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## FGNW's WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative Sample RFP

The WIRED initiatives issue RFP's for a variety of services. Particularly for the benefit of Generations II & III, we have included an edited sample of one from Florida's Great Northwest (FGNW) WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative. We encourage other regions to send us examples that they think can be useful models.

**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 stratiefies while preparing workers to compete and succeed both within the United States and globally. Learn more at [Doleta.gov/wired/](http://Doleta.gov/wired/)

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## **Just Do It! Finger Lakes WIRED Provides Venture Capital to Entrepreneurs Network**

### **Practice Areas:**

- Economic Development
- Early stage capital gaps
- Entrepreneurship development

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

*As with many WIRED regions, the Finger Lakes region saw a gap between the entrepreneurial opportunities within the region and the absence of institutional means to exploit them. In particular, Rochester and the surrounding area was rich in intellectual property as measured by the number of patents, a large number of PhD's with research backgrounds, and declining major employers. The Entrepreneurs Network (TEN) is a regional program which offers a practical, business-oriented, and hands-on educational series of events in which entrepreneurs will be exposed to world-renowned speakers with expertise in start-up and emerging companies. Itself the product of two entrepreneurs, the program has produced extraordinary results in a brief period of time.*

### **Description:**

Sometimes it takes one to know one. That certainly is the case with The Entrepreneurs Network (TEN) in the Finger Lakes WIRED region. It was developed and promoted by a local entrepreneur and business consultant, Debora K. LaBudde, who partnered with a Boston venture capital attorney. Their goal was to build an effective network of senior management level entrepreneurs based on high tech focused, product-based, early stage (pre-institutional funding) companies.

TEN combines best practices from different approaches to encouraging entrepreneurship. It puts a premium on peer-based learning through intensive 2.5 day boot camps, workshops, panels and other events designed to optimize exposure to and interaction with leading local and national entrepreneurial experts. At this time, TEN is the only entrepreneurial training program which offers this type of intensive training.

TEN serves a regional audience spanning the nine county Finger Lakes Region as well as Buffalo, Syracuse and Ithaca. The intent of the program is to provide an environment of learning and networking for founders and CEO's of established seed and early-stage companies. Approximately 65 company executives have participated to date and have been introduced to both new ideas and new avenues to attract capital and grow their business. Thus far, one member company received \$2.7M in VC financing and expects to hire an additional 30 employees. Another secured a \$50M Department of Justice contract, and another received \$200k in angel funding.

The Finger Lakes WIRED initiative reached an agreement with Monroe County whereby each party supplied half of the start up and operating costs for the first two years. After that, the WIRED funding ends, to be replaced by membership fees, contributions from successful "graduates", finder's fees, and other support.

### **Lessons Learned:**

- Practice what they preach – they were entrepreneurial themselves. Like Nike, their mantra is “just do it!” Instead of waiting to build a consensus their method was to build value and demonstrate the effectiveness of their product.
- Focus on the entrepreneur – they resisted the temptation to be all things to all people. They chose NOT to be an incubator despite tempting financial inducements, instead they concentrated on teaching business models, finance and networking.
- Look beyond region – they used their contacts and networked others to bring in nationally known figures to meet with their entrepreneurs periodically. This enhanced their credibility and contributed to their quality.
- It's the network – they found, met with, and collaborated with other small networking organizations to recruit their companies.

