those areas where ability is lacking.

The Missouri counties of Andrew, Atchison, Gentry, Holt, Nodaway, and Worth are using the Enterprise Facilitation model.

NWMEF has formed a board with representation from the banking industry and has agreed to review applications for the \$5,000 in start-up funds for program participants in their region.

Website: www.sirolli.com

The other entrepreneurial movement is Northwest Missouri Enterprise Facilitation (NWMEF), a non-profit organization working to grow the economy from within Andrew, Atchison, Gentry, Holt, Nodaway, and Worth Counties. NWMEF provides one-on-one support to fledging entrepreneurs using the Sirolli Model (see box on previous page). NWMEF considers the unique needs of individuals within the community by assessing personal commitment as well as the viability of the business concept. They will help the individual access business incubators, revolving fund programs, business and market research, and technical assistance programs and providers.

Eligible and interested participants in NWMETS will be encouraged to first complete the FastTrac™ entrepreneurial course offered through the region's Small Business Development Centers. FastTrac™, a product of the Kauffman Foundation (www.fasttrac.org), is a practical, hands-on business development program designed to help entrepreneurs hone the skills needed to create, manage and grow a successful business. FastTrac™ participants work on their own business ideas or ventures throughout the course—moving their ventures to new levels of growth and reality. The FastTrac™ course, a 40-hour curriculum, will be offered on an as-needed basis in the three largest towns in the region, and fees associated with each class will be paid for by NWMETS.

Upon successful completion of the course, graduates are eligible to submit their business plan, including a budget, to receive up to \$5,000 in start-up grant funds.³ Applications for start-up funds will be reviewed for approval by either the Northwest Missouri Enterprise Facilitation Board or Hometown Competitiveness, depending on the county from which the application originates.⁴

The Northwest Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has developed a standard set of scoring criteria and scoring review sheets to be used by the review teams, regardless of the model or the county. (One of the WIB's goals is to compare the two micro-enterprise models used in this initiative, and to try and determine their relative effectiveness through Northwest Missouri.) The review committees will consider such criteria as:

1. Applicant completion of the FastTrac entrepreneurial course.
2. Applicant demonstrates the persistence necessary to pursue their vision, based on:

³ (The U.S. Department of Labor approved a waiver for the METS initiative to use a portion of the grant funds for start-up funds. The \$5,000 amount was established as a ceiling by the Northwest WIB.)

⁴ For those Northwest counties not involved with either HTC or Enterprise Facilitation, applications will be reviewed by the MO-KAN or Green Hills Rural Development Incorporated.

Northwest Missouri

- The research they have conducted,
 - Their relevant education,
 - The amount of experience in their chosen field, and
 - Their utilization of a mentor's experience and expertise.
3. Applicant has a sound business plan and supporting documents, such as a budget.
 4. Applicant is proposing a new business with employment in one or more of the region's demand occupations.

NWMETS will make available other workshops and seminars on financial management, marketing, and industry-specific workshops to program participants, each of whom is eligible to receive up to \$3,000 worth of training offered through NCMC, the SBDC, Missouri Enterprise and other educational institutions. In addition, participants will receive case management services and other community resources to assist them in dealing with personal challenges. The Adult, Older Youth and Dislocated Worker program sub-contractors will fund supportive services on an individual basis for select workshops and scheduled program activities.

Graduates of this project will be encouraged to participate in alumni activities offered by North Central Missouri College (NCMC). The alumni meet monthly to network, share, and learn from special presenters. Mentoring will be available to participants through the SBDC, Northwest Missouri Enterprise Facilitation, and HTC. Another valuable tool in the development of the network will be an electronic based resource guide of entrepreneurial training and support services available within the 18 county region. The Resource Guide will be hosted on the NW WIB website.

Throughout the NWMETS project, the Northwest Missouri WIB will focus on providing value by:

- Establishing partnerships and networks of providers and resources to support the micro-enterprise projects and participants. Such partners may come from the workforce development, economic development, and education fields. Further, the WIB will focus on trying to connect various projects across the 18 counties in the region;
- Testing, developing, and supporting new ideas and initiatives in support of micro-enterprise in particular, and in support of economic development in general;

- Tracking and providing data and practices, processes, outcomes, and impacts on a quarterly basis, and through the final grant project report; and
- Working to both secure additional funds for the NWMETS project in general, and providing access to “free” (that is, with interest or charges) start-up money for promising entrepreneurs.

The budget for the Northwest Workforce Board’s METS project is \$65,000 per year for a 3 year period, totaling \$195,000. During this timeframe the Workforce Investment Board will leverage at least \$22,000 each year for a total of \$66,000 for 3 years, for a total project budget of \$261,000. The budget allows for eight grants of \$5,000 each.

