

# The WIRED Learning Exchange

A peer-to-peer network for WIRED regions

Issue No. 1

June 18, 2007

The WIRED Learning Exchange facilitates the dissemination of promising practices and success stories and the lessons learned from them among the WIRED regions. All of the practices are available on the Collaborative Web Space (CWS) <http://wired.workforce3one.org/>. The Council on Competitiveness is responsible for collecting information from the WIRED regions and entering it on the CWS as well as selecting articles for The Learning Exchange. Sam Leiken is the project leader for the Council. He can be reached at (202) 969-3394, [sleiken@compete.org](mailto:sleiken@compete.org). WIRED regions are encouraged to send examples of promising practices and success stories. All practices are reviewed by their source regions before being circulated. Please send any comments or suggestions for The Learning Exchange directly to Sam.

## Catalyzing Collaboration in California: California Innovation Corridor's Collaboration Support Programs

Given its size, the California Innovation Corridor (CIC), the WIRED region managed by the California Space Authority (CSA) is by any measure a significant challenge. It is especially difficult to develop a culture of collaboration across 60 plus partners in 13 counties in a region that encompasses almost half the state.

This is the story not of one practice but of a series of practices designed to



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foster collaboration as a practical, win/win undertaking. Among them are the Spacebound! Newsletter, (a practice adopted by many regions); a webinar on communications and partnerships (see attached PDF); and a Success Stories online knowledge base that includes easily searchable records profiling Projects, Participants (Partners, Supporters, Collaborators, and Affiliates) and Accomplishments (Success Stories).

### **Making Technical Education Relevant and Rewarding: Northwest Florida Secondary Education Grant Program**

This is a story of a WIRED region that took a local innovation, the CHOICE Institute, and award-winning career skills training academy created by the Okaloosa County School District and strategically expanded it around the region. It is about how the WIRED leaders strategically used the career skills training academy to meet one of their transformational goals-building a regional talent pipeline to five growth industries. This is also the story of lessons learned from replicating a local innovation across the region, turning a local innovation into a high value-added product, and the challenges of linking across educational sectors.

### **Connecting and Strengthening Entrepreneurs: Piedmont Triad Regional Capital Connection Mixer**

Under the implementation plan for the Piedmont Triad Partnership WIRED Initiative in North Carolina, one of the four goal areas is Economic Growth and Competitiveness. Within this goal, there is a special focus on supporting entrepreneurship in the region. The lack of interconnection between entrepreneurial firms, funders, and support services has been identified as one of the key challenges in this area. The Regional Capital Connection Mixer was created as a means to link angel investors, VC firms and entrepreneurs from around the region. This is an ongoing event that is held quarterly; the exact format of each event may differ somewhat.

### **Reinventing Small Manufacturers: Mid Michigan Innovation Team Initiatives**

Mid Michigan manufacturers-and their statewide counterparts-are suffering

from turmoil in the American automotive industry. Over 200,000 Michigan manufacturing employees have lost their jobs in recent years because of market disruptions and cost pressures facing the "Big 3" domestic automakers. As a result, the Mid Michigan Innovation Team has made reinventing its industrial base through innovation a major priority. This is the story of two projects that focus on helping small manufacturers to develop new products and identify new markets for existing products.

### Expanding Industry Specific Training: Metro Denver Jump Start Programs

The Denver Metro Region WIRED Initiative determined that its primary goal was to create a pipeline of home grown talent in a number of critical industries. Success in achieving this goal would remove a key barrier to economic growth. Heretofore, Denver has relied on importing new talent, but demographic projections strongly suggest that this source will be insufficient to provide the skilled workforce to support the expansion of four industries identified by the Initiative as critical for its future. The idea behind JumpStart is to broaden existing, successful collaborations among education, training, entrepreneurship, and private sector partners that can be expanded to the entire region.

**Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED)** focuses on the role of talent development in driving regional economic competitiveness, increased job growth and new opportunities for American workers. It supports innovative approaches to education and workforce development that go beyond traditional strategies while preparing workers to compete and succeed both within the United States and globally. Learn more at [Doleta.gov/wired/](http://Doleta.gov/wired/)

**The Council on Competitiveness** is the only group of corporate CEOs, university presidents and labor leaders committed to the future prosperity of all Americans and enhanced U.S. competitiveness in the global economy. Learn more at [Compete.org](http://Compete.org)



## Catalyzing Collaboration: California Innovation Corridor's Collaboration Support Programs

### Practice Areas:

- Acting like a region
- Networks

### Reader's Guide:

*Given its size, the California Innovation Corridor (CIC,) the WIRED initiative managed by the California Space Authority (CSA) is by any measure a significant challenge. It is especially difficult to develop a culture of collaboration across 60 plus partners in 13 counties in a region that encompasses almost half the state..*

*This is the story not of one practice but of a series of practices designed to foster collaboration as a practical, win/win undertaking. Among them are the Spacebound! Newsletter, (a practice adopted by many regions); a webinar on communications and partnerships (see attached PDF); and a [Success Stories online knowledge base](#) that includes easily searchable records profiling Projects, Participants (Partners, Supporters, Collaborators and Affiliates) and Accomplishments (Success Stories).*

The CIC has developed a series of capacity-building, transformational goals which they sum up as *Optimize the Corridor for Innovation*. Their strategy is based on the contradiction between the region's innovation potential – federal laboratories, research universities, corporate R&D, national security RDT&E installations, etc. - and the fact that not a single sub-region within the Corridor region was ranked within the top 25 most entrepreneurial areas of the country. Precisely because these resources are spread across the region, the CIC has recognized the need to build a culture of collaboration that cuts across the achievement of their three transformational goals: Innovation Support, Industrial Rejuvenation, and Talent Development.

The three most notable practices thus far in building the culture of collaboration are:

- The [Success Stories Online Knowledge Base](#)
- The Community of Practice
- The Webinar on communications and partnerships

### Success Stories Online Knowledge Base

The [Success Stories Online Knowledge Base](#) includes easily searchable records profiling Projects, Participants (Partners, Supporters, Collaborators and Affiliates) and Accomplishments (*Success Stories*). Users can search across the 25 Corridor Projects, more than 60 Participant entities and the many evolving Accomplishments using built-in search menus and any keyword. You can also search on projects and participants working in the areas of [Innovation Support](#), [Industrial Rejuvenation](#) and [Talent Development](#).

### **Community of Practice**

This knowledge base will help facilitate development of the Corridor [Community of Practice](#), a network sharing information and communications among WIRED members as well as with the outside community. The peer-based Community of Practice participants share many common project needs and the network allows them to share their experiences in real time. Participants (partners, supporters, collaborators and affiliates) will focus initially on sustainable growth through technology-based education and development.

### **Webinar on communications and partnerships**

Wil Simon, the Manager of Media and Public Relations has put together the attached Power Point presentation (in *PDF* format) which he presents both as a Webinar and as a face-to-face presentation to CIC partners. While focused on the importance of collective communications and outreach, the underlying message in this Webinar is the power of collaboration to create collective advantages. It emphasizes that collaboration across the region creates creative synergy and provides examples of direct services like a speakers' bureau and a Virtual Media Kit. It is a useful guide to thinking about ways to institutionalize collaboration across the region and to begin to embed in the partners the idea that collaboration pays off.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Collaboration is an unnatural act that requires a conscious, continuous, and focused effort.
- Effective collaboration is not based on the paradigm of equality but of opportunity. Urban and rural parts of regions can contribute to a collective synergy that makes the entire region more successful
- Collecting success stories and other practices can create an internal community of practice that allows the experiences of one partner to benefit others.

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## **Making Technical Education Relevant and Rewarding: Northwest Florida Secondary Education Grant Program**

### **Practice Areas:**

- Education Challenges
- Workforce Development
- Acting like a region
- Networks
- Talent

### **Reader's Guide:**

*This is a story of a WIRED region that took a local innovation, the CHOICE Institute, an award-winning career skills training academy created by the Okaloosa County School District and strategically expanded it around the region. It is about how the WIRED leaders strategically used the career skills training academy to meet one of their transformational goals – building a regional talent pipeline to five growth industries. This is also the story of lessons learned from replicating a local innovation across the region, turning a local innovation into a high value-added product, and the challenges of linking across educational sectors.*

The WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative has embarked upon a strategy to target knowledge based industries that create high skill, high wage jobs and that provide the region with a competitive advantage on the national and international levels. The targeted industries are:

- aerospace and defense,
- life sciences,
- information technology/electronics engineering
- alternative energy
- construction trades

Regional leaders believe the key to success is to build a regional talent pipeline that would encourage firms in these industries to expand in North West Florida. One major area of focus is the front end of the pipeline – technical education in secondary schools.

