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# Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development *Combined 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.*

Global competition, a 21<sup>st</sup> century economic reality, is typically seen as a national challenge, but the front lines of the battlefield are regional, where companies, workers, researchers, entrepreneurs and governments come together to create a 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

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.



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## **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. WIRED is focusing on labor market areas that are comprised of multiple jurisdictions within states 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.

## **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.

## **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.



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## **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.

## **WIRED Regions**

WIRED 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.

The following regions have been selected for the WIRED Initiative:

**Coastal Maine** – 11 counties including Bangor and Brunswick

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

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

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

**Mid-Michigan** – 13 counties including Lansing, Flint, and Saginaw

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

**Florida's Great Northwest** – 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** – 8 counties including Denver, Boulder, and Ft. Collins

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

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



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### **The WIRED Virtual Community**

To further emphasize the importance of regional integration, ETA added a second tier of participation under WIRED, the WIRED Virtual Community of Regions. The WIRED Virtual Community will incorporate a three pronged strategy: 1) supply federal support in brokering resources and information; 2) provide access to the WIRED technical assistance tools and content experts; and 3) establish a mentor/protégé relationship with a selected WIRED region in subsequent years. Thirteen regions demonstrated promising strategies to promote economic growth and were selected for the WIRED Virtual Community. These include:

**Eastern & Central Puerto Rico** – 7 counties including San Lorenzo

**Southwestern Connecticut** – Fairfield County including Bridgeport

**Northern New Jersey** – 8 counties including Newark

**Delaware Valley Tri-State Area** – 7 counties in Penn. including Philadelphia; 5 counties in NJ including Camden and Trenton; and 1 county in Del. including Wilmington

**Appalachian Ohio** – 29 counties including Athens and Marietta

**Southeast Michigan** – 9 counties including Detroit

**Northern Alabama & Southern Tennessee** – 12 counties in Ala. including Huntsville; and 1 county in Tenn. including Fayetteville

**Southwestern Indiana** – 9 counties including Evansville

**Southeast Wisconsin** – 7 counties including Milwaukee and Kenosha

**Arkansas Delta** – 12 counties including Osceola

**Rio Grande Valley, Texas** – 4 counties including Brownsville

**Wasatch Range, Utah** – 8 counties including Salt Lake City and Provo

**Northern California** – 18 rural counties including Chico

