

# IssueBRIEF

"In order to meet the challenge of the 21st century global economy, the public workforce system works in partnership with employers, educators, and community leaders to foster economic development and high-growth opportunities in regional economies."

—U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration  
(<http://www.doleta.gov/business/pws.cfm>)



## Serving the Regional Economy: Collaboration Among Local Workforce Investment Boards

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### HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS BRIEF

Collaboration among Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs)—and between LWIBs and other regional workforce and economic development stakeholders—can be a beneficial way to address regional issues and achieve common goals.

- Nearly all of the 28 LWIBs that participated in the Workforce Investment Act Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation reported collaborating with other LWIBs and regional stakeholders.
- These collaborations ranged from informal communication networks to long-standing regional associations that pooled funds, shared staff, met regularly, and implemented multiple activities.
- Collaborations pursued one or more of the following goals: (1) obtain funding for joint ventures, (2) communicate about regional issues and best practices, (3) coordinate outreach to regional businesses, (4) promote employment in target sectors, (5) conduct regional planning, and (6) respond to regionally disruptive events.

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Agency collaborations, both within and across regions, are at the heart of the workforce investment system envisioned by Congress when it passed the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014. The system's employment and training services are administered by Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs) in approximately 600 state-defined Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) across the country. The boundaries of these local areas do not always align with those of regional economies—an LWIB's service area might stop at a county line or city limit, but many of its residents likely commute and conduct business in broader regions. Recognizing that LWIBs might have to partner across their borders to best serve these regional economies, WIA enabled state workforce agencies to provide funding for LWIBs to pursue a regional approach to workforce development.<sup>1</sup> WIOA further encourages regional collaborations by requiring states to define economic regions and LWIBs to coordinate across regions.

Regional collaboration now might be as necessary as it was when WIA was first enacted. WIA funding has gradually declined over the past decade, whereas job seekers' need for WIA-funded services has steadily increased.<sup>2</sup> Further, businesses increasingly need help developing and maintaining a skilled workforce to stay competitive in the new global economy.<sup>3</sup> Collaboration can help LWIBs share ideas and leverage resources to serve job seekers when funding is low and need is high, and can help them to support regional employers as they face the challenges of globalization. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), other federal agencies, and private foundations have funded a series of initiatives to promote partnerships among LWIBs and between LWIBs and other regional stakeholders—including the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grants, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and the Workforce Innovation Fund.<sup>4</sup>

This brief describes how 28 LWIBs randomly selected to participate in the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation collaborated regionally, as described by LWIB administrative and/or fiscal entity staff (LWIB staff) during onsite interviews conducted in 2012 and 2013 and telephone interviews conducted in 2014, and in program documents. It highlights the key goals of these collaborations and provides a detailed description of a particularly comprehensive, multifaceted LWIB partnership that can serve as a model for LWIBs currently considering or pursuing collaboration. This information can help states and local areas as they plan to meet WIOA's requirements for regional collaboration.

## REGIONAL COLLABORATION: ACTIVITIES AND GOALS

Staff from all but 3 of the 28 study LWIBs reported partnering with at least one other LWIB to identify and address common regional issues, challenges, and needs. These collaborations ranged from informal communication networks to periodic partnerships that executed special projects to long-standing regional associations that pooled funds, shared staff, met regularly, and implemented numerous activities. More than half of the study LWIBs that collaborated with other LWIBs also partnered with other entities that had a vested interest in the health of the region's economy and workforce, such as economic development agencies, education and training providers, employer associations, and employers.

Regional collaborations across the study LWIBs commonly aimed to achieve one or more of the following goals:



### Secure funding



Many study LWIBs collaborated with other LWIBs, in large part, to secure funding for their region, usually to execute special projects such as targeted sector training. For example, in New York, the Chautauqua County Workforce Investment Board, three other LWIBs, and area economic development agencies collectively formed the governor-mandated Western New York Regional Economic Development Council (REDC). Among the goals established by the state for this and its other regional economic development councils was to collaboratively seek funds from available state economic and workforce development sources for regional projects. Since 2010, the Western New York REDC has secured \$60.8 million to implement 81 projects across the region. One of these projects involved the Chautauqua County board partnering with a local community college to train 21 long-term unemployed workers as machinists. Other study LWIBs pursued and obtained funds from WIRED grants, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, the Workforce Innovation Fund, and state agencies. Staff from two LWIBs noted that while their current collaborations were originally formed to pursue a grant opportunity, the LWIBs continued to collaborate on regional projects even after those grants had expired.