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## Newly Formed OneKC Regional Workforce Council targets *regional* workforce needs in three strategic industries

### **Practice Areas:**

- Regional training linkages
- Linking WIBs and *regional* workforce needs
- Acting like a region

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

*One of the key lessons of the WIRED initiative thus far is the importance of linking the WIRED regional initiatives to local WIBs. What sounds like a straightforward, practical task is, in reality, fraught with complexity. Jurisdictional boundaries, eligibility guidelines, and demographic differences are among the issues that need to be discussed. The seven LWIBs and the OneKC WIRED Region have created the OneKC Regional Workforce Council to serve as a regional advisory body. While it has no statutory or regulatory authority, it serves to position the public workforce system as a relevant talent development pipeline for business and economic development across political jurisdictions in the 18-county bi-state region.*

### **Description:**

Linking the public workforce system (the WIRED initiative and the LWIBs) together into a regional collaboration offers practical benefits. A regional system creates more efficiencies, so that, for example, enrollees and graduates of WIA-supported programs can easily transition into WIRED supported initiatives. Likewise client companies in various WIB areas can be linked to regional sectoral strategies. It becomes a platform to recognize common credentials as in the Career Readiness Certificate and to collect and share information, such as Regional Asset Mapping. These and other projects are underway at the OneKC Regional Workforce Council, a regional advisory body created by the seven LWIBs and the OneKC WIRED Region.

While the OneKC Regional Workforce Council has no statutory or regulatory authority over the seven LWIBs in the OneKC WIRED Region, it serves as a regional advisory body to position the public workforce system as a relevant talent development pipeline for business and economic development across political jurisdictions in the 18-county bi-state region. The Council will be responsible for

planning and developing all OneKC WIRED public workforce solutions. Its membership includes: seven representatives from targeted business and industry

sectors (includes Chair of OneKC Regional Workforce Council); the seven LWIB Chairs; two State-level Workforce Representatives (one each from MO & KS); the seven LWIB Directors (ex-officio) and representatives from community colleges and tech prep.

The Council is concentrating on key common areas including Regional Workforce Asset Mapping (including current activities – apart from WIRED – in the three targeted industry sectors); Career Readiness Certificate Process Mapping (for the creation and implementation of a single, bi-state certificate with the same standards and recognition); and Process Mapping for Approved Training Providers (to help create common, bi-state standards for approved training providers).

The public workforce solutions rest on four “pillars” that offer a new, innovative framework for the region. These are:

- **Regional Training Accounts (RTAs)** to provide training in the three targeted industries.
- **Common Assessment Platform (WorkKeys)** focusing on the areas of Reading for Information, Applied Math, and Locating Information.
- **Lifelong Learning Accounts** that promote worker, government, and employer involvement in a “shared investment” model.
- **Work-based Learning Connected to Classroom Instruction** integrated into educational/training programming in both states.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Focus on the practical advantages of regional collaboration
- Be very specific and detailed about the WIA/WIRED funding categories, eligibility criteria, etc. OneKC has created detailed FAQs for the LWIBs (see CWS)
- Include private sector representatives (WIB, WIRED chairs) in deliberations and in oversight.

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## North Central Indiana WIRED Creates “mini SBIR” for Innovation Investments

### Practice Areas:

- **Networks**  
Networking knowledge assets  
Multi-partner, regional leadership networks
- **Collaboration**  
Cross-boundary partnerships  
Building a collaborative culture

### Reader’s Guide:

*It’s not easy spending \$15 million! The Generation I WIRED regions have developed a variety of strategies for grant making and supporting initiatives that can be disseminated in their regions. The North Central Indiana WIRED region has developed a very flexible, staged grant making approach called the WIRED Opportunity Fund, that corresponds to the phases of innovation needed to take a project from conception to realization.*

### **Description:**

The North Central Indiana WIRED region has created the WIRED Opportunity Fund to experiment with new ways to deliver education and training and support business development by educational and non-profit organizations. It will focus on initiatives that accelerate skills training and foster economic growth by creating new partnerships among organizations involved in economic development and workforce development. The guidelines for these investments are based on a long-term time horizon using the WIRED region as a test bed for promising initiatives that can be "scaled" across Indiana.

Like the federal SBIR program’s investment goals, the purpose is to provide early stage “seed” funding, which is always the hardest to come by. The Opportunity Fund will make three types of investments.

- ***Fast Track Investments***

The purpose of these exploratory investments of up to \$35,000 is to get new ideas into action quickly to see “what works”.

