

The WIRED Learning Exchange

A peer-to-peer network for WIRED regions

Issue No. 5

December 8, 2008

The WIRED Learning Exchange facilitates the dissemination of promising practices and success stories and the lessons learned from them among the WIRED regions. The Council on Competitiveness has been responsible for collecting information from the WIRED regions and selecting articles for The Learning Exchange. For this, the final issue of *The WIRED Learning Exchange*, we have re-examined some of the practices we featured in past issues to see how they have stood the test of time. We explored three specific aspects of each practice: achievement, sustainability and replication.

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Editors Note:

The Council on Competitiveness is grateful for the opportunity given us by the Employment and Training Administration to find and track the promising practices from the WIRED regions. The Council has gained valuable insights on regional



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development from this opportunity including:

- The WIRED Initiative has produced many innovative practices that demonstrate that the regional level is where the aggregation of a critical mass of resources creates the most effective platform for transformational change.
- Regions are laboratories for policy innovation. For example, the NCI WIRED region has developed the Maturity Matters project, identifying an important niche in the labor market which could have national policy implications.
- It is at the regional level where local innovations can be brought to sufficient scale to have a major policy impact. The CHOICE program in Northwest Florida WIRED is a good example of a program that has expanded from local to regional and ultimately statewide scope.
- Regions can be launching pads for innovations no matter where they originate. The Career Readiness Credential was not invented in West Michigan but it is on its way to becoming a statewide program because of the West Michigan WIRED's decision to throw its weight behind it.

Northwest Florida WIRED Expands CHOICE

Originally, we reported that the Northwest Florida WIRED region had taken a local innovation, the CHOICE Institute, an award-winning career skills training academy created by the Okaloosa County School District and replicated it across the region. CHOICE allows students to earn concurrently high school credit, college credit and professional industry certification.

The CHOICE academies are linked to the region's targeted industries: aerospace and defense, life sciences, information technology/electronics engineering, alternative energy, and building and construction trades. This is the foundation of their strategy for building a skilled workforce pipeline in high demand occupations. Now the story is about replication – embedding the CHOICE model in school

districts across the state.

Innovate California Website Poised To Go Statewide

From the outset, the California Innovation Corridor recognized that collaboration within a region of its size presented a mammoth challenge (the Corridor initiative includes the California Space Authority; the State of California's Labor and Workforce Development Agency and Employment Development Department; and over 60 industry, academic, workforce, and economic development participants extending across 13 counties). Part of the solution is the Innovate California website which offers on-line collaboration tools that have potential benefit to all WIRED regions.

North Central Indiana Closing Skills Gap with Mature Workers Programs

North Central Indiana (NCI) WIRED is committed to leveraging its mature, experienced workforce as it transitions to high-performance production in manufacturing. In order to create a Lifelong Learning System that would benefit this cohort of workers' and address employers' needs, NCI WIRED undertook three community-wide surveys to understand perceptions, barriers, and requisites for the new system. Based on the surveys, NCI WIRED developed a number of tools to assist employers and retiring employees.

West Michigan's National Career Readiness Certificate Goes Statewide

The bane of existence of workforce 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 the high school degree once was, to measure the capabilities of applicants and employees. The National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) is filling that gap in states and regions around the country. The WIRED West Michigan story tells how they are moving the NCRC to a region wide and then statewide certification that links employers, K-12, and workforce agencies.

Expanding Industry Specific Training: Metro Denver Talent Pipeline

The Denver Metro Region WIRED Initiative determined that its primary goal was to create a pipeline of homegrown talent in a number of critical industries. Success in achieving this goal would remove a key barrier to economic growth. Heretofore, the region had relied on the in migration of educated 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.

JumpStart was the first step in the plan to build the pipeline. It was a grants program to build capacity in the region by helping successful collaborations among education, training, entrepreneurship and private sector partners to expand regionally. Since then the WIRED region has narrowed its focus to what it believes to be the weakest link in the pipeline – preparing high school students for the targeted industries so that they could then qualify for two-year college degrees needed for entry level positions.