Goals, Progress & Next Steps

Performance goals (as reported by the Northwest Missouri Workforce Investment Board) for the NWMETS initiative include:

	06-07	07-08	08-09	OVERALL
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	35	25	8	68
NUMBER/PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS COMPLETING FASTTRAC/PACE CLASS	28 (80%)	20 (80%)	6 (80%)	54 (80%)
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS SUBMITTING BUSINESS PLANS	16 (57%)	16 (80%)	8 (133%)	40 (74%)
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS EARNING THE START-UP GRANT	8 (50%)	9 (56%)	12 (150%)	29 (73%)
NUMBER OF NEW BUSINESSES STARTED	13	12	8	33
NUMBER OF NEW JOBS CREATED	18	28	20	66
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF BUSINESSES STARTED STILL IN OPERATION	10 (77%)	19 (76%)	25 (75%)	25 (75%)

The NWMETS project launched in late summer 2006 (just 3 months prior to this document being published) and has yet to realize any of its long-term goals. At the time of this writing, one individual had submitted a business plan and the necessary supporting documents to be eligible for the \$5,000 start-up funds. The plan and documents are awaiting review by one of the micro-enterprise review committees.

The WIB is embarking on an enhanced marketing and communications effort to raise awareness of and participation in the NWMETS program. This effort includes distributing flyers, posting information on the WIB’s website, providing news releases, and promoting NWMETS at partner meetings. As the WIBs

Northwest Missouri

partners become more aware of the opportunities available from NWMETS, service providers anticipate greater success identifying potential participants and recipients of the start-up funds.

Lessons Learned

PROMOTION, PROMOTION, PROMOTION! Because notice of the grant award was extremely late, it's been a struggle to reach projected numbers. The hope is that success will breed success. When the region's first start-up funds recipient is named and awarded, it is hoped the accomplishment will energize and strengthen efforts while serving as a success story to promote the project.

Contact

Becky Steele
Executive Director
Northwest Missouri Workforce Investment Board
912 Main Street
Trenton, MO 64683
1.660-359-3622, ext. 17
BSteele@mail.ncmissouri.edu



Missouri—

Missouri’s Workforce Development office, Missouri Enterprise, and local WIBs and economic development agencies team up to improve business retention and layoff aversion efforts.

Summary

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) authorizes services and funds for dislocated workers as well as rapid response activities to facilitate a smooth transition to new jobs and careers when workers lose their jobs. Over the last decade, the US Department of Labor and state and local WIBs have sought to utilize WIA dislocated worker funds for layoff aversion—to prevent the layoff or minimize its scope and effect on both workers and communities. As noted by the Steel Valley Authority⁵:

Plant closings and substantial layoffs occur for a variety of reasons including financial difficulty, mergers and acquisitions, loss of markets, consolidations, foreign competition, product or service obsolescence, shift in parent company focus and other factors. Once a company announces its intentions to close or substantially downsize, the decision is usually final and irreversible. There are occasions, however, where the decision is not inevitable. These are the occasions that provide opportunities for job retention and layoff aversion.

The ability to provide layoff aversion assistance in a variety of forms is clearly authorized in the Workforce Investment Act and in the final regulations, allowing dislocated worker funds to be used for a wide range of layoff aversion activities, such as:

- Economic trends monitoring and creation of “early warning networks”
- Pre-feasibility studies
- Employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs)

⁵ The Layoff Aversion Guidebook, unpublished document, prepared for US Department of Labor, 2003.

Missouri.

- Incumbent worker training
- Linkages to loan programs and other business assistance programs

To take advantage of the flexibility in the statute to proactively serve the needs of companies before layoffs become inevitable, the Missouri Department of Economic Development's Division of Workforce Development issued an RFP as a part of its Skilled Workforce Initiative in 2006 to develop Business Retention/Early Warning Teams in workforce regions around the State. The resulting grants supported initial projects in three workforce areas, as well as a statewide grant to Missouri Enterprise (the state's Manufacturing Extension Partnership Center), to provide assessment, evaluation, and technical assistance support.

WIB & Partner Roles

Business Retention / Early Warning Teams

Missouri's Business Retention/Early Warning Teams are funded through federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) 25% funds, administered by the Division of Workforce Development. Grants for these Teams primarily financed local Business Retention Coordinators (BRCs), but other related costs associated with support of business retention efforts are allowable. Two of the three local pilots (Southwest Workforce Region (Springfield) and Northwest Workforce Region (St. Joseph's)) opted to establish Business Relations Teams by using their grant money to hire Business Retention Coordinators, professionals responsible for assembling and leading a local team of business retention experts. Representatives on the local teams typically come from the local WIB, the local economic development organization and/or chamber of commerce, and also include the local state agency Rapid Response Coordinator, the local Division of Workforce Development Business Representative, labor representation, local utility company representation, and a representative from Missouri Enterprise.

The third local pilot project, covering two local Kansas City Metro Workforce Regions, opted to invest their grant funds in a number of economic development organizations to support and expand the business retention and expansion expertise of these economic developers. These investments provided critical incentives to the economic development organizations to improve their business retention efforts. The local WIB, in turn, funded their Business Retention Coordinator through the use of local WIA dollars.

Regardless of how the local WIB chooses to allocate their funds, the state entrusted wide latitude to the local WIBs and their business retention teams by designing a set of strategies and tactics to best meet the goals of the grant—to improve business retention and minimize the number and impact of layoffs.

Through the monitoring of formal and informal indicators of business distress, the Business Retention Coordinator (BRC) and the Team are responsible for identifying at-risk industries within a community and leveraging resources and assistance designed to avert layoffs and closings when possible.