- ***Phase 1 Investments***

The purpose of a Phase 1 investment is to develop practical plans for expanding promising Fast Track Investments throughout the region. Phase 1 investments are to design, test and develop plans for the regional expansion of initiatives that fit into the WIRED objectives and investments are limited to \$100,000.

- ***Phase 2 Investments***

The purpose of Phase 2 investments is to implement promising initiatives across county lines. Phase 2 investments are committed based on the submission of a regional expansion plan that demonstrates how the initiative can be sustained and scaled both in the 14 county region and across Indiana. Phase 2 investments are generally designed to expand initiatives across two or more counties in the WIRED region. Limits and other conditions on Phase 2 investments are set on a case-by-case basis. Co-investors are, however, required at this stage.

Investment Areas include:

- ***Talent networks:*** New initiatives to deliver 21st Century Skills from primary school to older adults, particularly STEM skills in high school, and expanded training opportunities for older adults seeking to restart their careers.
- ***Entrepreneurship networks:*** Initiatives to teach and support entrepreneurs from primary school to older adults including creating a network of entrepreneurship support at locations throughout the region.
- ***Business networks:*** Networks of businesses committed to high performance production in North Central Indiana including advanced manufacturing, advanced materials and agribusiness.
- ***Civic leadership networks:*** New civic leadership networks to encourage the collaboration and sharing that has become critical to successful innovation.

Preferred Investments Criteria include:

- Projects that are likely to be replicated easily.
- Investments with co-investors.
- Investments that link economic development and workforce development activities across county and organizational boundaries.
- Initiatives that link the interests of the business community with primary secondary schools and colleges and universities.
- Investments that provide reasons for young people to stay in Indiana.

**Lessons Learned:**

The Indiana WIRED team took time on the front end to work out the difficulties of how the investment process would work. The lesson: You have to invest the front end time and thought to go faster over the long haul.

Start with sustainability in mind – the leverage and ROI principles that were applied to the Fund were based on the goal of becoming a market-based fund able to attract investors into companies. Lesson learned: the result is that sustainability is built into the structure of the program.

This approach to management recognizes that the emergence of promising transformations requires the continuous work of an "economic gardener". The job of management is to seed, feed and weed. Lesson learned: Innovation is about seeding and feeding new ideas and allowing those initiatives unable to attract co-investment to die.

To find promising new ideas, we need to test them. We learn by doing. We cannot learn in the abstract

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## West Michigan Embraces National Career Readiness Certificate, Employers Buy In

### Practice Areas:

- **Education Challenges**
  - Workforce credentials
  - Work readiness credentials
- **Workforce Development**
  - Linking WIBs and *regional* workforce needs
  - Linking labor market needs to training opportunities

### Reader's Guide:

*The bane of existence of work force developers is the insistence by employers that they need qualified workers without knowing what those qualifications are. The bane of hiring managers is that there is no reliable credential, as once was the high school degree, to measure the capabilities of applicants and employees. The Career Readiness Certificate is filling that gap in states and regions around the country. The WIRED West Michigan story tells how they are moving the CRC to a region wide and then statewide certification that links employers, K-12, and workforce agencies.*

### Description:

WIRED West Michigan, like many regions, wants to upgrade the quality of its workforce to improve its regional competitiveness. The state of Michigan is seeking new ways to address economic transition as traditional jobs in auto-related manufacturing disappear and new jobs in a “knowledge economy” emerge. At the same time, employers are distrustful of the traditional high school diploma as an indicator of employee qualifications especially for entry level jobs since so many new employees lack the skills needed to succeed in the workplace. As a result, they are less willing to invest in developing their new employees. To fill this credentialing gap, WIRED West Michigan has adopted the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). The CRC is based on ACT WorkKeys, a job skills assessment system used by employers to rate the skills required for jobs they offer.<sup>1</sup> In recent years it has been deployed by ten states and fourteen others are following suit. In

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.act.org/workkeys/>

addition, since the universal Michigan Merit Examination (MME) administers the ACT Reading for Information and Applied Mathematics as part of its statewide exam, WIRED West Michigan had a jump start because these are two of the three

exams that are used for the CRC. Their focus has been on the third test, Locating Information. A gold level certification on the CRC qualifies for 90% of the jobs in the occupational database that holders of these certificates are eligible for.

