

The WIRED Learning Exchange

A peer-to-peer network for WIRED regions

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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. 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.

Metro Denver's WIRED Governance Transforms Itself

The Metro Denver WIRED Initiative demonstrates how governance structures can remain flexible and be reformed as programs evolve and functional demands change. Metro Denver's Leadership Council was originally comprised of co-chairs from each of the Initiative's eight panels representing industry, education, the public workforce system and small business. It was charged with oversight of the data gathering efforts of the eight panels and forming recommendations for transformation of delivery systems for a skilled workforce for four targeted industry



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clusters - Aerospace, Bioscience, Energy and IT/Software. As Metro Denver WIRED transitioned into the implementation phase, the Leadership Council was restructured as a decision-making body representing all partners and supported by four Solutions Teams.

Regionalism Takes Root in Mid-Michigan

Before WIRED, residents of Mid-Michigan would have never claimed to live in a single region. There is no large metro area and no single media outlet that covers the entire region. WIRED Mid-Michigan faced the daunting task of creating a regional identity from scratch and has devised innovative marketing and communications strategies to accomplish this. It appears that the aggressive and evocative communication of information to and among regional stakeholders is catalyzing self-reinforcing regional awareness in Mid-Michigan.

WIRED West Michigan Outfits Region with Remote Work Sites for the Modern Economy

West Michigan identified the flexible workplace as a defining characteristic of many high-growth sectors. They have developed a toolkit for creating remote work sites that can support and attract mobile workers. This toolkit facilitates regional development by providing the means that enable the regional market to develop new regional assets. The project coordinators expect the project's unique market-based approach to be the key to the model's success and sustainability.

Appalachian Ohio Gets Connected

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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/

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Metro Denver WIRED Transforms its Governance

Practice Areas:

- Organizational Structure
- Leadership
- Transformation
- Program Sustainability

Reader's Guide:

The Metro Denver WIRED Initiative demonstrates how governance structures can remain flexible and be reformed as programs evolve and functional demands change. Metro Denver's Leadership Council was originally comprised of co-chairs from each of the Initiative's eight panels representing industry, education, the public workforce system and small business. It was charged with oversight of the data gathering efforts of the eight panels and forming recommendations for transformation of delivery systems for a skilled workforce for four targeted industry clusters – Aerospace, Bioscience, Energy and IT/Software. As Metro Denver WIRED transitioned into the implementation phase, the Leadership Council was restructured as a decision-making body representing all partners and supported by four Solutions Teams.

Description:

The WIRED governance structure for the nine-county metro Denver region is evolving as the needs of the initiative change.

The initiative's original Leadership Council was comprised of the two co-chairs from eight dedicated panels: Aerospace, Bioscience, Energy, IT/Software, Small Business, K-12 Education, Higher Education, and the Public Workforce System. These panels were each tasked with conducting research and analysis around the industries' high-demand occupations, and mapping assets for finding, training, and retaining skilled workers. Using these analyses, the Leadership Council developed recommendations for transforming the delivery systems for a skilled workforce.

As the Metro Denver WIRED Initiative moved into the implementation phase, the organizational structure was adapted for action. The initiative's fiscal partners, comprised of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp., the City and County of Denver, and the Colorado Department of Labor & Employment, continued their oversight role with

the restructured Council. There are eight seats on the Leadership Council for each of the stakeholder groups – K-12 and higher education, industry, and the public workforce system. Including the three fiscal partners, the Leadership Council now has 27 members.

The restructured Council is supported by four Solutions Teams, convened to take action on the original Leadership Council's recommendations. These recommendations were categorized into four themes and the following Solutions Teams were formed:

- Connecting to Industry – building upon and sustaining relationships among industry, education and the public workforce system;
- Growing Our Own – engaging students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) skills and getting them excited about careers in the target industries;
- Optimizing Today's Workforce – engaging untapped sources of talent (e.g. veterans, minorities, non-completers, Baby Boomers, etc.) in careers in the target industries to meet emerging workforce shortages, as well as long-term needs; and
- Metro Denver 2010 – identifying entities/partnerships/networks for a sustainable system of regional talent development for the metro Denver economy.

Metro Denver WIRED anticipates that transforming its governance will ensure that the initiative takes concrete action toward a seamless pipeline of regional talent development through the end of the grant (January 31, 2010). It will continue to build upon relationships among all stakeholders, and provide flexible, responsive leadership – and true regional transformation - for years to come.

While all stakeholders have been important in pursuing WIRED goals, its industry partners have been crucial to its success. It was industry's participation that gave all stakeholders an understanding of which occupations were critical and difficult to fill, as well as the skills that individuals must have to be successful and able to advance in an array of occupations. WIRED industry partners helped the initiative understand the need for, and transferability of, key STEM skills; not only within each industry, but across industries.

