



**Compete.**  
Council on  
Competitiveness

# The WIRED Learning Exchange

A peer-to-peer network for WIRED regions

Issue No. 3

January 23, 2008

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. Blythe Chorn is the project leader for the Council. She can be reached at (202) 969-3388, [bchorn@compete.org](mailto:bchorn@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 Blythe.

## California Innovation Corridor Retrains High-Skilled Engineers

Like much of the country, the California Innovation Corridor is facing a workforce shortage in highly skilled, technical positions as the baby boomers retire. Following the dot com bubble burst, there are a number of dislocated software engineers with strong technical backgrounds that are relatively well-prepared to transition to the aerospace and defense industry. This is a story about how California Innovation Corridor WIRED collaborated with a local university and workforce board to retrain these engineers to meet regional industry demand.



### In This Issue

**Retrain and Retain  
High Skilled  
Workers**

**Realizing Small  
Business Growth  
Potential**

**WIB Collaboration**

**Private Sector Input  
and LiLAs**

**Aligning Lifelong  
Learning with  
Regional Needs**

### Join Our List

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

## **Finger Lakes WIRED Entrepreneurship and Strategic Growth Immersion Sequence trains regional innovators for growth**

Led by the E. Philip Saunders College of Business at Rochester Institute of Technology, the Finger Lakes WIRED Strategic Growth through Innovation Program prepares regional business leaders to grow their high potential firms. Executive education specialists and RIT business professors bring their expertise together in this training program, in which senior management officials from regional firms develop their own strategic growth plans.

## **Wall Street West Promotes Regional WIB Collaboration**

Wall Street West has accomplished a significant achievement by enhancing collaboration among the five Workforce Investment Boards in the region. By building on prior relationships and identifying a champion to create change within, WSW united the WIBs around the objectives of WIRED and is making substantial progress on its workforce development goals.

## **Engaging Private Sector Leaders in the Creation of Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs)**

One of One KC WIRED's primary goals is to support workers in targeted industries for whom job expectations or individual circumstances have changed. This is the story of how One KC created an Advisory Board of committed private sector leaders to design and implement the new Lifelong Learning Account (LiLA) program.

## **Aligning New Programs with Regional Needs: North Central Indiana Surveys Region for New Lifelong Learning System**

North Central Indiana WIRED is committed to leveraging its mature, experienced workforce as it transitions to high-performance production in manufacturing. The Lifelong Learning System is one initiative aimed at retaining older workers by increasing access to continuing education opportunities. In order to create a system that would be most beneficial to workers and address employers' needs, NCI WIRED undertook three community-wide surveys to understand perceptions, barriers, and requisites for the new system.

**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)

**Forward email**

✉ **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to sleiken@compete.org, by

[communications@compete.org](mailto:communications@compete.org)

[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) |

[Privacy Policy](#).

Council on Competitiveness | 1500 K Street, NW | Suite 850 | Washington | DC | 20005

Email Marketing by



## **California Innovation Corridor Retrains High-Skilled Engineers**

### **Practice Areas:**

- Worker retraining
- Talent recruitment, retention, development and advancement
- Local WIBs targeting regional workforce needs

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

*Like much of the country, the California Innovation Corridor is facing a workforce shortage in highly skilled, technical positions as the baby boomers retire. Following the dot com bubble burst, there are a number of dislocated software engineers with strong technical backgrounds that are relatively well-prepared to transition to the aerospace and defense industry. This is a story about how California Innovation Corridor WIRED collaborated with a local university and workforce board to retrain these engineers to meet regional industry demand.*

### **Description:**

California Innovation Corridor WIRED has created an industry-driven pilot training program to retrain dislocated software engineers for space-related information technology positions. Like many high-tech firms, aerospace and defense companies in the region have been aggressively recruiting new college graduates, but there's still a high demand for seasoned workers—particularly those from the high-tech sector—who bring skills and experience from a variety of projects and from a team environment. Many dislocated software engineers already have in place superior computer skills, and through retraining prove invaluable to any company workforce.

In 2003, the California Space Authority, a key partner of the WIRED team, conducted a study in cooperation with the NOVA Workforce Board to assess the requirements for an individual to transition from the software engineering industry to the aerospace and defense sector. California Innovation Corridor WIRED saw an opportunity to address needs of dislocated engineers and of a key industry by creating a 'conversion course' to prepare these engineers to change sectors.

The WIRED team collaborated with NOVA and the University of California Santa Cruz Extension to create a certificate program that would expose students to the culture and 'language' of the aerospace and defense industries as well as expand their technical skills. To advise the development of the curriculum, representatives

from businesses in the sector met to discuss their needs and key skill requirements. This advisory panel has also provided guest speakers for the class to provide real-world industry insights and some tips for obtaining employment.