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 goes beyond traditional stratification while preparing workers to compete and succeed both within the United States and globally. Learn more at 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



Northwest Florida WIRED Widens CHOICE

Practice Areas:

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

Why Selected:

Originally, we reported that the Northwest Florida WIRED region had taken a local innovation, the CHOICE Institute, an award-winning career skills training academy created by the Okaloosa County School District and replicated it across the region. CHOICE allows students to earn concurrently high school credit, college credit and professional industry certification.

The CHOICE academies are linked to the region's targeted industries: aerospace and defense, life sciences, information technology/electronics engineering, alternative energy, and building and construction trades. This is the foundation of their strategy for building a skilled workforce pipeline in high demand occupations. Now the story is about replication – embedding the CHOICE model in school districts across the state.

Description:

CHOICE is an innovative program which allows students concurrently to 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 and to create a pipeline of qualified employees for regional growth industries. As more and more jobs require advanced technical skills, employers are willing to pay higher wages to those with industry certification. According to a recent study by the University of West Florida's Haas Center, CHOICE graduates can expect to earn over \$298,000 more in their lifetime, compared to "regular" high school graduates -- even if they don't continue on to college.

Working closely with local employers and the public workforce system, the CHOICE Institutes provide the opportunity for students to get a diploma, marketable skills for high-wage, high-growth industries, and national industry certifications. This leads to more and

better job opportunities, whether or not the student continues on to complete college. The choice is theirs. They can go straight to work, combine work and college, go to college full time, or pursue additional post secondary opportunities in their careers.

Update:

- CHOICE has gone from 17 sites in the WIRED region to 491 sites in sixty seven school districts.
- 50% of these new districts are rural.
- The Florida Career and Professional Education Act of 2007 requires every school district to have a career academy by 2008-9.

Lessons Learned:

- Regions are significant vehicles to pilot innovations and turn them into statewide policy initiatives.
- Policy development is a two way process, both from the regions up and from the state down.
- Linking high school and college degrees to industry certifications is an effective way to involve employers and target growth industries.
- Linking school districts within a region is a powerful means to leverage resources and create specialization.

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- <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0859rpt.pdf>
- <http://www.bannersecondary.com/index.html>



Innovate California Website Poised To Go Statewide

Practice Areas:

- Networks
- Collaboration
- Capturing learning
- Outreach

Why Selected:

From the outset, the California Innovation Corridor recognized that collaboration within a region of its size presented a mammoth challenge (the Corridor initiative includes the [California Space Authority](#); the State of California's [Labor and Workforce Development Agency](#) and [Employment Development Department](#); and over 60 industry, academic, workforce, and economic development participants extending across 13 counties). Part of the solution is the Innovate California website which offers on-line collaboration tools that have potential benefit to all WIRED regions.

Description:

The resources available on this web site are too vast to list here. There are a number of tools that are of particular value for collaboration. Collaboration Search allows you to choose among a series of roughly forty categories like **Certification, Economic Impact Analysis, Supplier Training, Research**, etc. Each category links to at least one provider with an in-depth description. Below that is a heading entitled **Opportunities for Collaboration** which lists organizations that are interested in collaborating on this subject along with contact information. If you click on Asset Portal you get linked to **Connectory.com**[®], which contains detailed profiles of California industrial and technology companies across all industries at every level of the supply chain. (<http://www.innovatecalifornia.net/>)

To read the original article, please follow this link:
<http://www.workforce3one.org/view.cfm?id=5571>

Update:

- In the last year, the use of the website has increased 400%, on average. Year to year comparison for October 2008 and 2007 shows that the use of the site has gone up by 600%.
- The Success Stories on the Connectory.com section of innovatecalifornia.net cite a range of public agencies including the U.S. Navy and the US Air Force SBIR and private companies like RhineAir, an aerospace company that located consultants to help them become ISO 9000 certified, and Graffiti Patrol which received three inquiries and made one sale within a week of posting on **Connectory.com**. There are currently 15,615 companies profiled on **Connectory.com**.
- The deliverables section of the InnovateCalifornia.net is beginning to be populated with hundreds Products and Deliverables of the 25 California WIRED projects. Signature WIRED products include the STEM Collaborative Action Plan and Inventory, the Smart Supplier Initiative and The Innovation-Driven Economic Development Model and Toolkit which incorporates products from related projects, including the Innovation Asset Mapping Inventory that will soon go live.
- The strategic plan to sustain Innovate California is based on modest contributions from regional organizations and WIBs across the state.