Local business retention teams in the targeted workforce regions identify at-risk companies, align resources, and seek additional capital to meet companies' identified needs. Committee members access and leverage resources for the local Business Retention Program and develop strategies to establish an Early Warning Network in their regions.

To identify potentially at-risk companies, the business retention teams collaborate to review factors such as:

- Declines in utility bills
- Declines in employment
- Declines in taxes paid
- Insights from local economic development organizations and Missouri Enterprise

Missouri.

- Knowledge about business lost to competitors in the US or abroad
- Dun and Bradstreet report that identifies at risk companies

In addition, many of the team member organizations conduct regular business visits to determine additional specific needs that should be addressed to support employers and improve their chances for success.

Missouri Enterprise

Under the terms of the State of Missouri's grant, Missouri Enterprise is responsible for conducting comprehensive assessments on up to thirty companies identified by the business retention teams in the three local workforce areas per year. The grant funds from the State enable Missouri Enterprise to conduct these assessments at no cost to the employers.

For these at-risk businesses, Missouri Enterprise analyzes and prioritizes challenges and opportunities for the company's survival, documents their findings, and helps to develop strategies to avert plant closings and business failures.

The Missouri Enterprise assessment process includes the following steps:

- Conduct a lean transformation planner—25 questions that provide information on the company's operational and financial issues,
- Assess a firm's income statement and balance sheet to calculate a Z score. The Z score is a measure of fiscal fitness and is used to predict a company's probability of failure, and
- Conduct a company site visit and walk-through with Missouri Enterprise staff well-versed in manufacturing operations and engineering expertise

After this process, Missouri Enterprise prepares a formal report with recommendations for presentation to the company. While follow-up on the proposed recommendations for action is the responsibility of the company, the business retention team is available to assist in anyway possible.

The State's Layoff Aversion Initiative allows each of the regional teams to determine how they will operate together. Likewise, depending on the specific needs identified for each at-risk employer, the team members will mobilize and respond with services and resources according to their expertise and capabilities. For issues related to skills, qualifications, and talent development and management, the regional workforce board and/or the community college or similar education institution will take the lead.

By examining the viability of the at-risk businesses and offering specific improvement techniques, Missouri Enterprise helps the region retain jobs and strengthens the area's valuable employers.

Goals, Progress & Next Steps

Work in the three pilot sites formally began July 1, 2006. Activities started slowly, as teams convened to organize and define roles and responsibilities in each region. Within just a matter of a few months, the teams were fully operational, and Missouri Enterprise had begun conducting assessments on identified companies: two in March 2007 and six in April 2007, with another 20 companies in various stages of the assessment process by May 2007. Recommendations from the completed assessments have been delivered to companies, and the local business retention teams are working to secure funding and begin the implementation of various recommendations.

Per the state grant requirements, the three pilot sites are expected to report against a set of specific measurable performance outcomes, at a minimum:

- The number of businesses assisted
- The number of jobs saved and their corresponding wage rates
- A summary of strategies used and the outcomes per strategy
- Any increases in productivity through measurements
- If applicable, higher post-training wages of participating employees

Missouri.

In addition, for any recommendations implemented by Missouri Enterprise staff or partners, the aggregate outcome metrics for the companies served are available. These measures include jobs created, jobs retained, cost savings, increases in capital investments, and other investments leveraged. This data is collected by an independent follow-up survey conducted in the year following the work performed.

The State of Missouri anticipates expanding the number of pilot sites from four to nine during 2007 (Missouri has 14 workforce regions). Each grant will be for three renewable one-year periods. In addition, each grantee is expected to develop strategies to sustain the business retention teams and their initiatives during their three years of grant-support work.

Lessons Learned

Patience is critical. During the first few months of the program, challenges included how to understand and administer the program and how to target at-risk companies. Participants were anxious to see the impact of the grant on companies in their area of responsibility. However, as the partners experienced more activity under the grant, excitement about the results increased and the partners have become more invested in the process and its success.

The State learned that despite their initial assumption, providing funding for a local business retention coordinator may not be the best solution to local circumstances. In fact, having a full-time coordinator isn't necessarily required. It may be the case, as is being tested in Kansas City, that using the state grant funds to contract directly with local economic development organizations to step up their business retention and expansion activities has as much, if not more, impact. After all, economic developers are more often the experts in business retention, and supporting their ongoing efforts may be more cost effective than trying to establish a similar position within a WIB. The Kansas City WIB's Business Retention Coordinator, a position supported through local WIA funds and other unrestricted monies and not through the state grant funding, serves as an intermediary and broker of knowledge and connections, ensuring that information is being shared within the team and that

the necessary resources are brought to the table to meet identified needs of at-risk companies.

The challenge with this strategy, however, is to find a means for rural WIBs to use state grant funds to catalyze retention activities by local economic development organizations while still identifying the necessary funds to pay for a Business Retention Coordinator. Kansas City, like many larger urban WIBs, has sufficient funds from WIA and other sources to finance a coordinator without the use of the grant funds. Many rural WIBs do not benefit from this luxury.