Lessons Learned:

- A transparent governance structure, able to flex and change as conditions warrant, eases the process of reform.
- Metro Denver had procedures for internal review in place, which ensured that the program's governance operated smoothly and efficiently, able to respond to challenges as they were presented.
- Effective collaboration can occur at different levels. Metro Denver's initial governance structure enabled intra-disciplinary collaboration on dedicated panels and inter-disciplinary collaboration on the Leadership Council. The restructured governance will enable all stakeholders to collaborate on the creation of a seamless pipeline of regional talent development.

- Involving industry partners in workforce initiatives is crucial to understanding what individuals need to be successful and able to advance in high-growth careers.

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Regionalism takes root in Mid-Michigan

Practice Areas:

- Communications
- Marketing
- Regional identity
- Sustainability

Reader's Guide:

Before WIRED, residents of Mid-Michigan would have never claimed to live in a single region. There is no large metro area and no single media outlet that covers the entire region. WIRED Mid-Michigan faced the daunting task of creating a regional identity from scratch and has devised innovative marketing and communications strategies to accomplish this. It appears that the aggressive and evocative communication of information to and among regional stakeholders is catalyzing self-reinforcing regional awareness in Mid-Michigan.

Description:

When WIRED began, Mid-Michigan had never self-identified as a region. Despite the region's similar economic structure, the regional economy had never been described as integrated in public or business discourse. No single media outlet covers the entire region, and no large metro area dominates. Flint, Lansing, Midland, and Saginaw all anchor the region, but each has historically been oriented either with other parts of the state or internally.

Since the program's inception, WIRED Mid-Michigan has faced the daunting task of creating a regional identity from scratch. Without a regional reorientation, the program risks failing to overcome early hurdles; in the longer run, the advances made by the WIRED program could dissipate after the grant runs out and no monetary glue remains to hold the region together. Marketing and communicating regionalism therefore became a cornerstone of the WIRED region's strategy.

The WIRED team identified a shared media outlet as essential for the region to grow together – something that would give people a sense of a shared history, culture and, hopefully, future. Funding restrictions preclude the team from instating an all-out marketing campaign or founding a traditional media outlet though. So to maximize their reach, strengthen regional ties, and most importantly, share information and keep stakeholders abreast of developments across the WIRED region, the communications team decided to use documentary videos to share stories between different parts of the

region. Project leaders have found that this concrete and evocative visual medium helps regional stakeholders to wrap their minds around the issues. As opposed to touting a vague and previously unheard of concept like ‘regionalism’ or ‘workforce development’, the team has presented its audience with stories of real initiatives being undertaken right next door.

Mid-Michigan has also leveraged the documentaries to involve new stakeholders. Early meetings were taped, capturing the arguments, collaborations, and emotional engagement of the participants. Impressed by the level of commitment displayed through these videos, other motivated individuals have come on board. Recently the President of the University of Michigan at Flint joined after seeing a documentary on workforce and education programs taking place in nearby institutions that were unfamiliar to him.

From the sustainability perspective, substantiating the region’s progress is essential to building momentum. The documentaries accomplish this by capturing the course of change in the region. Complementarily, WIRED Mid-Michigan’s newest communications innovation is a YouTube competition to engage the younger residents who may not even know that WIRED exists. Contestants are being asked to create a video answering “what are you doing to transform your region?”. Organizers hope this outreach program will foster regionalism in the next generation.

WIRED Mid-Michigan has strategically leveraged its marketing and communications resources to maximize effectiveness in light of strict spending restrictions. The aggressive communication of information among regional stakeholders appears to be catalyzing a self-reinforcing regional awareness in Mid-Michigan.

Lessons Learned:

- A regional identity may be slow and difficult to establish, but targeting the major institutional stakeholders in the region can successfully get the ball rolling.
- Communications, marketing and outreach may be most effective when they are focused on disseminating information across the region – especially if there is no other regional outlet to do this.
- Programs will likely serve different – and sometimes unexpected – purposes as the WIRED initiative evolves. In Mid-Michigan, the communications program found itself playing a major role in recruitment and sustainability efforts. The WIRED initiative should be structured to allow for such flexibility.

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WIRED West Michigan Outfits Region with Remote Work Sites for the Modern Economy

Practice Areas:

- Talent attraction
- Market-based approaches
- Private sector involvement
- Project scope

Reader's Guide:

West Michigan identified the flexible workplace as a defining characteristic of many high-growth sectors. They have developed a toolkit for creating remote work sites that can support and attract mobile workers. This toolkit facilitates regional development by providing the means that enable the regional market to develop new regional assets. The project coordinators expect the project's unique market-based approach to be the key to the model's success and sustainability.

Description:

West Michigan observed that the nature of work in the modern economy is changing and that their region could use this to their advantage. The modern workplace, rather than being regimented and hierarchical, is becoming more flexible and mobile. This trend is even stronger for the new class of high-skilled, high-value workers that appreciates independence and flexibility. The West Michigan region has a high quality of life but otherwise lacks the infrastructure to attract, support and retain these modern workers and their employers.