WIRED West Michigan had a multi-faceted strategy starting with a focus on building employer demand. Their intention was to design and build a **Pull not Push Approach**, or in WIRED parlance, a demand driven system with the emphasis on system. They envision and, indeed, have achieved collaboration with the public workforce system (Michigan Works!), high schools, community colleges, economic development agencies and chambers of commerce to disseminate and adopt the CRC. Their vision of the system is state-wide. The other MI WIRED regions have become engaged in adopting the CRC and helping to promote it as a universal state policy.

WIRED West Michigan has trained and employed a sales force to secure additional employer commitments. As of July 31, 2007 over 150 W. Michigan employers have agreed to participate. Over 2200 tests have been administered. Seven hundred fifty-seven certificates have been awarded (doubling their initial goal). WIRED West Michigan is also working on a system for people who take the NCRC tests to improve their WorkKeys levels through remedial work on Key Train software which teaches foundational workplace skills – ensuring that those without the requisite skills can get them.

In addition to its ongoing activities, the W. Michigan WIRED CRC strategy is now focusing on developing a sustainable business model, including potential new funding sources after WIRED, that imbeds the CRC in the state as a self-supporting system.

### **Lessons Learned**

- It is important to focus on the employer demand side from the outset and get a sales force working to meet with employers at their places of business.
- CEO engagement in the process is critical and taking the test themselves is a convincing technique.
- The NCRC is ultimately sustainable as a statewide credential. Therefore, working with various state agencies to help them understand the value of the widespread use of the NCRC within Michigan is critical to success.

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## **FGNW's WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative Sample RFP**

### **Practice Areas:**

Organizational Issues

MOUs with partners, grantees, participating organizations  
(companies, providers, etc)

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

*The WIRED initiatives issue RFP's for a variety of services. Particularly for the benefit of Generations II & III, we have included an edited sample of one from Florida's Great Northwest (FGNW) WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative. We encourage other regions to send us examples that they think can be useful models.*

### **Description:**

#### **Introduction:**

Florida's Great Northwest (FGNW) was awarded a US Department of Labor Workforce Innovation for Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant on February 1, 2006, creating the WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative. The purpose of FGNW's WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative is to develop training initiatives designed to create a skilled workforce in the target industries of Aerospace & Defense, Life Sciences (Medical Device Manufacturing, Medical Technologies, Biotechnology, and Health Services), Information Technology/Software Development and Electronics Engineering, Alternative Energy and Construction Services. Data collection relative to the workforce skills needed by existing employers within these targeted industries is necessary to properly determine what additional training programs are needed for success in our mission.

#### **Background:**

Florida's Great Northwest, Inc. is a sixteen county, regional economic development organization representing Northwest Florida from Tallahassee to Pensacola. It is a private, not-for-profit corporation with membership consisting of the county economic development organizations, post-secondary education institutions, the area's workforce development boards, and private business with the private sector representing the majority of the organization's membership and budget source.

Data Collection Process:

FGNW, in conjunction with its WIRED Northwest Florida Initiative, will be utilizing the e-Synchronist system to identify the workforce needs of our targeted industry employers in the region. The e-Synchronist system will be used to locate the gaps that exist between the talent competencies employers need in their workforce and the educational and training resources that are currently locally available to cultivate those skills.

For the contracts resulting from this RFP, the contractors will interview a mutually agreed upon list of businesses representing a 30% sample of the counties' businesses in the target industries of aerospace & defense, life sciences and information technology and a 20% sample of the businesses in construction services. All interviews will be conducted using the e-Synchronist interview format. The data from each interview will be entered into the e-Synchronist database by the contractors.

