

Florida's Great Northwest INC

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Focus: Grow a vibrant and sustainable economy for all 16 counties in Northwest Florida that creates nationally and globally competitive advantages for the development of key industry clusters, increases the income and prosperity of workers and families, ensures healthy communities and a vibrant quality of life, and preserves the natural beauty and resources of the region.

Geographic Area Served: 16 counties in the Northwest Peninsula of Florida are a part of the Great Northwest Initiative. The counties are: Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, Holmes, Washington, Bay, Jackson, Calhoun, Gulf, Liberty, Gadsden, Leon, Wakulla, Jefferson, and Franklin

Participant Age Level: No age is specified in the website but the program of work generally focuses on working with high school, as well as the five community colleges, and four university level education institutions in the region as well as business persons who would be able to execute business contracts.

Funding Sources: The WIRED Initiative, created and funded by the United States Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration with a \$15 million dollar grant, is designed to support the development of a regional, integrated approach to workforce and economic development and education. The ultimate goal of WIRED is to expand employment and advancement opportunities for American workers and catalyze the creation of high-skill and high-wage jobs.

The initiative is primarily established as a performance-based grant program that requires a 100 percent match. Incorporated into the initiative are guidelines that enhance the long-term sustainability of the program, establish a minimum wage and benefit structure for which job creation assistance will be provided, and incorporate the five workforce investment boards in the region and their associated one-stop workforce development centers into the initiative governance and program delivery

Key Services Abstract: The vision of Florida's Great Northwest grows a sustainable economy throughout Northwest Florida that embraces the rural, suburban and urban components of the region. The strategy focuses on job creation and includes :

- Diversifying the Northwest Florida economy, ensuring strength in multiple industry clusters, as well as strengthening world trade markets.
- Lessening the burden of government by focusing on business development that complements Northwest Florida's existing infrastructure, matches Florida's competitive strengths, and minimizes the reliance on incentives for business development.

- Establishing and strengthening international trade, including the import and export of goods and services as well as reverse foreign direct investment in the region.
- Integrating education, workforce, infrastructure, quality of life, and smart growth as integral elements to diversify Florida's economy.
- Focusing on quality development through embracing an environment that:
 - Fosters the development of globally competitive businesses.
 - Provides, through the development of high wage/high skill jobs in knowledge-based industries, annual increases in the per capita income of the region.
 - Discourages off-shoring by encouraging the development of high-margin businesses.
 - Corrects the region's existing two-tiered or barbell economy through a focus on job creation in the \$30,000 to \$80,000 annual income range.
 - Understands that rural projects are different in magnitude than urban/suburban projects.

The strategy incorporates a holistic approach to economic development. It incorporates the basic economic development principals of product development, retention and expansion of existing industry, attraction, and new business development or entrepreneurship, as well as adding an international trade component.

Florida's Great Northwest WIRED Initiative examined all 26 industry clusters represented in the region but focuses on creating high wage, high skill jobs in the most promising areas which are: Aerospace and Defense, Health Care, Life Sciences, Information Technology and Electronics Engineering and Construction Services. Florida's Great Northwest has developed a governance council and industry council for each of the targeted industries. Each council incorporates membership from the regional partners, including businesses, which must represent at least 50 percent of the councils' membership in order to keep the initiatives business driven.

Summary of Key Benefits and Results:

Northwest Florida is working hard to create an environment that attracts new jobs and businesses, retains, attracts, and educates the kinds of workers needed in the knowledge-based economy, and builds a platform for innovation and entrepreneurship, all encompassed in a uniquely positive quality of life.

The entrepreneurial focus of Florida's Great Northwest is on bringing new technology to the market as well as supporting research and development activities across the region and within target industries. A key strategy in Florida's Great Northwest regional economic development plan is to support the growth of locally-founded target industry businesses. Current efforts in supporting entrepreneurial development include the formation of an Entrepreneurship Advisory Council tasked with identifying the spectrum of needs to assist entrepreneurs, plus an analysis of the status of the region.

The initiative is focused on development of an *entrepreneurial business climate* and *creative communities* that appeal to the new generation of workers. To be successful in new business development in knowledge-based industry clusters, the region must embrace an environment supportive of entrepreneurial activity and must create the type of work and living environment supportive of the "creative Class" or the techie society.

The creative community philosophy has been gaining exposure and acceptance in Tallahassee and Pensacola. Additionally, the Gulf Coast from Pensacola to Mexico Beach already has in place many of the attributes critical to creative communities

Florida's Great Northwest focuses on supporting the philosophy of developing creative communities that attract and retain the increasingly diverse, mobile workers who will drive tomorrow's economy.

Florida's Great Northwest has created a PR campaign that promotes the entrepreneurial foundations that are already in place across Northwest Florida as well as the region's entrepreneurial success stories in an effort to draw attention to and build on the positive entrepreneurial climate already in existence in the region.

Florida's Great Northwest developed a strategy that fosters the development of a regional infrastructure embracing emerging businesses.

Florida's Great Northwest facilitated the development of local "New Business Investment Clubs," a strategy that is working in other states. The investment club is a partnership of local community philanthropists who fill in missing parts of emerging clusters by actually providing the necessary start-up capital.

(An example is a group of community leaders that decided their community needed a hotel, so they each contributed monthly to an investment club until they had the equity necessary for down payment on a hotel, with the local bank providing the balance of the financing.) This is a particularly effective rural development strategy.

(Another example was a group of manufacturers who realized they each had a need for a specific supplier. They invested the equity to start the business and secured the operating line of credit by guaranteeing orders for the product.) This strategy is essentially a "buy your own business" philosophy that incorporates enough local support to make the business profitable.

Florida's Great Northwest is endeavoring to strengthen and expand incubators and related entrepreneurial services throughout the region. Though the Northwest Florida region boasts a number of strong R&D institutions, the innovation support framework that helps to translate research into commercially viable products or services emerged as an area in which improvements can be made. This initiative focuses on strengthening business incubation and entrepreneurial services resources and thereby enabling the region to capitalize fully on its innovative capacity.

Florida's Great Northwest continues to develop services such as the SBIR/STTR Phase 0 and Phase 1.5 Programs that enhance the research and commercialization capacity of the region's entrepreneurial businesses.

Lessons Learned: The common performance measures that the WIBS have to focus are outdated and focused on placing people in jobs not on job creation which is the economic development paradigm essential to growing a vibrant economy.

Focusing on job creation is the way to ensure that the Florida's Great Northwest initiative can meet their grant requirements and the needs of the region. They focus on full-time jobs created (full-time offering benefits and sustainable)

Communities that embrace failure can create an entrepreneur friendly environment.

Florida's Great Northwest could not make the Self Employment Assistance program work for individuals but could provide incentives for entrepreneurs to focus on target industries. Serial entrepreneurs have provided some of the biggest bang for the investment incentives.

There is often a gap in the needed seed capital beyond the \$100,000 that is often available from angel or foundational investors.

The rework of the Panama Canal will positively impact the Gulf Coast region of Florida when completed because of the interstate routes north to the densely populated east coast regions.

The low wage jobs in the hospitality industry have a negative impact on raising the wage scale in the region.

Spin off companies to become supply chain partners in the aerospace and defense industry have been good entrepreneurial ventures in the region.

Tax credits are not very helpful to start up entrepreneurs. Refundable items are more helpful as they help with cash flow of new businesses.