Fifteen students comprised the inaugural class for the Certificate in Software Development for Aerospace/Defense Applications. Participants were recruited by NOVA, which typically serves the higher skilled workers of Silicon Valley, as well as by UCSC Extension. The program targets engineers rather than technicians, and students must have the ability to obtain a security clearance. Students attend seven modules in a very condensed timeframe; courses are scheduled in the evenings and weekends to allow students who may have taken 'survival' jobs to attend.

To date, nine of the students from the first class have attained employment. The next class is scheduled to begin in late January 2008. Based on feedback from the first class and their instructors, California Innovation Corridor WIRED has refined the prerequisites, and a 'C' programming assessment tool has been developed and implemented as part of the participant selection process. The course was also lengthened from 131 hours to 148 hours. The WIRED team is trying to leverage their advisory panel to connect directly with company representatives who are responsible for hiring to ensure that qualifications are met and that opportunities are available.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- In transitioning to new industries, the culture and 'language' of an industry can be just as important as the technical skills. Re-training programs should include opportunities to interact and network with representatives from the new industry in addition to 'academic' learning.
- Engage the ultimate consumer. Collaborating with regional businesses in the aerospace and defense industries helped California Innovation Corridor WIRED develop a curriculum that met industry needs. However, it is important to engage representatives engaged in the actual hiring as well as high-level representatives.
- Consider the entire workforce. Often, workforce development and re-training programs are focused on lower-skilled workers, neglecting a significant portion of the population. By developing a re-training program for software engineers, California Innovation Corridor WIRED retained a highly talented portion of the workforce and ensured that they were employed in high productivity positions.

**Contact:**

Jeanette Langdell

Employment Training Manager

NOVA Workforce Board

505 W. Olive Ave., Suite 550

Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Phone: 408/730-7241

Email: [jlangdell@novaworks.org](mailto:jlangdell@novaworks.org)

[www.novaworks.org](http://www.novaworks.org)



## **Finger Lakes WIRED Entrepreneurship and Strategic Growth Immersion Sequence trains regional innovators for growth**

### **Practice Areas:**

- Organic growth
- Workshop development
- Entrepreneurial mentoring

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

*Led by the E. Philip Saunders College of Business at Rochester Institute of Technology, the Finger Lakes WIRED Strategic Growth through Innovation Program prepares regional business leaders to grow their high potential firms. Executive education specialists and RIT business professors bring their expertise together in this training program, in which senior management officials from regional firms develop their own strategic growth plans.*

### **Description:**

The Finger Lakes WIRED Initiative has developed an entrepreneurship support program based on the notion that there are many local firms with high growth potential. Since growth opportunities are scarce in existing market niches, regional businesses may need to look beyond their current business models, products, and narrow markets. A firm's financial resources may often be better employed providing new or related products/services which can provide higher revenue streams and profit margins.

The Strategic Growth through Innovation Program is a training program that mixes academic instruction with a practical consulting approach to teach small business leaders to understand and implement growth strategies. Participants meet once a week for four hours for 10 weeks. The sessions are held in the evening, and participants are provided dinner.

Target participants are senior managers for local businesses – the people who ultimately implement growth strategies. Organizers look first and foremost for participants with strong leadership capacity, as well as strategic thinking. Recognition of both growth potential and of the inadequacy of old growth strategies is important too. Given these criteria and the ambitious, think-outside-the-box nature

of the program, participants thus far have tended to be self-selected. Increasingly, individuals are bringing colleagues and participating in the program as a team.

Instructors are typically executive education professors with extensive experience in growing companies through innovation. They walk participants through how to think about and implement growth plans. Additionally, successful entrepreneurs from the region serve as mentors, working with participants individually to develop their own strategic growth plans. Mentors may be in the same industry as their mentees, but to avoid any conflicts of interests they always come from non-competing sectors. Economic development agencies and trade associations are also engaged in the program.

The Entrepreneurship and Strategic Growth Immersion Sequence stands out among other public programs for entrepreneurship because it focuses on the strategic growth of existing high potential firms rather than on supporting start-ups. Initial feedback has been great, and demand for the program continues to be high. Organizers attribute the program's success to its focus on a previously under-served community, its real-world approach and opportunities for networking, and its reasonable cost.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Work with the companies and assets you already have to realize organic growth potential easily. Pre-existing firms are already rooted in the region and can become strong economic assets and drivers if they realize their growth potential.
- Allow for flexibility as programs develop. Originally, the program was designed for individuals from firms, but participants found that it was more beneficial to participate as teams.
- Maintain a realistic focus. Rather than trying to be everything to all entrepreneurs, this program is focused on a very specific population and acts as a complement rather than a competitor to other early-stage entrepreneurship programs such as The Entrepreneurs Network.