Finally, the state learned that it is critically important to develop and maintain strong partnerships with organizations such as Missouri Enterprise—an organization that brings statewide perspective and expertise, deep knowledge of employers and industries, and the ability to conduct in-depth assessments and strategic recommendations for the retention and expansion of essential businesses.

Contacts

Amy Deem, Program Manager
Missouri Department of Economic Development
Division of Workforce Development
573-526-8271
amy.deem@ded.mo.gov

Mary Davis
President / CEO
Missouri Enterprise
573-341-0117
mdavis@missourienterprise.org



Texoma, Texas and Oklahoma—

A 13-county region including parts of North Texas and Southern Oklahoma forms a comprehensive strategy through the partnership of local and state workforce and economic development organizations.

Summary

The 13 counties located in south central Oklahoma and northern Texas—covering an area roughly the size of Connecticut and Rhode Island combined—make up a largely rural area, replete with small towns and historically reliant on oil and gas, ranching, and manufacturing for jobs and income.⁶ The region is bisected east and west by the Red River and its namesake, Lake Texoma, an 89,000-acre reservoir managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Chickasaw and Choctaw Tribal Nations contribute significantly to the regional economy, not only through their highly visible tribal casinos and resorts, but also through their investments in a variety of business operations.

Communities on both sides of the Red River have undertaken many planning efforts in search of their own economic opportunities, aiming to develop specific strategies for providing a competitive and high-quality workforce to support and sustain the future economic development. However, a more regional approach involving community, business, economic, and workforce development leaders from towns on both sides of the river was not launched until late 2005.

In 2006, several key local workforce and economic development organizations—including Workforce Texoma, Southern Oklahoma Workforce Investment Boards, Denison Development Alliance, Durant Industrial Authority, Bonham Economic Development Corporation, and Sherman Economic Development Corporation—established a collaborative partnership, the Texoma Regional Consortium (TRC), to organize a joint economic and workforce development planning process. Critical to addressing the region's key issues will be convening leaders in a structured way. The formation of the Texoma Regional Consortium represents the beginning of just such a cooperative process. TRC's goal is to define a common vision for the region's

⁶ Background information has been drawn from "Bridging the Red River: A Regional Economic Strategy for the Texoma Regional Consortium", developed by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness. 2007

Texoma, Texas and Oklahoma

future prosperity beyond its traditional dependence on low-skill manufacturing and resource-based activities and to a more knowledge-based economy.

Since Texoma's project covers two states, 13 counties, numerous cities and towns, and a Tribal government, it has been important to garner interest and secure commitment from all stakeholders early in the process. Oftentimes, repeated explanations are required to stakeholders and partners of the reasons for and value of going through a planning process. It has been imperative to ensure that all partners are fully engaged during the entire planning process, and that all partners will be willing to continue their commitment into and through the implementation phase.

WIB & Partner Roles

To date, the two local WIBs have acted as the primary organizers and leaders of this regional planning effort. Each was able to secure funding from their respective state workforce and economic development agencies to seed the initial phase of work. Key partnering organizations from the two states included both the Texas Workforce Commission and the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. In addition to the Texas Workforce Commission's initial financial support for research and planning, both state agencies were critical in providing financial support and organizational backing; and both participated in many of the planning sessions and helped to position and execute various implementation activities.

Other key local and regional economic development partner organizations include:

- Ada Jobs Foundation
- Ardmore Development Authority
- Bonham Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development
- Chickasaw Nation
- Denison Development Alliance
- Durant Industrial Authority

- East Central University of Oklahoma
- Gainesville Economic Development Corporation
- Grayson County Airport Authority
- Grayson County College
- Murray County Industrial Authority
- Murray State College
- North Central Texas College
- Pauls Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Sherman Economic Development Corporation
- Southeastern Oklahoma State University

Many of the partners provided financial resources in support of the planning phase. The project is currently transitioning from the research and planning stage to the implementation stage. Defining specific roles for partners is the first task in the implementation phase.

Goals, Progress & Next Steps

In examining existing and future economic opportunities, several industry clusters offering the greatest potential growth opportunities for the region were identified. These clusters, while not necessarily different than those identified in other regions, typically provide the kind of high-wage, high-skill jobs that will enhance the Texoma region's standard of living, and include:

- Finance and insurance
- Motor vehicles
- Aviation

Texoma, Texas and Oklahoma

- Plastics products
- Packaged food products
- Warehousing and distribution
- Computer and electronic equipment
- Basic health services
- Hotels and passenger transportation services
- Ranching and equine and
- Petroleum and gas.

To prepare the region to support these targeted clusters, the TRC identified its core assets and acknowledged its key challenges in enhancing knowledge capacity, fostering innovation, creating a global image and competitive location, offering appealing amenities, engaging community and civic support, providing connectivity, and supporting regional collaboration.

The regional leaders recognize that they have many challenges to overcome in ensuring that Texoma's workforce is trained and prepared for knowledge-driven industry clusters. These obstacles include increasing the utilization of its research resources, improving its limited local urban amenities, addressing its inadequate broadband and inter-regional transportation network, and addressing traditional parochialism in the outlook of the region.