Lessons Learned:

- Collecting success stories and other practices can create an internal community of practice that allows the experiences of one partner to benefit others.
- Especially for regions with large geographic footprints, the Internet offers a cost effective means of enabling collaboration.
- IC.net, as a repository of publicly-available resources, offers the partners in WIRED regions the opportunity to collaborate with initiatives outside the region and the state, as **Connectory.com** does for the California Innovation Corridor.
- Once operating, the costs of sustaining a collaborative website are affordable when spread across a multiplicity of users.

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North Central Indiana Closing Skills Gap with Mature Workers Programs

Practice Areas:

- Worker retention
- Access to lifelong learning
- Skills gap

Why Selected:

North Central Indiana (NCI) WIRED is committed to leveraging its mature, experienced workforce as it transitions to high-performance production in manufacturing. In order to create a Lifelong Learning System that would benefit this cohort of workers' and address employers' needs, NCI WIRED undertook three community-wide surveys to understand perceptions, barriers, and requisites for the new system. Based on the surveys, NCI WIRED developed a number of tools to assist employers and retiring employees.

Description:

NCI WIRED is the first of the WIRED initiatives to focus on leveraging the mature workforce as an asset for employers in the region. With little existing research available on this cohort, NCI WIRED decided to undertake a survey of each of the system's stakeholder groups: Educators and Workforce Developers, Consumers, and Businesses. Using the results as well as research data from the state of Indiana's population estimates, NCI WIRED has created the beginnings of what it calls a Lifelong Learning System on its website, Maturity Matters (<http://www.maturitymatters.org/>).

To read the original article, please follow this link:
<http://www.workforce3one.org/view.cfm?id=5574>

Update:

- The Mature Worker Impact Analysis is an assessment tool that shows employers what their workforce will look like in the next 5-10 years and provides recommendations on how to rethink traditional workplace practices to attract and retain older workers.
- A workshop for employers called Managing Your Mature Workforce is a four hour interactive session about recruiting, retaining, and retraining mature workers. Thus far NCI WIRED has held four workshops, charging companies \$90 per person.

- A train-the-trainer workshop has been created for other places who wish to focus on mature workers and use the tools developed by NCI WIRED.
- All of these tools are available for a fee, which will be the source of funding to sustain the mature workers initiatives.

Lessons Learned:

- A WIRED region, even one that is not in a major media market or population center, can find important opportunities for innovation in its own labor market.
- A revenue-generating business plan to market and sell tools developed in the WIRED process is a promising way to establish a sustainable funding base within and beyond the region and to disseminate WIRED innovations.
- Mature workers are an undervalued segment of the labor market for which there can be strong demand for services.

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- <http://www.maturity matters.org/>



West Michigan's National Career Readiness Certificate Goes Statewide

Practice Areas:

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

Why Selected:

The bane of existence of workforce 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 the high school degree once was, to measure the capabilities of applicants and employees. The National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) is filling that gap in states and regions around the country. The WIRED West Michigan story tells how they are moving the NCRC to a region wide and then statewide certification that links employers, K-12, and workforce agencies.

Description:

The National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) is a portable credential based on the WorkKeys® job skills assessment system. It verifies that that an individual has essential core employability skills in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. The NCRC is awarded for three levels, Bronze which certifies skills for 35% of the jobs in the WorkKeys data base; Silver for skills for 65% of the WorkKeys data base jobs; and Gold for 90 percent of the WorkKeys jobs.

To read the original article, please follow this link:
<http://www.workforce3one.org/view.cfm?id=5558>

Update:

- More than 20,150 certificates have been issued in West Michigan in 2007 and through the second quarter of 2008.