#### **Contact:**

Claudia Lynn Burcke  
Finger Lakes Wired  
255 North Goodman Street  
Rochester, NY 14607  
Direct: 585-258-3541  
Fax: 585-232-6033  
[www.fingerlakeswired.com](http://www.fingerlakeswired.com)



## Wall Street West Promotes Regional WIB Collaboration

### Practice Areas:

- Collaboration among local WIBs
- Leveraging existing relationships
- Leadership

### Reader's Guide:

*Wall Street West has accomplished a significant achievement by enhancing collaboration among the five Workforce Investment Boards in the region. By building on prior relationships and identifying a champion to create change within, WSW united the WIBs around the objectives of WIRED and is making substantial progress on its workforce development goals.*

### Description:

Like all WIRED regions, Wall Street West is committed to developing high-skilled talent to create effective regional economic development strategies. Because the fragmented, social service system of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can no longer meet the demands of the global economy, workforce development agencies must collaborate with each other and with other regional institutions to provide individuals with opportunities to constantly update their skills. Wall Street West's particular focus on the financial services and information technology industries requires that workers obtain strong math, science, and technical skills.

The Workforce Investment Boards in the Wall Street West region have a history of collaboration as a result of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Industry Partnership program. This program is part of Pennsylvania's high performance standard for local Workforce Investment Boards that establishes benchmarks. These benchmarks are very much in line with the ideas of WIRED. In the Wall Street West region, two of the five WIBs have met these standards.

The leaders of these two high performing WIBs are members of the Wall Street West Executive Committee. Through exposure to WIRED principles and successful experiences in previous collaborations through the Industry Partnership program, one of the executives became a strong advocate for expanding the collaboration among the region's WIBs.

By finding a champion for collaboration ‘on the inside’, Wall Street West WIRED was able to support and encourage cooperation amongst the WIBs rather than lead it. Because the advocate was ‘one of their own’ and someone that the other WIB leaders already knew and trusted, they were more receptive than they might have been if WIRED staff members tried to force cooperation. Also, the collaboration is more likely to be sustained beyond WIRED because it was created by and is led by the participants rather than the Wall Street West staff.

The collaboration has already realized a number of significant accomplishments. They have established a common individual training account allocation and outreach materials; are pursuing consistent service delivery targets; are leveraging the collaboration to attract additional higher education institutions to become training providers; and are planning to identify other opportunities to partner.

**Lessons Learned:**

- Organizational change, including collaboration, can be more successful when it is instigated from within rather than by external groups or individuals. By identifying and working with a champion from within one of the WIBs, the Wall Street West WIRED team was able to effectively support collaboration more easily than if they had tried to inspire it themselves.
- Build on prior partnerships and relationships. Creating strong relationships is the most time consuming part of building partnerships. By capitalizing on existing relationships, Wall Street West WIRED avoided the difficult work of building trust among partners and was able to see the gains of the collaboration sooner.

**Contact:**

Susan Shaffer  
Director of Workforce Initiatives  
Wall Street West  
Phoenix Plaza  
22 East Union Street  
Wilkes-Barre, PA 18701-2721  
Phone: (484) 515-8909  
Email: [sshaffer@wallstreetwest.org](mailto:sshaffer@wallstreetwest.org)  
[www.wallstreetwest.org](http://www.wallstreetwest.org)

## Engaging Private Sector Leaders in the Creation of Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs)

### **Practice Areas:**

- Advisory Board development
- Leadership characteristics
- Private sector engagement

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

*One of One KC WIRED's primary goals is to support workers in targeted industries for whom job expectations or individual circumstances have changed. This is the story of how One KC created an Advisory Board of committed private sector leaders to design and implement the new Lifelong Learning Account (LiLA) program.*

### **Description:**

There is a significant need for constant updating of skills and knowledge in the global economy, but financing continuing education is a complex issue for employers and employees. Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs) are a solution to this problem where funds saved by the employee and matched by the employer are used for tuition and related course expenses much like 401Ks.

In order to create a LiLA program that would be realistic and easy for employers to implement as well as beneficial to employees, it was critical to get employer input. However, it is often difficult to engage and retain private sector leaders in workforce programs. One KC has recruited a highly effective and dedicated Advisory Board of volunteer CEOs, directors, and senior Vice-Presidents by carefully choosing the right people and building strong relationships and a shared vision among members.

To build a board that would provide the needed expertise and take ownership of the program, Suzy Makalous, the Director of Lifelong Learning, mapped out the ideal characteristics and backgrounds of board members. She also outlined the required criteria that each member:

- 1) possess an interest in and passion about workforce development
- 2) be committed and dependable
- 3) have the time and the influence to open doors at a high level
- 4) believe in KC itself
- 5) be a good, creative thinker and problem solver
- 6) have the desire and interest to make a difference.

