

# Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development Selected Regions

*Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) is a new initiative that focuses on the role of talent development in driving regional economic competitiveness, increased job growth and new opportunities for American workers.*

Revolutions in technology and information have ushered in the era we know as globalization. This era is marked by tremendous advances in communications, travel and trade allowing individuals instant access to commerce from almost anywhere in the world. At the same time, American businesses now work not only with companies across the street, but also with companies around the globe. In the new global economy, talent development is a key factor in each business's and our nation's economic competitiveness.

Global competition is typically seen as a national challenge. In reality, the front lines of the battlefield are regional, where companies, workers, researchers, entrepreneurs and governments come together to create competitive advantage. That advantage stems from the ability to transform new ideas and new knowledge into advanced, high-quality products or services – in other words, to innovate. And those regions that are successful demonstrate the ability to network innovation assets – people, institutions, capital and infrastructure – to generate growth and prosperity in the region's economy. These regions are successful precisely because they have connected three key elements: workforce skills and lifelong learning strategies, investment and entrepreneurship strategies, and regional infrastructure and economic development strategies.

## **The Road to WIRED**

The Federal government invests over \$14 billion every year in talent development through the public workforce investment system. The Labor Department is leveraging those resources with industry and education resources to design innovative education and job training programs. The President's High Growth Job Training Initiative is demonstrating how these partnerships can prepare workers for new and increasing job opportunities in high growth, high demand and economically vital sectors of the American economy.

The President's Community-Based Job Training Grants initiative recognizes that many of the job opportunities available in the 21st century economy require post-secondary education and training, and that our community college system will play a key role in developing the skills of American workers. These grants are competitive and are designed to strengthen the capacity of community and technical colleges to train workers in the competencies and skills required by employers. In short, they will improve their ability to develop talent.



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Though each of these initiatives is important in developing the skills of American workers, we also recognize that workforce development is about more than training individuals for current jobs. In today's economy, talent is an asset, bringing new businesses and industries into communities, and successful workforce investment programs can lead to the creation of new jobs.

## The WIRED Initiative

While many regions have made considerable progress in integrating talent and skills development into their larger economic strategies, there are regions that need additional technical and financial assistance. Similarly, economic regions no longer correspond to state, county, local workforce investment area or municipal boundaries.

The WIRED Initiative is focusing on labor market areas that are comprised of multiple jurisdictions within state or across state borders. It supports innovative approaches to education and workforce development that go beyond traditional strategies preparing workers to compete and succeed both within the United States and globally.

Through the WIRED Initiative, Governors have a unique opportunity to design and implement strategic approaches to regional economic development and job growth. The WIRED Initiative will take place over the course of three years and is intended to catalyze the creation of high-skill and high-wage opportunities for American workers within the context of regional economies. This initiative is designed for regions that have been affected by global trade, are dependent on a single industry or are recovering from natural disasters.

## Critical Factors in Selecting the Regions

The U. S. Department of Labor used the following criteria to judge the proposals received under the WIRED Initiative:

- 1) Demonstration of the strategic *partnership* that is representative of the entire economic region and is comprised of a strong team of regional leaders.
- 2) Presence of impacted economic elements in the region (unemployment, low-wages, low levels of new job creation) and description of the economic and labor market conditions that are driving the *need* for transformation (such as industries that are declining or industries targeted for growth).
- 3) Demonstration of how the region will undergo *transformation* through the implementation of new efforts designed to drive integration among workforce, economic development and education systems; innovation in addressing challenges; and utilizing and building upon existing structures, resources and legislatively funded programs.



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## Planned Actions for Regions Selected under WIRED

- 1) Strategy Development – Map existing economic landscape and understand region’s strengths and weaknesses and identify opportunities and risks.
- 2) Galvanize Regional Networks – Build a leadership team consisting of civic, business, investor, academic, entrepreneur, and philanthropic members. Form consensus on action agenda and gain leadership commitment.
- 3) Implementation Coaching – Selected team of experts to provide guidance.

## Additional ETA Actions

- 1) Create a WIRED Academy to share successes and challenges between selected regions and capture that knowledge for other regions.
- 2) Develop performance measures and benchmarks of success to track the short and long-term impact of this initiative.

The following regions have been selected for the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative:

**Coastal Maine** – 11 counties including Augusta, Bangor, & Brunswick

**Northeast Pennsylvania** – 9 counties including Scranton, Allentown, and Reading

**Upstate New York** – 9 counties including Rochester and Finger Lakes region

**Piedmont Triad North Carolina** – 12 counties including Greensboro & Winston-Salem

**Central Michigan** – 13 counties including Lansing, Flint, and Saginaw

**Western Michigan** – 7 counties including Grand Rapids

**Florida Panhandle** – 16 counties including Tallahassee and Pensacola

**Western Alabama & Eastern Mississippi** – 17 counties in Ala. including Tuscaloosa and Selma & 19 counties in Miss. including Meridian and Starkville

**North Central Indiana** – 14 counties including Lafayette

**Greater Kansas City** – 10 counties in Missouri and 8 counties in Kansas including Topeka

**Denver Metro Region** – 9 counties including Denver, Boulder, and Ft. Collins

**Central & Eastern Montana** – 32 counties covering mostly rural areas

**California Coast** – 13 counties including Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Diego