The WIRED NWF Initiative launched the **WIRED Northwest Florida Secondary Education Career Academy Creation Grant Program** to provide assistance to projects that promote the development of career skills training or intense, accelerated math and science training at the secondary education level. The grants are issued on

a competitive basis, demanding models that give students a diploma, marketable skills for high-wage, high-growth industries, and national industry certifications. Each WIRED-funded model allows for statewide articulation agreements with postsecondary programs permitting multiple career entry points based on the education achieved.

CHOICE is an innovative program, developed in Okaloosa County, which allows students to concurrently earn high school credit, college credit and professional industry certification, at no cost to the student. The goal of the program is to ensure that students acquire the skills they need to be competitive in the workplace now and in the future. As more and more jobs require advanced technical skills, employers are willing to pay higher wages to those with industry certification. Working closely with the public workforce system and local employers, the CHOICE Institutes provide the opportunity for students to earn real-world certification. This leads to more and better job opportunities, whether or not the student continues on to complete college.

Thus far, the WIRED Northwest Florida Secondary Education Career Academy Creation Grant Program has made a total of fourteen grants, nine to replicate the CHOICE model. All grantees will participate in regional network designed to promote shared learning and quality assurance of the career academies. All CHOICE replication projects will benefit from the coaching of the program originators as part of the initiative.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Look first to your region for innovations that can be replicated. It is easier to do when the innovations are local and therefore more accessible and face-to-face contact makes the innovations more replicable.
- The CHOICE Institute makes key linkages with secondary and post secondary education providers, industry, WIBs, and school guidance staff.
- The provision of BOTH an industry certification AND college credit is a key element of career advancement in knowledge-based industries.
- Creating a regional model for career academies and a regional network of providers is a big advantage for quality insurance and continuous improvement.

Link to Okaloosa County School District's CHOICE Institute:

<http://www.okaloosaschools.com/OkaloosaSchools/Default.aspx?tabid=133>

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## Connecting and Strengthening Entrepreneurs Piedmont Triad Regional Capital Connection Mixer

### **Practice Areas:**

- Entrepreneurship development
- Early stage capital gaps
- Building a collaborative culture

### **Readers Guide:**

*Under the implementation plan for the Piedmont Triad Partnership WIRED Initiative in North Carolina, one of the four goal areas is Economic Growth and Competitiveness. Within this goal, there is a special focus on supporting entrepreneurship in the region. The lack of interconnection between entrepreneurial firms, funders, and support services has been identified as one of the key challenges in this area. The Regional Capital Connection Mixer was created as a means to link angel investors, VC firms and entrepreneurs from around the region. This is an ongoing event that is held quarterly; the exact format of each event may differ somewhat.*

The Piedmont Triad Entrepreneurial Network (PTEN) has co-located with the lead agent for the region, the Piedmont Triad Partnership (PTP), and is partnering with PTP in the implementation of the entrepreneurial strategy. PTEN was formed in 2004 to offer programs and resources to high-growth, high-impact ventures in four main specialized areas: Education; Mentoring; Networking; and Capital Formation. The organization has combined the best programs and resources of two former organizations, the Triad Entrepreneurial Initiative (TEI) and Piedmont Entrepreneurs Network (PEN), both of which served Triad entrepreneurs in different stages of their development.

The purpose of the quarterly Regional Capital Connection Mixers is to create connectivity between all members of the value chain: entrepreneurial networks, angel capital networks and venture capital firms and to allow regions without venture capital firm offices to engage VCs on a quarterly basis in an informal, collegial setting.

For the most recent event, the Piedmont Triad Partnership donated the meeting space and the Piedmont Triad Entrepreneurial Network (PTEN) invited the Piedmont Angel Network (PAN) to hold a member meeting at the centrally-located PTP

offices. PAN agreed to screen two companies to its members (screening is the stage before due diligence).