Makalous then began holding meetings with private sector leaders, leveraging WIRED connections, to build enthusiasm for the project. Rather than recruiting members directly, she focused on sharing the ideas of the program and asking for recommendations for board members. This technique allowed her to assess potential members and choose those who fit the needs and criteria rather than just fill seats.

The first meeting was also crucial to the success of the Board. Within the first three minutes of the meeting, members were interacting and getting to know each other on a personal basis. They also shared their motivations for joining the Board, which fueled the excitement and established expectations for the meetings - namely that each meeting would result in outcomes and decisions made. By creating a shared vision for the Board and the program, members built trust and defined clear goals.

So far, the Board has not lost any members from loss of interest. Members continue to meet every Tuesday morning at 7.30 and accomplish an astounding quantity of work outside of meetings, including writing grant proposals and RFPs. Some members have even taken time off of work to travel with One KC WIRED to promote the program.

#### **Lessons Learned:**

- Identify your needs and criteria first. Creating an effective, cohesive board requires planning and forethought. Knowing your needs will also help you tailor recruitment by identifying exactly why each individual's participation is necessary.
- Assess potential members. Building a board is like conducting job interviews: both parties must evaluate the potential fit. Approaching potential members to explain the project rather than for recruitment allows both parties to assess whether or not the candidate will be able to make a strong contribution.
- Invest the time early on to establish relationships and build a shared vision. By getting everyone on the same page, members' expectations are met, and participation is maintained.

#### **Contact:**

Suzy Makalous  
Director  
Lifelong Learning  
OneKC WIRED  
920 Main Street - Suite 640  
Kansas City, MO 64105  
(816) 595-2313 phone  
(816) 595-2310 fax  
[makalous@aimKC.org](mailto:makalous@aimKC.org)

## Aligning New Programs with Regional Needs: North Central Indiana Surveys Region for New Lifelong Learning System

### **Practice Areas:**

- Worker retention
- Access to lifelong learning

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

*North Central Indiana WIRED is committed to leveraging its mature, experienced workforce as it transitions to high-performance production in manufacturing. The Lifelong Learning System is one initiative aimed at retaining older workers by increasing access to continuing education opportunities. In order to create a system that would be most beneficial to workers and address employers' needs, NCI WIRED undertook three community-wide surveys to understand perceptions, barriers, and requisites for the new system.*

### **Description:**

North Central Indiana's population is aging faster than that of the nation, and many older workers are either leaving the workforce or trying to transition from long-tenured manufacturing jobs. This population is a significant asset for North Central Indiana though because of mature workers' experience and knowledge, and NCI WIRED is committed to retaining these workers and supporting their transition to higher skilled manufacturing positions.

NCI WIRED envisions a Lifelong Learning System that will increase educational and training attainment of mature workers and increase the number of employers that implement mature worker human capital best practices. The first step to creating this System was to identify specific initiatives that would foster lifelong learning and develop a business plan.

Determining the appropriate content and services for mature workers has been challenging, and best practices seem to be nonexistent. The WIRED team had significant demographic data on the older workforce in the region to draw upon but needed to supplement the data with knowledge of the perceptions, barriers, and requisites of lifelong learning in order to create the most valuable system. The team, in collaboration with their Lifelong Learning Taskforce, decided to undertake a survey of each of the system's stakeholder groups: Educators and Workforce

Developers, Consumers, and Businesses. With the help of the Taskforce, which is composed of business and education leaders, representatives from regional workforce and economic development agencies, and experts on aging, NCI began to frame the issues involved and developed three separate surveys. The surveys were administered by the WIRED team and by the Survey Research Center at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

The survey response rate was outstanding and confirmed and revealed many attitudes and barriers that would need to be addressed by the new system. Through the employer survey, more than 70 businesses volunteered to participate in beta testing of the mature worker best practices training curriculum that would be developed as part of the system.

**Lessons Learned:**

- Ask the region what it wants before determining what it needs. By devoting the time up front to engage and listen to stakeholders, NCI ensured that their investments would best meet the region's needs and would not be redundant. Also, by using the employer survey to identify volunteer businesses for beta testing, NCI expanded their network and saved valuable recruitment time.
- Take advantage of regional resources in your own work. We often talk a lot about leveraging regional resources for the prosperity of the region, but they can help you in your own work as well. These collaborations can also be a good way to engage new organizations and individuals in the WIRED process.

**Contact:**

Kathy Burns  
Planning & Marketing Analyst  
Tecumseh Area Partnership, Inc.  
1712 S. Deer Park Dr.  
Peru, IN 46970  
Phone: 765.472.4311  
Mobile: 765.398.6184  
[kburns@tap.lafayette.in.us](mailto:kburns@tap.lafayette.in.us)