- West Michigan has earned 16,695 certificates per million residents. That's a higher concentration than nine of the top 10 states that have been at this for years.
- Eleven out of 14 Michigan Works! Service Centers in West Michigan are now training and certifying transitional workers. By the end of the year all 14 will be engaged.
- WIRED West Michigan has recruited over 350 employers to sign Letters of Commitment (LOC) to use the CRC and is ahead of its timeline to reach its goal of 500 employers.
- The three Michigan WIRED regions have created a partnership to make the CRC a statewide credential. The state's Council for Labor and Economic Growth unanimously approved the [MI NCRC Implementation Plan](#) in their June 9th meeting. The MI NCRC will be delivered through the Michigan Works! system in partnership with the K-12 educational system, community colleges, economic development agencies, employers, business associations, and other local partners.

Lessons Learned:

- WIRED West Michigan focused on the employer demand side from the outset. Success with employers gave the CRC the credibility it needed to influence policy makers.
- The key to sustainability for the CRC is to become a statewide credential. Working with the other WIRED regions and various state agencies to help them understand the value of the NCRC within Michigan has been critical to success.

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Further information:

- http://wired.2gtech.com/images/ncrc_workkeys_wm_business_case_final_april_23_2008.pdf
- <http://www.michigancrc.org/default.aspx>



Expanding Industry Specific Training: Metro Denver Talent Pipeline

Practice Areas:

- Networks
- Collaboration
- Capturing learning
- Outreach

Why Selected:

The Denver Metro Region WIRED Initiative determined that its primary goal was to create a pipeline of homegrown talent in a number of critical industries. Success in achieving this goal would remove a key barrier to economic growth. Heretofore, the region had relied on the in migration of educated 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.

JumpStart was the first step in the plan to build the pipeline. It was a grants program to build capacity in the region by helping successful collaborations among education, training, entrepreneurship and private sector partners to expand. Since then the WIRED region has narrowed its focus to what it believes to be the weakest link in the pipeline – preparing high school students for the targeted industries so that they could then qualify for two-year college degrees needed for entry level positions.

Update:

The Denver Metro Region 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 emphasizes the development of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) skills at all educational levels.

Once the JumpStart funding was completed, the WIRED Initiative turned towards a more focused intervention. Metro Denver WIRED embraced the academy model of postsecondary education: two specialized years in high school followed by a two year degree program at

community college. A good example is the process technology program at Red Rocks Community College (RRCC) which trains process and maintenance technicians for the energy industry and more general manufacturing positions. The program begins at several local high schools where students receive college credit toward the Process Technology program taught at RRCC. Industry partners in this project include Suncor, Xcel Energy, and Coors Brewing Company.

The program has over 200 students engaged at various levels of completion at the college. There are also over 150 high school students enrolled in Process Science I and II and Algebra 2 for Process Science courses at four Jefferson County High Schools.

Likewise, JumpStart into Aerospace (JSA) is a collaboration among Community College of Denver, North High School, the Denver Office of Economic Development / Division of Workforce Development, and Metropolitan State College of Denver (MSCD), and industry. JSA takes a holistic approach through unique offerings to students like contextualized curriculum and the expansion of accelerated learning formats; strengthening delivery of instruction through professional development, curriculum alignment, and enhancing the capacity of educational providers to prepare students for aerospace jobs by installing state-of-the-art technology at MSCD's aerospace facilities; and providing real-life applications of learning through partnerships with aerospace employers.

To date, 615 North High School students have been taught under the new curriculum and system. Another 4,500 are projected to have access within the next 5 years.

To read the original article, please follow this link:
<http://www.workforce3one.org/view.cfm?id=5556>

Lessons Learned:

- Fill the gap – the Denver Metro Region WIRED Initiative's research and active involvement in the pipeline allowed them to identify a weak link in the pipeline at the high school level. That informed their strategy of focusing on the high school level to embed pipeline strategies tied to industry rather than seek to plug every hole in the entire pipeline.
- Building and embedding capacity in innovative ways – like other WIRED regions, Denver Metro viewed scale and sustainability through the frame of embedding new capacity into existing institutions and building linkages among them.
- Focus, focus, focus – building a talent pipeline is an undertaking involving many levels and many moving parts. Instead of trying to be all things to all people, Denver Metro WIRED focused on key industries and on a part of the pipeline which most needed fixing and where it could play an effective role.

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