To respond to these hurdles and develop a new vision, regional leaders aspire to advance the region as a "hometown hotspot" in which Texoma will be an economically diverse and entrepreneurial region that supports innovation and appeals to families with:

- A distinct regional identity
- Vibrant downtowns

- More highly educated citizens
- Growing companies in emerging industries
- Supportive, connected environment
- More collaborative governance

This vision is designed to provide a positive statement about where Texoma would like to proceed. It is structured not only to provide a framework for the priorities of the TRC action plan, but also to serve as a guide to assist other regional stakeholders in strategic and operational planning.

The Texoma Regional Consortium reviewed a list of more than 50 possible actions that could help in achieving the Texoma vision. Recognizing that successful implementation will rely on accomplishing a few “impactful” strategies, the TRC prioritized that list and identified the most important actions to foster and promote during the coming months and years. The following nine specific actions were identified to help the region achieve its vision in the coming months and years:

- Develop industry-driven “just-in-time” career and technical education for the region’s targeted clusters
- Develop an integrated entrepreneurial development initiative
- Develop a “business” recruitment plan tied to Dallas/Ft. Worth and Oklahoma City as key regional assets
- Develop a coordinated regional “people” attraction plan for the Texoma Region
- Develop and deliver workforce housing
- Assess and address workforce transportation needs
- Develop “cross-border” Texoma multi-modal transportation for freight and passengers

Texoma, Texas and Oklahoma

- Increase the region's broadband capacity
- Implement a sustainability plan that engages the region's leaders and citizens in the plan's success

To accomplish these action items, the Texoma Regional Consortium plans to form detailed implementation and monitoring plans for each. Each action plan will have a working task force dedicated to designing and implementing tasks associated with each action item. The TRC also plans to continue, with the participation of additional stakeholders, to monitor overall activities in the region, in the hopes of ensuring that the economic vision of its leaders is achieved and the region becomes a true “hometown hotspot” for its citizens.

Lessons Learned

This initiative, while not yet completed, has produced numerous critical lessons. First and foremost, this process proved that workers define labor sheds, not legislation. State, county, and city boundaries are less important than where jobs are located, how economies are emerging and evolving, and what commuting and transportation options are available.

As part of the planning process, Texoma found great value in being as inclusive as possible, because, as regional leaders pointed out, “You never know who will have the right connections to accomplish your goals.” To further guarantee input and buy-in, Texoma held focus groups in different locations throughout the 13 county area to insure all partners and stakeholders could provide input. Interestingly, Texoma discovered that when people meet in small groups, often new alliances are formed which lead to opportunities not previously imagined. For example, unexpected partnerships between former competitors have been created as a result of two summits held for the healthcare and manufacturing industries.

Finally, Texoma believes that using outside consultants to lead a planning process can have positive outcomes (Texoma hired a team of consultants to assist with their planning process). Credible and professional consultants keep the process on track,

provide neutral perspectives on project findings, bring different ideas and thought processes to the procedure, and help hold partners and stakeholders accountable.

Contacts

Janie Bates
Texoma Workforce Development Board
5904 Texoma Parkway
Sherman, TX 75090
Executive Director
(903) 957-7408
(903) 957-7413
janie.bates@twc.state.tx.us

Bob Rhoden
Texoma Workforce Development Board
Business Services Manager
5904 Texoma Parkway
Sherman, TX 75090
Bob.rhoden@twc.state.tx.us



Pittsburgh—

Comprehensive strategies and coordinated initiatives to improve regional transportation for workers and employers are realized through a partnership of the WIB, the port authority, a local foundation, and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission.

Summary

There is a strong correlation between a successful economy and an available, well-trained and highly mobile workforce. For urban and rural low-income people without access to reliable cars, many jobs—in some cases entire professions—are out of reach. At the same time, growing numbers of suburban business owners struggle to recruit and retain workers for entry-level jobs—precisely the jobs that fit the skills profiles of many low-income people. Exacerbating this situation in Southwestern Pennsylvania is the fact that Pittsburgh ranks sixth worst in the nation in urban sprawl, and suffers from a declining population within its MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area), thus leaving Pittsburgh with fewer people in more space, yielding a challenging spatial mismatch.

Given these conditions, and a review of regional transportation strategies, Southwestern Pennsylvania's leadership made a commitment to advance economic vitality and job growth by forming the Access to Work Interagency Cooperative (ATWIC). The Access to Work Interagency Cooperative builds regional support for, and develops and implements integrated transportation and workforce development strategies to support economic development and employment growth in the region.

The following organizations serve on the ATWIC's executive committee:

- Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (representing all the local workforce investments boards across Southwestern Pennsylvania)
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
- Port Authority of Allegheny County
- Pittsburgh Foundation

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

There is also an independent, rotating chair of the executive committee who represents an organization other than these four permanent members, thus always ensuring a diverse set of perspectives and varied input into the deliberations and projects of ATWIC (www.atwic.org).

WIB & Partner Roles

ATWIC is a working committee of Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB). In addition to housing ATWIC and its staff, the TRWIB employs a Mobility and Workforce Development Specialist who assists with the work of ATWIC.

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission is the designated 'metropolitan planning organization' (MPO) for the region, and as such, receives federal transportation planning funds. The Port Authority of Allegheny County is the grant recipient of federal Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) funds, and is, in turn, the administrative entity for these JARC funds. The Pittsburgh Foundation has been providing funding from its own resources to study and address regional transportation issues for years.