The PAN fund executive also invited representatives from two early-stage venture capital firms, located within a 3-hour drive radius, to attend the screening: Southern Capitol Ventures (Raleigh, NC) and Jefferson Corner Partners (Charlottesville, VA). PTEN invited the region's 10 most promising ventures to attend the screening, including founder-CEO pairs from each venture when applicable. The entrepreneurs were selected from previous and current winners of PTEN's business plan competition, as well as top companies referred by local business incubators or service providers. At the conclusion of the two-company screening, PAN members adjourned to the break-out room to make their selection decision. The two presenting companies as well as the VC's were invited to stay with the entrepreneurs in the conference room and network with each other. When the angel members returned to the main conference room, the two VC firms gave short briefings about their respective firms, followed by Q&A. A reception followed.

At the conclusion of the agenda, PAN leadership and fund executives, the two VC firm representatives and the PTEN executive (representing interests of PTP/WIRED) adjourned to a restaurant for a small dinner where the angel fund leaders and VC firm representatives were able to build business relationships in a social setting without entrepreneurs present.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- The mixer allows venture capitalists to get to know region, even if they don't have a physical office there.
- Angel network builds "value chain" relationship with VCs who can now refer not-fully-formed deals to the angel network.
- Angel network members meet promising regional entrepreneurs in a social setting, informally since entrepreneurs are not there to make a formal pitch to the angels.
- Entrepreneurial network and PTP/WIRED are positioned as convening and supporting all the elements of successful venture development.

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## **Reinventing Small Manufacturers**

### **Mid Michigan Innovation Team Initiatives**

#### **Practice Areas:**

- New Market Identification/ Market Assessment
- Building a collaborative culture
- Networks

#### **Reader's Guide:**

*Mid Michigan manufacturers—and their statewide counterparts—are suffering from turmoil in the American automotive industry. Over 200,000 Michigan manufacturing employees have lost their jobs in recent years because of market disruptions and cost pressures facing the “Big 3” domestic automakers. As a result, the Mid Michigan Innovation Team has made reinventing its industrial base through innovation a major priority. This is the story of two projects that focus on helping small manufacturers to develop new products and identify new markets for existing products.*

Mid Michigan auto-suppliers are scrambling to save their businesses. Two core survival strategies include diversifying their customer and product base and regional partnering in a business that suffers from an ultra-competitive culture.

The Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center (MMTC)—a partner in the WIRED-funded Mid-Michigan Innovation Team effort, is offering a customer-diversification training program, meant to help manufacturers find new markets for their products and services.

MMTC developed a “Discovery Session” to deliver customer diversification content and conducted a direct mail campaign to 681 manufacturing facilities in the 13-county MMIT region to offer the free Discovery Sessions. MMTC also conducted a phone campaign to reach the 681 manufacturers with 20 or more employees in the MMIT region, including all known direct suppliers to Delphi Automotive, which is in bankruptcy. They followed up with site visits to 14 interested firms, eight of which signed up for the first pilot of the training program. The first round of training took place at Mott Community College on January 9, 2007. The eight companies that signed up for the training agreed to participate in the consulting program. Diversification assessment surveys are complete and will provide a baseline for evaluation.

Within the mitten that is the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, there is a special area known as “the Thumb”, which includes Lapeer County, Sanilac, Huron, and Tuscola Counties. These four counties comprise a distinct sub-region within the MMIT.

The industrial diversification concept was launched there by Thumb Area Michigan Works in July of 2006 —thanks to a small WIRED grant made possible through the Mid Michigan Innovation Team. The Thumb-area program is focused on linking manufacturing firms with an executive coach who helps managers assess opportunities for supplier and customer diversification. The program has grown rapidly. While envisioned for a modest group of twenty manufacturers—five for each of the four Thumb-area counties—the initiative now engages over sixty firms.

Driving the initiative at every phase has been relationships—whether building rapport with manufacturers through a successful training venture, finding the right coach through an existing contact, relying on the relationships of that coach to help create new opportunities in overseas markets, or spreading word of the program through relationships that manufacturers have with each other.