FGNW has identified the existing employers in each of the targeted industries and requires an interview sample of 30% of those employers in each target industry, with the exception of a 20% sample in construction services.

Number of Employers by County by Targeted Industry

<b>County</b>	<b>Aerospace &amp; Defense Companies</b>	<b>IT Companies</b>	<b>Life Sciences Companies</b>	<b>Construction Services Companies*</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Companies to be Interviewed**</b>
Bay	51	88	61	202	402	100
Calhoun	0	4	1	10	15	4
Escambia	77	106	90	298	571	142
Franklin	3	1	4	10	18	4
Gadsden	3	9	6	0	18	5
Gulf	0	9	9	16	34	8
Holmes	2	0	1	13	16	4
Jackson	6	11	9	26	52	13

Jefferson	0	1	2	16	19	4
Leon	44	184	107	249	584	151
Liberty	0	2	1	9	12	3
Okaloosa	77	164	43	192	476	123
Santa Rosa	18	46	19	81	164	41
Wakulla	2	11	4	13	30	8
Walton	6	0	9	36	51	12
Washington	5	4	8	20	37	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>1,191</b>	<b>2,499</b>	<b>631</b>

Ideally, economic development organizations and workforce boards that cross county lines will cooperate to submit one proposal: for example, a single proposal from Workforce Escarosa, the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce, and Team Santa Rosa or a single proposal from Opportunity Florida, the local economic development organizations in its eight counties, and the workforce boards for workforce regions 3, 4 & 5. Each proposal must identify the lead organization. FGNW’s contract will be with that lead organization.

Desired Deliverables – Selected Partner:

- Plan for coordinated activity between the regional workforce development board and the local economic development organization for data collection
- Fully completed interviews, including interview data collected input into the e-Synchronist database program, representing 30% of existing employers in each of the targeted industries with the exception of a 20% sample in construction services.

FGNW Deliverables to the Selected Partner:

To supplement the activity provided by the contractors as the successful bids to this RFP, Florida’s Great Northwest will provide:

- Existing employer listing, including available contact information, for each of the targeted industries,
- One-time face-to-face training to individual(s) that will be conducting the e-Synchronist interviews and inputting interview data generated from those interviews into the e-Synchronist database system; expense for additional

necessary training provided by FGNW will not be billable by selected contract partner,

- On-going support to interviewers and their lead organizations,
- County results to the local economic development organization, service area results to the regional workforce board and regional results to both, and
- Payment on a monthly or quarterly basis, at the selected partner's preference, for
  - each interview when fully completed, including interview data collected input into the e-Synchronist database program
  - administrative overhead and training expense reimbursement at successful completion of a 30% sample for all industries' interviews with the exception of construction services with a 20% sample.

#### Proposal Evaluation:

FGNW is seeking proposals that:

- Demonstrate a cooperation between the local economic development organizations and the corresponding regional workforce board,
- Produce a plan sufficient to ensure completion of the data collection within the specified time frame, and
- Incorporate staffing of a caliber sufficient to meet with business leaders on a one-on-one basis, conduct the interviews in a professional manner, have adequate business background to identify appropriate business and workforce issues, and possess the skills to accurately input the data from each interview into the e-Synchronist database.

#### Content of the Proposal:

Please submit your proposal including:

- Lead contact person/organization for this project work
- County/region to be serviced
- Anticipated process to complete project
- Anticipated staffing plan to complete project; if hiring for this project, the open position must be posted within the Employ Florida system
- Letter of support from the economic development organization(s) or regional workforce board, whichever is not the lead organization/contract recipient

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Determining a head contact to FGNW streamlines communication
- Require communication on the project between economic development organizations and workforce development boards

- Promoting grassroots cooperation eliminates FGNW's having to choose which local organization (ED or WIB) to partner with.

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