Individually, each of these organizations controls substantial funding related to transportation, and therefore economic and workforce development. Together, serving through the executive committee of ATWIC, these organizations work collaboratively to ensure that transportation-related resources are invested in Southwestern Pennsylvania in a fiscally responsible and equitable manner.

Specifically, ATWIC:

- Cultivates an integrated approach to develop, implement, evaluate, and oversee programs and services intended to address access-to-work transportation issues;
- Demonstrates and documents best practices/models in coordinating transportation as it relates to economic

“Our job is to help people get to work. We help approximately one million riders get to and from work annually through reverse commute routes, neighborhood shuttles, and the provision of bus tickets and passes for employment related purposes.”

—David Stragar

*ATWIC Program
Manager*

development, workforce development, human services and transportation planning and investment;

- Employs cutting-edge technology that will cross disciplines and assist numerous agencies and organizations with data collection intended to provide a better understanding of transportation use;
- Encourages earlier integration of workforce development, transportation planning and human services in the economic development process.

Goals, Progress & Next Step

A sample of programs funded for 2007 demonstrate the region's commitment to improved transportation through the creative use of transit providers and strategies, including the use of vans and buses; shared rides; non-traditional hours of operation and the addition or expansion of bus routes:

- Port Authority of Allegheny County—Partial support for selected bus routes
- Heritage Health Foundation—WorkLink Community Van Service
- Beaver County Transit Authority—Route 6 Bus Service
- Butler County City Township Joint Municipal Transit Authority—Night Owl Service
- Washington Rides—Shared Ride Service
- Indiana County—INDIGO Shared Ride Service
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission—CommuteInfo Program
- Allegheny Intermediate Unit—Travel Training Program
- Gap Service Fund—Workforce Emergency Response Transportation Fund

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

ATWIC's outcomes include:

- According to a recent report, the region has demonstrated a heightened commitment to and expertise in access-to-work issues. As a result, thousands of people, particularly low-income and entry level workers, have reliable transportation options, many for the first time.
- Increased activity in regional, state, and Federal budgeting and appropriations debates.
- The hiring of a new Program Manager to promote and support access to work activities for entry level workers

For the TRWIB, participation in ATWIC has raised its levels of credibility and visibility. Consequently, now the TRWIB is well positioned to frequently provide input to, and make presentations for, towns and cities throughout the region on issues ranging from economic development and land use to zoning and transportation. In turn, this has prepared the TRWIB to be better qualified to fulfill its core mission—workforce development.

Lessons Learned

The work of the TRWIB on transportation related issues has reinforced the board's belief that its work must extend beyond the administration of Workforce Investment Act funds and programs. Workforce boards must command a broader vision of their sphere of responsibility and accountability, because a successful workforce requires a vibrant economy, and each of these entities requires effective transportation strategies.

Embracing this standpoint, Ron Painter, the TRWIB executive director, has opted to serve on a wide range of boards and participate in numerous organizations and initiatives that many WIBs believe fall outside their primary areas of focus. For example, Mr. Painter sits on the board of Sustainable Pittsburgh, an organization with

a commitment to land use and transportation issues in the region, both to provide a workforce development perspective to their deliberations and to further inform the work of the TRWIB.

Further, Mr. Painter and the TRWIB understand that their commitment to this broader range of issues can't be merely short-term, as the basic issues surrounding the need for improved transportation are not diminishing. Mr. Painter emphasizes that the learning curve on issues related to transportation (and land use, and related issues) can be very steep, and that hard-earned knowledge shouldn't be wasted by walking away from the table. Further, it takes time to build the necessary levels of trust with newly engaged organizations, and that trust also should not be wasted by disengaging too early. This combination of knowledge and trust leads to a level credibility and value that will situate the WIB as an invaluable player in a region beyond just traditional workforce issues.

Contact

Ron Painter
Executive Director
The Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board
425 Sixth Avenue Suite 650
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 552-7090



Chicago—

Video-conferencing equipment opens the doors to the Argonne National Lab for inner-city students through a partnership with the Chicago Workforce Board and the Chicago Public Schools.

Summary

Chicago Public School students have little opportunity to meet and interact with working professionals in technical fields at the nation's industrial or government-run research facilities. Faced with obstacles such as jam-packed calendars and shrinking field-trip budgets, “virtual visits” seem an ideal way to connect students and teachers with science professionals, to familiarize students and school administrators with career opportunities in math, research and science.

Argonne National Laboratory (ANL) is a world-class research lab supported by the US Department of Energy and operated by the University of Chicago. It has nearly 1,400 scientists, engineers, and technical staff involved in over 200 pioneering research projects. The Laboratory is located about 20 miles from downtown Chicago yet a world away from most Chicago Public Schools. While Chicago Public Schools (CPS) works hard to engage civic-minded executives, community leaders and technical professionals in classroom activities, many schools still lack the time or resources to invest in the kinds of experiences that connect their studies to life-lab experiments, field trips and other hands-on activities. Argonne National Laboratory (ANL) is helping to create such experiences virtually for CPS high schools through the Science Careers Video Conferencing Series.