Firms that traditionally had relied on the automotive sector now are looking to sell their wares in other industries and other countries, thanks to connections the coaches have helped them make through their overseas networks. For the first time, these manufacturers are learning what each other has to offer. Instead of looking for a supplier overseas, they’re finding that another business has what they need, and they’re basically right next door. As these small manufacturers develop new markets, the WIRED project is supporting the development of a Career Readiness Certification to ensure they have the talent to meet their needs.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Michigan manufacturers are anxious about their businesses, but they are also cautious in how they proceed with new partners in pursuing desired change. Successful outreach efforts entail a very personal approach, but once a personal connection is made, firms are eager to embrace new ideas that can help them compete.
- A key feature of the Thumb initiative has been the coach (vs. a consultant), who helps clients identify opportunities for collaboration with partners both inside and outside the community. Sometimes the equivalent of tough love comes into play. You have to be direct with firms, but you can’t just tell them what they’re doing wrong. You have to give them credit where it’s due but also point to opportunities for growth, mixed with a healthy dose of reality.

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## Expanding Industry Specific Training: Metro Denver Jump Start Program

### Practice Areas:

- Education Challenges
- K-12 Education
- Workforce Development

### Reader's Guide:

*The Denver Metro Region WIRED Initiative determined that its primary goal was to create a pipeline of home grown talent in a number of critical industries. Success in achieving this goal would remove a key barrier to economic growth. Heretofore, Denver has relied on importing new talent, but demographic projections strongly suggest that this source will be insufficient to provide the skilled workforce to support the expansion of four industries identified by the Initiative as critical for its future. The idea behind JumpStart is to broaden existing, successful collaborations among education, training, entrepreneurship, and private sector partners that can be expanded to the entire region.*

Without intervention, Metro Denver's current K-12, Higher Education and workforce systems will not deliver the skilled workforce needed by companies in its fastest-growing industry sectors. The WIRED Initiative has targeted four industry clusters – aerospace, bioscience, information technology and energy – as having the greatest growth opportunities, coupled with the largest potential for labor shortages. A common element to occupations in these industries is that they all require higher-level math, and all but one require higher-level science. Therefore, in addition to industry-specific training, the Metro Denver WIRED Initiative is emphasizing the development of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) skills at all educational levels.

To promote institutional changes in the K-12 system and to develop a pipeline for knowledge-based industries, the Metro Denver Wired Initiative is using an RFP process to incentivize educational providers based on RSTI (Regional, Sustainable, Transformational, Industry-Targeted, and Innovative) principles. Year one of the grant making process is called the JumpStart and is considered a sub-grant program, part of a three year strategy to create a seamless system from K-12 to post secondary education and to engage business in the transformation process.

Examples of the awards include:

- **Aerospace**  
The Community College of Denver (serving Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson Counties) leverages an existing NASA-funded degree program in Aerospace Systems Engineering Technology that targets underserved

populations. JumpStart funds will strengthen the pipeline to the program through summer bridge programs, curriculum development, and real-life learning applications.

- **Aerospace & Bioscience**

The University of Denver (serving Boulder, Denver, and Douglas Counties) is using JumpStart funds to increase student participation in its Making of an Engineer summer camp program and extending the curriculum to regional high schools. The program uses an Engineering of Extreme Sports theme to develop skills for a post-secondary education in aerospace engineering and bioengineering.

- **Information Technology**

JumpStart funding to the Denver School of Science and Technology (serving partial Adams, partial Arapahoe, Boulder, and Denver Counties) will expand an internship program which connects 11th grade students with real-world science and technology work experience in high-wage/high-skill businesses, and connects industry partners with potential highly educated employees.

- **Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM)**

The Colorado Minority Engineering Association's JumpStart award will accelerate replication of its successful pre-collegiate and college-prep STEM competencies and career pathway mentoring programs, throughout the nine-county WIRED region.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- The Denver Metro Region WIRED Initiative organized industry panels from which the evaluators, mostly of CEOs and high level managers, were drawn. They provided an outcome oriented, business focused approach to evaluation.
- The pre-proposal conference, which attracted sixty people, served as a networking opportunity where partnerships were developed. In the future, the Initiative is thinking of sponsoring networking sessions for applicants prior to announcing the RFP to encourage more regional collaborations.
- The region has successfully achieved "short-term wins" by accelerating the regional expansion of existing programs, rather than focusing only on new program development.

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