### Communicate



Staff from nearly half of the study LWIBs highlighted communication as a main goal of their regional collaborations. Representatives from these LWIBs met with staff from neighboring LWIBs on a regular basis as part of formal state or regional LWIB

associations (for example, the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association and the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago), or as part of informal networks of regional workforce boards. They used these exchanges to (1) discuss issues affecting the region's job seekers and employers, (2) strategize solutions to service delivery challenges, (3) disseminate best practices, and (4) identify opportunities to implement collaborative projects. In fall 2013, for example, an LWIB association met to share strategies for coping with federal budget sequestration and the government shut-down. In another area, a group of neighboring LWIBs determined that frontline staff from across the region were providing customers with inconsistent and confusing information about one another's services and activities. Together, the LWIBs designed and executed an across-LWIB training to "get everyone on the same page" and remediate the issue.

Although many of these collaborations focused on communication among LWIBs, one of the main purposes of the Northern Illinois Workforce Coalition was to promote communication among the 9 LWIBs and 14 community colleges that were major providers of WIA-funded training. According to staff from the participating study LWIB, the two groups shared a commitment to ensuring that students receive a high quality education, attain industry-recognized credentials and certificates, and successfully enter the workforce soon after graduation, thus making it important for the two groups to communicate regularly and openly. The coalition also aimed to significantly increase post-secondary degree attainment across the region.

### **Provide regional business outreach and services**



Regional collaboration can help LWIBs reduce duplication and increase the efficiency of their business services and outreach efforts.

Because employers commonly conduct business across local area boundaries, they can receive services from numerous LWIBs. To ensure that they do not duplicate efforts with such employers, the New Orleans Workforce Investment Board and three neighboring LWIBs coordinated outreach and services to regional businesses and presented "a united front" to the regional business community. As a group, these LWIBs (1) used the same on-the-job training contract template and pursued joint opportunities to execute on-the-job and customized training with regional businesses; (2) surveyed businesses

to assess their needs; (3) funded a toll-free help line for businesses; (4) hosted regional job fairs and other regional business events; and (5) collected, analyzed, and distributed regional labor market and business information. The four LWIBs designated a regional business strategies coordinator to facilitate these activities on their behalf.

The Sacramento Works Workforce Investment Board also collaborated with neighboring LWIBs to provide business outreach and services. As part of its regional collaboration, the Sacramento board and three other LWIBs formed the Regional Employer Outreach Committee to develop a "regional brand." In 2013, using a governor's discretionary grant and pooled local WIA formula funds, the committee worked closely with the LWIBs' business services staff to conduct an assessment of "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats" (SWOT analysis) and develop a strategic plan to increase employer participation in WIA-funded activities. Per the recommendations in the plan, the LWIBs created a regional business services advertisement for inclusion in regional publications. The advertisement informed businesses of services that are consistently available at LWIBs across the region and emphasized those services that the SWOT analysis determined were particularly attractive to businesses: employee recruitment, small business assistance, tax credit programs, and financial resources. The advertisement also displayed a new regional identity and tag line, "Greater Sacramento Regional Workforce System: Working for You." The committee expected the advertisement and consistent regional messaging to increase business awareness of the regional workforce system and planned to test this assertion and assess businesses' satisfaction via an online survey.

### **Execute regional sector initiatives**



More than one-third of the study LWIBs partnered with other LWIBs to implement projects to promote employment in the region's growth or demand sectors. This included collecting and providing industry information to job seekers, developing and funding education and training programs in these industries, and conducting business outreach and providing services that focus on employers from these sectors. According to staff from the Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas Board, partnerships with other regional LWIBs helped it efficiently target these high priority sectors. As described in the text box on the next page, the Workforce Boards for North Central Texas,

Dallas, and Fort Worth each focused on and developed opportunities for job seekers in one of three priority sectors: manufacturing, aerospace, and technology.

As another example, the Capital Region Workforce Investment Board and four other LWIBs partnered to prepare their region for high projected growth in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) jobs. With the help of a state Transforming Your Workforce grant, the LWIBs executed a community outreach campaign to inform residents about STEM jobs, funded training for STEM-related occupations, and developed a STEM career plan that included on-the-job training and job placement assistance.