“The fact that students can ask the scientists questions is the key to the success of the conferences. The conferences demonstrate experiences that the students can appreciate, and assist them in the career decision-making process.”

—*LaShayne Collins*

*Chemistry Teacher
Chicago High School for
Agricultural Sciences*

Chicago, Illinois

For the past two years, the Chicago Workforce Board (CWB), CPS and ANL have worked together to pilot the use of distance learning technology to provide CPS students with customized, interactive “virtual visits” with scientists and technical professionals in Argonne’s research and development facilities.

Participating ANL scientists include physicists, a chemist, a meteorologist, a nano scientist, and a glass-blowing specialist, and each ANL scientist makes this project a priority. The content is excellent, the staff well-prepared, and the students are afforded the rarest of resources—the time and attention of some of the brightest, most committed, most innovative professionals (who also happen to be from many parts of the world). While Argonne experts have a knack for making science fun, they are also pointedly clear about the importance of their work: they are inventing the future, and inviting CPS students to join them.

WIB & Partner Roles

Initiated in 2004 with a two-year grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Science Careers Video Conferencing Series utilizes distance learning technologies to enable customized, interactive virtual visits to Argonne’s labs for high-school science students. In comparison to many other Chicago Workforce Board projects, the initiative is a relatively small one, at a cost of about \$90,000 in the 2004–2005 school year and \$40,000 in the 2005–2006 school year. While the initial state grant has concluded, the Science Careers Video Conferencing Series is being considered for continuation as a means to introduce students, sitting in their classrooms, to scientific researchers and technical professional at ANL.

Videoconference units were provided to each of the participating high schools, linking them with a mobile unit which can be set up in almost any laboratory at Argonne. To date, students have been able to “visit” Argonne labs specializing in Hydrogen Fuel and Hydrogen Sensors, Glassblowing, and the study and forecasting of Tornados. Prior to each session, ANL staff met with the participating teacher(s) to discuss the subject matter and the level of sophistication of the students. Background

materials on the scientists and their work were posted on the web to enable teachers to introduce their students to key concepts and vocabulary in advance. During the actual “visits,” students observe lab procedures and experimental work in progress, learn about scientific teamwork, and ask many questions of the ANL participants, typically a team of scientific and technical professionals. The scientists talk with the students about ongoing projects, and discuss their background and education, including steps they took to prepare for their current careers.

To date there have been two types of video conferences in the CPS high schools:

- Scientist Research—scientists introduce themselves, invite students into their labs, provide a glimpse of their cutting-edge research, discuss their work with students, and answer questions.
- Student Presentation—students present their science fair or class assigned project (e.g., making musical instruments) to a team of 3–4 scientists who provide guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Inevitably, a natural dialogue ensues between the scientists and students, during which the scientists have an opportunity to discuss their area of expertise, education and career choice in science, math or research, and to offer encouragement to the students to continue their studies in these fields.

Through the use of the Chicago Workforce Board’s funding:

- Each participating school is outfitted with videoconferencing technology. The equipment allows students to observe experiments in action, including those involving ANL’s \$850 million Advanced Photon Source.
- ANL scientists work with teachers to help students to make the most effective use of each visit. Scientists post age-appropriate descriptions of their work on the web so students and teachers can prepare in advance of their scheduled sessions, for example.
- All of the Argonne visits are made available on DVD for use in other classrooms and at other times.

Chicago, Illinois

To support CPL's staff engaged in this initiative, Argonne delivered two professional development workshops specifically for teachers and guidance counselors utilizing the lab's resources. These professional development workshops are designed to help the teachers better acquaint their students with science, engineering and research careers.

“The video conference was a fabulous idea. My students were delighted to have feedback about their projects as well as ideas for further experimentation.”

—Marilyn Havlik,

*Science Chairperson
Walter Payton College Prep*

Goals, Progress & Next Steps

The CPS/ANL Distance Learning Project has hosted 14 video conferences with two Chicago Public High Schools and has been a tremendous success with teachers, students and ANL scientists and researchers. With the current national emphasis on encouraging students to pursue careers in math, science, engineering and other critical fields, this project brings the possibilities and excitement of scientific careers to students firsthand by an international team of experts.

The CPS/ANL session at the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences on February 21 & 22, 2006 represents the incredible effort demonstrated by the ANL scientists. For this session, a post doctoral fellow, Michael Zach, demonstrated to CPS advanced placement chemistry students the different combustion behavior of hydrogen and propane gas in a humorous and exciting manner. Through time-lapse photography, Dr. Zach illustrated the inherent safety advantages of hydrogen as a fuel for the future. The exciting footage for his presentation was obtained during a two hour pre-production taping conducted by ANL. Dr. Zach edited and incorporated images of various balloon explosions and several creative scenarios on lab safety into his presentation. An important key to the safety of hydrogen technology is the ability to quickly and cheaply sense hydrogen leakage. Zach explained his current hydrogen sensor design on a nanoscale level and how it will bolster the hydrogen economy.