West Michigan WIRED devised a strategy to leverage the region's high quality of life to attract and retain these workers by developing remote work centers. They undertook a feasibility study to determine which parts of the region would make the best sites. They then created a planning toolkit which includes business plans that interested regional actors can use as blueprints for designing and building remote work centers.

Three communities in the seven-county region were identified as appropriate test beds for the model, and work centers are being designed in two of them. In one community, the

county government has taken the lead; in the other, a group of entrepreneurs is building the center as a for-profit business venture. Though the remote work centers are location-specific, companies interested in the region will recognize the centers as regional assets.

In creating the toolkit the region successfully engaged some of its larger private stakeholders, notably a local office furniture maker whose business interests in non-traditional office spaces gave it a tangible incentive to get involved.

Developing the tool and then releasing it to the public for development and marketization made the scope of the project manageable. Given the rapidly changing nature of the economy and the WIRED program's limited resources, leaders thought long and hard about how they could be most effective. Their solution was to *facilitate* development in the region through the provision of tools that would enable the market itself to develop regional assets. The remote work center model was WIRED West Michigan's method of maximizing its effectiveness with limited resources.

Lessons Learned:

- The scope of the project was short-term and manageable, even though it addressed the longer-term goals of talent attraction, retention and development.
- The team's strategy focused on creating an environment in which people want to live and work rather than developing a specific set of skills. The remote work sites are yet another asset that reinforces the region's attractiveness and high quality of life.
- With the quickening pace of innovation and economic change, facilitation and the provision of tools to the market may well be more appropriate and sustainable objectives, especially for an organization with limited human and financial resources.

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Appalachian Ohio gets connected

Practice Areas:

- Connectivity
- Rural accessibility
- Program sustainability

Reader's Guide:

Appalachian Ohio is an expansive rural region comprised of 29 counties and extending 300 miles from one end to the other. Holding meetings was an expensive and logistically problematic endeavor that threatened to reduce the WIRED team's effectiveness. They decided to hold meetings virtually and since have witnessed attendance and productivity skyrocket.

Description:

Appalachian Ohio is an expansive rural region comprised of 29 counties and extending 300 miles from one end to the other. Travel time posed a huge opportunity cost for WIRED participants and acted like a tax on productivity by sapping individual and team resources. The WIRED staff estimates that for any given WIRED team meeting, travel costs reach \$1000 and the group loses a total of 16 hours of productivity.

Because of these costs, meeting attendance was low and communication among leaders occasionally broke down. The Appalachian Ohio region understandably found collaboration difficult when the right people were never in the same room at the same time. Not only did this lead to short-term decision-making problems, but the issue did not bode well for the program's sustainability either.

Absent the possibility of real face-to-face collaboration, Appalachian Ohio found a space for it on the web. The group decided to conduct more than half of its meetings virtually, using web-conferencing software package Adobe Connect[®]. Web-conferencing enables team members to see and hear each other, as well as view the same presentation and access and update the same common resources.

Organizers have found not only that attendance now approaches one-hundred percent for these meetings, but also that the conversation is much more focused and the meetings themselves much more productive. The team leaders still recognize that some things can only be accomplished face-to-face and that personal contact is important for

building long term relationships. The WIRED team accordingly meets physically a few times a year, which most agree is sufficient to maintain these important linkages.

The region uses additional technological resources to make sure the right documents are always available to the right people with Basecamp[®] software, which keeps track of projects and serves as a single storage space for the region's implementation plans, MOUs, documents and background papers. The resource is available to anyone with an internet connection and log-in. Brief online training sessions are offered, and the programs are widely acknowledged to be particularly user-friendly. The region also built a Second Life[®] Virtual World to conduct cyber seminars and to disseminate best practices.

Appalachian Ohio serves as an example of a region which overcame barriers to collaboration – and indeed enhanced regional collaborative efforts – by boosting connectivity and leveraging new communications technology to unite and integrate the region. The project manager, Bill Sams, likes to think of the region as a “collaboratory” – a place for experimental and innovative approaches towards collaboration.

Appalachian Ohio WIRED believes that connectivity will be key to program sustainability in the future, not to mention the region's ultimate competitiveness. While keeping people involved and informed does not happen by itself, technology certainly makes it easier. The region is confident that, once the financial incentives are gone, its virtual linkages and online tools will continue to foster communication and regionalism.

Lessons Learned:

- When meeting in person is impractical and inefficient, virtual meetings and web-conferencing allow team members to convene more frequently than otherwise, and at less cost.
- Maintaining virtual resources enables easy, free access and makes the organization more efficient since all members can access resources from anywhere.
- Putting sustainability solutions into practice early increases the likelihood that stakeholders stay on board for the long haul. The early adoption of new collaboration techniques makes the team familiar with the technology and will likely make the transition to sustainability after WIRED much smoother.

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