### Conduct strategic regional planning



LWIBs and other regional workforce and economic development stakeholders frequently share similar customer populations. Absent collaboration, these entities might duplicate efforts or inadvertently pursue conflicting goals. To avoid overlaps and miscommunication, about a quarter of the study LWIBs reported collaboratively developing strategic plans with other regional stakeholders. Most commonly, these LWIBs met with other regional LWIBs annually to align their goals and develop a shared regional vision for the upcoming year.

Economic development agencies, community colleges, and/or employers also participated in planning discussions as part of some of these regional collaborations. Although representatives from these groups are commonly members of LWIBs and, as such, provide input into local area regional plans, these collaborations went further and aimed to systematically align goals across agencies. The Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board and the eight other LWIBs of the Central California Workforce Collaborative, for example, convened annual strategic planning meetings with community colleges, economic development agencies, and other stakeholders from the region's San Joaquin Valley Workforce Consortium. During the meetings, they analyzed and assessed regional workforce needs and set joint goals. The group monitored and tracked progress toward these goals via quarterly progress reports that identified challenges and bottlenecks. The Muskegon/Oceana Michigan Works! Workforce Development Board, two of its neighboring LWIBs, and other regional stakeholders were in the process of launching a "prosperity region" in

### SECTOR-FOCUSED COLLABORATION: DALLAS-FORT WORTH REGIONAL WORK- FORCE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL (RWLC)

The Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas service area forms a ring around the cities of Dallas (Dallas County) and Fort Worth (Tarrant County) and their respective LWIB service areas. Together, the North Central Texas and the neighboring Dallas and Fort Worth metropolitan-area LWIBs formed the RWLC to do the following:

- **Promote target industry sectors.** Each LWIB focused on a particular industry sector (materials and advanced manufacturing, aerospace, and technology) and developed and executed activities targeted within that sector for the benefit of customers across the entire region.
- **Reduce duplication and increase efficiency.** Each LWIB did not have to be an expert on all industry clusters, but instead specialized in one field and then shared that information with their partners.

Since launching RWLC, the Workforce Solutions for North Central Texas board has secured at least two grants for the materials and advance manufacturing sectors including a grant to develop and execute a logistics training and certification program, through which more than 1,000 customers have been certified as Certified Logistics Associates (CLAs) or Certified Logistics Technicians (CLTs). The certification developed by the program became required by some employers.

2014. As part of the prosperity region initiative, the LWIBs planned to meet with representatives from economic development committees, transportation agencies, and planning commissions to conduct shared regional planning with the ultimate goals of (1) aligning services across agencies and throughout the region and (2) writing grants to use money reserved by the state to implement regional economic development activities.

### Respond to regionally disruptive events



Partnering and leveraging resources across local areas can be particularly beneficial when a large business closure or natural disaster suddenly affects a region. For example, when a manufacturer in Missouri closed a large plant in the state's Kansas City Region Workforce Investment Board service area and a smaller satellite plant in the state's Central

Region Workforce Investment Board service area, workers from across the region were dislocated. In response, the Kansas City Region board secured additional training funds and established a memorandum of understanding with the Central Region board that outlined how the LWIBs would use the funds to serve the dislocated workers. Because the larger plant closure occurred in Kansas City, the Kansas City Region board administered the training funds, but affected customers from the employer's plant in Central Region could access the funds, too. Similarly, when American Airlines at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport experienced a large layoff, residents

from across the Dallas County, Tarrant County, and North Central Workforce Board service areas were affected. The three LWIBs coordinated their response and each deployed staff to help affected workers, regardless of where they lived.

The experiences of the 28 randomly selected study LWIBs show that collaboration among LWIBs is a potentially beneficial way to address regional issues and achieve common goals. This brief concludes with a description of the Southeast Michigan Works Agency Council, which illustrates how one study LWIB collaborated with other LWIBs to pursue many of the goals discussed above.