Lessons Learned

The importance of the Science Careers Video Conferencing Series to students and teachers can hardly be exaggerated. But equally important are the lessons the program offers to workforce professionals, educators and businesses more generally:

- Technology is enabling a shared learning experience between scientists in a lab and CPS students and teachers—the same technology could help connect people to experiences anywhere in the world.
- The diverse experiences and professional backgrounds that scientists, students and teachers bring to their work inspire unique, lively and memorable discussions.

While technology can be enabling, a lack of infrastructure and equipment can also present challenges to implementing a video conferencing project such as the one between ANL and the Chicago Public Schools. Of the original goal of 20-25 schools participating in the pilot project, Chicago Public Schools' e-learning office was able to identify only two schools that had the connectivity and bandwidth to support this initiative. Argonne would like to continue with this project and with more schools and students involved. Workforce Boards and school districts considering implementing such a video-conferencing initiative should thoroughly understand the technical requirements of such a project, the existing technological infrastructure in the schools and at the employers' / laboratories' places of work, and the cost of purchasing necessary equipment and infrastructure upgrades prior to undertaking such an endeavor.

Chicago, Illinois

Contacts

Joanna Greene
Deputy Director
Chicago Workforce Board
60 West Randolph, Ste 200
Chicago, IL 60601
(312)553-4430

Lou Harnisch
Project Coordinator
Division of Educational Programs
Argonne National Laboratory
9700 S. Cass Avenue
Argonne, IL 60439
(630) 252-6925
lharnisch@dep.anl.gov

Conclusions

This publication shares a number of interesting examples of successful partnerships between workforce development organizations and “non-traditional” economic development entities. It has not been the intention to present a detailed “how-to” guidebook. Rather, this publication proposes to inspire workforce development leaders and to illustrate to policymakers the strategies and approaches employed by many workforce boards to meet local and regional needs through the development of creative partnerships.

Nonetheless, some common themes have emerged from these profiles:

- There are few limits on the types of economic development partnerships that can be formed. WIA has tremendous flexibility, and DOL has been open to a wide range of projects and programs funded with WIA dollars. In this publication alone we highlight examples of partnerships supporting:
 - o Microfinance
 - o Venture capital
 - o Career awareness and education for public school students
 - o Business retention and layoff aversion
 - o Dual-state regional economic development
 - o Comprehensive transportation strategies
 - o Support and development of a high growth industry
- There are many organizations engaged in economic development, each varied in mission, size and community impact. The number and types of organizations with which WIBs and other workforce development entities collaborate are numerous and diverse. The examples featured in this publication involve partnerships with such organizations as:

Conclusions

- o State universities
- o Public schools
- o National laboratories
- o Manufacturing Extension Partnerships
- o Venture capital firms
- o Business incubators
- o Port authorities
- o Foundations
- WIBs are bounded by their own vision and risk aversion. In each example outlined in this publication, WIB leaders actively chose to go beyond the basic requirements and obligations of WIA. In this publication we profile notable WIBs that prospered by:
 - o Taking the lead on business retention and layoff aversion initiatives,
 - o Demonstrating awareness of and involvement in transportation and land use issues,
 - o Supporting local schools' efforts to improve career awareness and education,
 - and
 - o Promoting entrepreneurship and microfinance.

These profiles illustrate how the Workforce Investment Act provides a flexible platform from which workforce boards, and other leaders in the publicly-funded workforce system, are empowered to establish, maintain, and advance a wide range of innovative initiatives to meet the needs of employers and employees in their communities.

About the Authors

Scott Cheney is the Founder and Principal of PAROS Group, a Washington, DC-based professional consulting firm specializing in the field of workforce and human capital development. Recently his work has focused on the intersections between workforce development, economic development, education, and community development, and between the public, private and non-profit sectors. Through PAROS Group, Scott has worked with the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB), the National Association of Manufacturers, Sears Holding Company, ARAMARK, the Ford Motor Company Fund, the U.S. Department of Labor, and The Hitachi Foundation, among others. Scott was a developer of many courses for NAWB, including Workforce & Economic Development Partnerships; Sector Strategies; Catalyst for Change; and an Advanced Course on Workforce Development. He is also the design lead for NAWB's Institute for Innovation. Prior to starting PAROS Group, Scott's work included time at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Society for Training & Development, and the National Alliance of Business.

Mark Troppe served as the Director for Economic and Workforce Development in NCEE's Workforce Development Strategies Group until February 2007. While at NCEE, Mark examined the nature of and opportunities for effective relationships between workforce and economic development organizations, and provided technical assistance to federal, state, and local government organizations on how to take advantage of these opportunities. Mark was lead developer and instructor for the course *Aligning Workforce and Economic Development for Community Leaders* for the National Association of Workforce Boards, and delivered the course to numerous local and state groups. In addition, Mark supported the Department of Commerce's Manufacturing Extension Centers in their workforce development activities, and wrote about linking small and entrepreneurial businesses to the public workforce system. Before joining NCEE in 2000, Mark worked in the private sector as Training Director for an internet professional services company, and in the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor for 14 years. Currently, Mark is Manager of Strategic Partnerships for the NIST Manufacturing Extension Partnership program at the U.S. Dept of Commerce.

The authors extend their sincere appreciation to *Cynthia Rhines* for her copyediting expertise on this document.

