

Piedmont Triad WIRED Project

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Focus: There is a transformation team of area university chancellors and presidents working under the leadership of Leslie Boney of UNC central administration who are focusing on the big leadership needs of economic development. They are focusing on entrepreneurship. Rose Johnson of Western Carolina University has led the Associates Degree in Entrepreneurship Education. Advantage West has developed the Certified Entrepreneur Communities initiative and the PTP WIRED is examining that as a concept to be replicated. High School and Community Colleges have generally been linked through tech prep initiatives. Grants for REAL and Family Health Care have been provided to advance the entrepreneurial preparation of students. Elon University has a summer camp for students interested in Entrepreneurship.

YES is a WIA youth program operating in Surry County that has entrepreneurship preparation programs in three school systems - Surry County, Elkin City Schools and Mt. Airy City schools. (This is one of PTP's WIRED funded grant activities.)

Geographic Area Served: The [Piedmont Triad](#) is a dynamic region of more than 1.5 million residents and a labor force of approximately 820,000 workers. Geographically, it consists of twelve central North Carolina counties, including: Alamance, Caswell, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Guilford, Montgomery, Randolph, Rockingham, Stokes, Surry and Yadkin. The largest cities in the region are Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem.

Participant Age Level: The work has been limited to those over age 16. There can be some exceptions for students age 14 to 16 students with DOL approval and in accordance with Youth initiatives of the WIA.

Funding Sources: First round \$15 million WIRED grant as well as the use of other funding in the region as well as business organization contributions of services. Many of the initiatives have been operations from university or community college budgets.

Key Services Abstract: Six Workforce Boards have linked to a TriadWorks Consortium. PTP is working on building a workforce portal for the region .Focus is on 4 different industry clusters of the economy as well as building an entrepreneurial network. The region is looking at the Certified Entrepreneurial Communities program that Advantage West has developed to determine how to replicate it.

The Piedmont Triad Wired is working with the National Information Clearing House project which is being developed with a DOL grant. It will help provide information to regions desiring to advance their economic structures.

Many partner organizations have developed or shared services to meet the needs of emerging entrepreneurs. Some key partners are PTEN, Area Universities, Community Colleges and Surry County, Elkin City, and Mt. Airy city school systems. (High schools offering Entrepreneurship Education courses) and Elon University offering summer camps for students interested in Entrepreneurship. Most people that have been asked to partner have responded positively. People in key roles have used their roles to encourage changes that are needed.

Summary of Key Benefits and Results: There are programs being developed to provide some certified regional support networks, such as the Piedmont Triad WIRED, Finger Lakes WIRED, and Northwest Florida WIRED. They offer tutorials for small business owners.

PTEN – Piedmont Triad Entrepreneur Network has existed for 5 to 8 years and it offers the Capital Connections Conference and the Angels Network that focuses on funding for high growth businesses.

PT Leadership Institute is organized to address the needs of emerging leaders in the region as they approach regionalism. There are four areas of focus that they have decided to use as their action agenda. One of the four areas is entrepreneurship. The Center for Creative Leadership is a partner in this work.

Many of the initiatives have been pulled together to focus on the needs of the entrepreneurs in the community. Entrepreneurs are guiding the initiatives that they see as needed.

A leadership cohort of entrepreneurs are being developed and asked to help make the area more entrepreneurial. They are creating the services they determine are needed by them and entrepreneurs like them throughout the Piedmont Triad region.

The Yadkin Craft Guild which operates in both NC and VA works to help crafters who are dislocated workers to become self sufficient. They learned that a mentor/apprenticeship system works best. The major problems they encountered are that it is hard to build a business with no income. Entrepreneurs want to do things their way and don't respond to mentoring very easily thus it is hard to keep them afloat.

Lessons Learned: Rural counties need most assistance and may be the greatest advantage to improving economic success. The people generally have ideas for new business ventures and have a strong work ethic.

We have learned how hard it is to communicate with new entrepreneurs! They are busy, they are often isolated, and they are not in organized groups.

There is a wealth of resources but there is little hand holding mentoring support. Many organizations want to tell a new entrepreneur to bring me your business plan and we can tell you where to go for resource assistance. The truly needy businesses may not have business planning skills. The accelerator concept does not seem to work, many new entrepreneurs need hands on assistance or they lose momentum – They are often people with ideas but not business skills – people need devoted interest to the project they want to pursue.

When an incubator – accelerator concept has been tried, there can be turf problems because of political clout problems between small business alliances, community colleges, and chamber support systems. Reporting on results can be hard also because of privacy issues. Resources are generally not the problem. (Community Colleges have small business centers, Universities have the Small Business Technology Development Centers, NCSU has the Industrial Extension Service, SCORE is available in conjunction with SBA, Small Business Loans, and Chambers of Commerce has focus for helping beginning businesses)

Co-location of entrepreneurial services is a good thing but it is hard to develop because organizations have a hard time paying part of the rent for space. They can pay their rent but to co-locate and pay partial rent often gets into some agency or grant funding issues. The issue for some organizations is a choice between having funds for client services or paying rent for a place to locate. Thus it is hard to get approval for renting space. * Perhaps some policy guidelines would be helpful if DOL/ETA would consider this issue.

One of the best models to learn from is the Prosperity Centers that are operated by Goodwill Industries of NW NC. They focus on the individuals coming in and ask about their hopes and dreams and they ask about their barriers. Then they work to move them toward their hopes and dreams by removing the barriers. (In Winston-Salem Sherry Carpenter and Art Gibb are contacts)