## COLLABORATION SPOTLIGHT: SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN WORKS AGENCY COUNCIL

Staff of the Southeast Michigan Community Alliance Workforce Investment Board reported participating in a comprehensive, active, and long-standing LWIB collaboration. The Southeast Michigan board and six other LWIBs have partnered for more than 15 years to address regional workforce development issues as the Southeast Michigan Works Agency Council (SEMWAC). Leaders from each LWIB met monthly to discuss and pursue activities that advance many of the goals identified in this brief. In 2012, the seven SEMWAC LWIBs, community colleges, and regional economic development agencies formed the Workforce Intelligence Network for Southeast Michigan "to create a comprehensive and cohesive workforce development system in Southeast Michigan that provides employers with the talent they need for success." Notable SEMWAC and Workforce Intelligence Network activities included:

- **Training on effective case management practices to line staff from across the region.** SEMWAC developed the "Take Your Career in a New Direction... the Positive Outcomes is You" program. SEMWAC trained more than 160 case managers in the Jay Block Companies' career coaching approach, which SEMWAC used as a guide to develop the job search program and tools.<sup>5</sup> SEMWAC also created flyers, banners, and posters that reinforce the program's core messages that were displayed in American Job Centers across the seven LWIBs.
- **A work group to improve the regional response to large layoffs.** When a local business lays off employees or a plant closes, LWIBs' can help businesses and affected workers access workforce development services through the federally-funded and state-administered Rapid Response program. Representatives from the seven SEMWAC LWIBs developed a common regional approach to Rapid Response, produced an orientation video for employers and job seekers, and conducted an outreach campaign to ensure businesses' awareness of Rapid Response-funded services.
- **A needs assessment to develop priorities for the region.** In 2007, SEMWAC hired a consultant to help conduct a needs assessment and develop a mission statement, goals, and priorities for the collaborative. SEMWAC also partnered with representatives from educational organizations, economic development agencies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies as part of an effort to establish a shared vision and direction for economic and workforce development across the region. According to Southeast Michigan board staff, this effort increased collaboration, communication, and consistency of service delivery across the regional partners.
- **A regional business outreach and marketing campaign.** One of SEMWAC's primary goals was to "establish a 'Corporate Appeal' that could be used across the region to support business outreach and communication." Toward this goal, SEMWAC developed a business outreach and marketing campaign, which includes a common business services folder and brochure and a business services directory website. SEMWAC also advocated for and funded a business solutions professional training for business service representatives from across the region.

SEMWAC was launched with funding from Michigan's Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth and a federal planning grant. Since these funds expired, SEMWAC has secured more than \$3.7 million in state and federal grants—including 21st Century Workforce Initiative funds, a regional National Emergency Grant, U.S. DOL Aging Working Initiative funds, and a State Energy Sector Partnership grant—and participating LWIBs had contributed more than \$400,000 of their WIA formula funds toward regional workforce development initiatives.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Public Law 105-220, Sections 116 and 134.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration Training and Employment Programs. “Summary of Budget Authority, FY 1984 to 2012, by Year of Appropriation.” Washington, DC: DOL, 2014. Updated April 14, 2014.

Social Policy Research Associates. “PY 2012 WIASRD Data Book.” Prepared for U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Performance and Technology. Oakland, CA: Social Policy Research Associates, December 2, 2013.

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<sup>3</sup>Eberts, Randall W. “How Local Workforce Investment Boards Can Help Support Job Creation.” *Employment Research*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2013, pp. 1–4.

U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. “Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative: Solicitation for Grant Applications. Washington, DC: DOL, November 17, 2005.

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. “Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development: Selected Regions. Fact Sheet.” Washington, DC: DOL, n.d. Available at <http://www.doleta.gov/pdf/wired%20fact%20sheet.pdf>. Accessed May 28, 2014.

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“Notice of Availability of Funds and Solicitation for Grant Applications for Workforce Innovation Fund Grants.” Washington, DC: November, 5, 2011. Available at <http://www.doleta.gov/grants/pdf/SGA-DFA-PY-11-05.pdf>. Accessed May 28, 2014.

<sup>5</sup>See <http://www.jayblock.com/>.

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

Through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Congress allocated about \$2 billion annually for employment and training services that states and their Local Workforce Investment Areas (local areas) provided through their Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. WIA mandated that job seekers and employers have access to employment and training resources provided by more than a dozen workforce system partners through American Job Centers. At these centers, job seekers could access core services, such as information on local labor markets and job openings. In addition, eligible adults and dislocated workers could receive intensive services, such as career counseling and skills assessments, and training services. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which superseded WIA, made important changes to the public workforce systems but largely maintained the services provided through the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs.

This issue brief is one in a series of briefs that presents findings from the WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Gold Standard Evaluation, which is being conducted for the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Employment and Training Administration (ETA). The study examines the implementation, effectiveness, and benefits and costs of the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs using an experimental design. The study occurred in 28 local areas that were randomly selected to participate. For more information about the evaluation, please visit the [project web page](#).

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