

Regional Demand-Driven Talent Development
for the 21st Century Global Economy – Are We WIRED to GROW
March 14, 2007

As our nation’s economy and businesses transform to meet the challenges of the 21st century, so too must the government systems and structures that support our economic growth and job creation. This includes changing the design and service delivery methods of the workforce investment system to reflect the new economy and meet the changing needs of workers and businesses. (Excerpt from a statement from the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration (DOLETA) upon releasing the Bush Administration’s FY 2008 Budget)

New Vision for Workforce Development

As evident by this statement, DOLETA has moved to transform the workforce investment system into a new “Regional, Demand-Driven System for Talent Development in the 21st Century.”

Key elements in the workforce investment system reform vision include:

- Workforce investment system that operates as a talent development system; it is no longer defined as a job training system. The goal is an educated and prepared workforce—on a U.S. or global standard.
- Workforce investment system aligned with the new economic realities of the 21st century, ensuring that American workers and businesses are competitive in the global marketplace.
- Workforce investment system that ensures that the private sector is a true partner in talent development, and that education and training programs are responsive to the workforce needs of employers.
- Workforce investment system that is demand-driven playing a catalytic role helping job seekers achieve self-sufficiency and promoting business prosperity.
- Workforce investment system that facilitates and leverages all available resources to respond to local needs for skilled workers.
- Workforce investment system formula funds provide tuition assistance for post-secondary education for lifelong learning opportunities aligned with the region’s talent development strategy.
- Workforce investment system that no longer operates as an array of siloed programs and services.
- Workforce investment boards structured and operating on a regional basis that are composed of regional strategic partners who drive investments, aligning spending with a regional economic vision for talent development.
- Workforce development regions should be aligned in common structures across workforce, education and economic development systems to support talent development and a regional economy.
- Workforce investment system that actively collaborates with economic development, business, and education partners to gather and analyze a wide array of current and real time workforce and economic data in order to create new knowledge about regional economies.

WIRED Initiative

One of the steps taken to achieve this “demand-driven” regional vision is called the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative. WIRED focuses on the role of talent development in driving regional economic competitiveness, job growth, and new opportunities for American workers. The goal of WIRED is to expand employment and advancement opportunities for workers and to catalyze the creation of high-skill and high-wage jobs in regional economies.

GROW Initiative

Wisconsin has adopted the demand-driven, regional vision with its own initiatives. Growing Regional Opportunities in Wisconsin (GROW) is the state version of WIRED. It promotes regional opportunities and development seeking collaboration between workforce development, economic development and education. SWWDB has received two GROW grants in collaboration with the Workforce Development Board of South Central Wisconsin. The 35% high wage requirement imposed by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) also responds to the federal vision.

RISE Initiative

Wisconsin's Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) initiative is a joint proposal from DWD and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) to the Joyce Foundation "Shifting Gears" initiative. It addresses the state's policy priorities and strategic objectives to make it easier for low-skilled, low-income adults to advance their skills and incomes along a career pathway. Building on regional innovations and state program alignment efforts, and drawing as well on research into career pathways programs in other states, the RISE initiative will assist regions pursue career pathways strategies to analyze their successes, failures, and progress. The purpose will be to identify particular dimensions of the career pathways approach that pose particular program implementation challenges and to identify potential solutions to those challenges. Ultimately, this strategy will seek to clarify, at the regional level, cross-cutting organizational agendas for career pathways program design and implementation that have ramifications both for state policy regarding career pathways and for expanding career pathways approaches to new regions.

New Paradigm for Workforce Development

The workforce development system finds itself facing an exciting new challenge. In the past, the workforce development system could concentrate service delivery on the job seeker assisting the person prepare for and obtain a job of their choice. Funding was plentiful and typical activities meant enrolling job seekers into one- or two-year training programs at the technical college or another education provider.

Today, the workforce development system finds itself needing to create a new paradigm. No longer is the system the primary option for job training focusing on individual choice. Continuing to provide the same traditional services provided under JTPA does not meet the purposes of WIA. Rather, the system is part of a broader approach, involving multiple agencies to determine how to collaborate and effectively use resources, from a variety of sources, to advance a regional economic and workforce agenda. To achieve this purpose, staff is recommending transitioning to Career Pathways to provide a service delivery structure that will help achieve this new paradigm.