

Workforce Investment System (WIS) Initiative/Program

Rochester, NY Finger Lakes Region

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Focus: Finger Lakes WIRED was created to link the communities of education, workforce development and economic development, creating an entrepreneurial, industry-driven, integrated system. The nine-county Finger Lakes region is undergoing an historic restructuring. It came to depend on the success of Eastman Kodak, Xerox, and Bausch & Lomb, creating a big-company manufacturing culture that has floundered as technologies changed and global economic shifts left the region in a state of decline. This project is based on a deep commitment to creating fundamental change in the region.

Finger Lakes WIRED has been designed and is being implemented by a strong team of business, investor, entrepreneurial, philanthropic, government and academic leaders. These leaders share a vision to transform the Finger Lakes region into a premier place in which to innovate, invest in entrepreneurial operations, educate workers, and empower them to be agile, adaptable and aligned with global opportunities.

Key Strategies to support the focus are:

1. Energize the region's entrepreneurial economy
2. Catalyze regional innovation and convert orphan or under-utilized technology into vibrant business ventures
3. Educate and empower workers to successfully compete in the changing global economy
4. Build a collaborative regional education, workforce and economic development system.

Geographic Area Served: The Finger Lakes initiative is a partnership of more than 23 economic development, education, workforce development and business organizations in nine counties surrounding the Rochester, New York area. The nine counties in the Rochester area that are involved in the Finger Lakes economic enhancement initiative are: Orleans, Genesee, Monroe, Wayne, Wyoming, Livingston, Ontario, Yates, and Seneca.

Participant Age Level: Students are served as early as middle school in an effort to help students understand the opportunities to innovate and become entrepreneurs. High School camps and instruction are provided in order to begin the flow of a pipeline of workers with an entrepreneurial mind set. Community colleges and universities provide a range of courses for students and adults in the community who need assistance in advancing their entrepreneurial efforts.

Funding Sources: The key funding for beginning the initiative came through a round one \$15 million dollar WIRED grant from the US DOL and has since become a sustainable effort as the

partners for the initiative have worked to either generate the funding or to get the initiative into regular budgets.

Key Services Abstract: The Finger Lakes region was once among America's most innovative and entrepreneurial. The decline of its large manufacturers in the last two decades is evidenced by increasing poverty and unemployment, decreasing wages, low graduation rates and sluggish job creation. The area has responded by cultivating technology development organizations and funding services and facilities for start-ups. Economic analysis, however, highlights an absence of integrated collaboration and sharing of best practices among regional stakeholders; this has created a barrier for transforming the Finger Lakes region into an innovative and entrepreneurial economy. A report prepared by the US Council on Competitiveness for two local organizations reinforced this conclusion: *“Greater Rochester has the assets necessary to develop a strong entrepreneurial economy. Indeed, the Rochester area surpasses most regions in the U.S. on many dimensions relevant to supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. However, to date, the region has not become an entrepreneurial success story...A fundamental challenge is cultural - the region lacks a strong entrepreneurial environment.”*

The twenty-one members of the Finger Lakes partnership represent critical leadership throughout the Finger Lakes region; strategic leaders from all sectors have worked to be agents for change in the region. RochesterWorks Inc., the non-profit arm of the Monroe County/Rochester Workforce Investment Board (WIB), leads the project, employing the project management team, facilitating partner projects and maintaining communication among regional, state, and federal stakeholders. In cooperation, the Genesee, Livingston, Orleans, and Wyoming WIB and the Finger Lakes WIB (comprised of Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates counties) connected the initiatives to job seekers, employers and education systems. Government partners include the City of Rochester, the County of Monroe, Empire State Development and Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, which represents eight rural counties and is the planning entity for the New York State-designated Economic Development District. Public/private entrepreneurial leaders for this project are Greater Rochester Enterprise, High Tech Finger Lakes Partnership WIRED Program Application Rochester, Infotonics Technology Center, Rochester Business Alliance, and the Cornell Agriculture and Food Tech Park.

The academic community is represented by the region's leading universities (University of Rochester and Rochester Institute of Technology) and the three community colleges (Finger Lakes, Monroe and Genesee). Led by the business community, private and public sectors formed Greater Rochester Enterprise three years ago; the community has shown it is now willing to work together in ways that were not possible a few years ago. This commitment is evident in that the partners that have joined together to increase worker skills and are placing an emphasis on the talents of its entrepreneurial community and the sharing of infrastructure, leveraging each other's strengths, all of which amplify the region's capacity for innovation and build a stronger economy. The investment community is an important partner, represented by the Rochester Angel Network and Trillium Group, a local venture capital firm. Philanthropic support for regional job creation and entrepreneurship is given by Rochester Area Community Foundation.

The Partnership identified seventeen measurable outcomes of this project, including: increased employment and retention; improved earnings and reversed decline in wages (relative to the national average); increased job growth and the number of start-up companies, including from orphan technologies; improved employer satisfaction; involvement of high school students and teachers in entrepreneurial activities; increased participation in training by companies and

individuals, including training of would-be entrepreneurs and innovators in high-growth sectors; doubled participation in business development; creation of industry-led clusters that stimulate sector growth; and economic development intervention with companies identified as high-risk. The outcomes directly involve and impact thousands of people and improve the business climate for the 1.2 million residents of the Finger Lakes region.

The lead organization for the Partnership - RochesterWorks, Inc. The Governing Board, consisting of presidents (including one representing the eighteen schools of the Rochester Area Colleges), CEOs or chairs from partner organizations, a school superintendent representative, and chief elected officials of the region, have set overall strategy for the Partnership to ensure the project addresses continually its mission of regional transformation. The Operations Team, managers from partner organizations, ensure region-wide engagement and project execution and initiative sustainability after the WIRED funding no longer exists.

Implementation Teams oversee the four initiative areas: entrepreneurship, innovation, workforce development and economic development. Each team, interdisciplinary by membership, coordinates specific initiatives and manages the application process from within the region for two funds embedded in this proposal: the *New Initiatives Fund* and the *Workforce Innovations Fund*. A National Advisory Panel of seven internationally recognized experts assure the Partnership is utilizing best practices effectively and help the Partnership accelerate the integration of economic and workforce development, which is central to this project.

Summary of Key Benefits and Results:

The Finger Lakes Partnership has leveraged over \$22 million of relevant partner funding. The funding will catalyze the region, resulting in a true integration of powerful resources, propelling the economy from a period of slow decline to one of national leadership in regional innovation and entrepreneurship.

Youth Entrepreneur Academy (YEA) teaches students how to establish a business venture or enterprise, and participants write a business plan, receive mentorship from local leaders and start their own real business. The 2009 program model was redesigned based on student and parent feedback and will shift program delivery from college campuses to high schools. The first high school cohort launched in Victor in January 2009. In the fall of 2009 nine high schools will begin operating YEA on their campuses.

In the summer of 2008 scholarship opportunities were provided to encourage 16-18 year old high school students to explore the possibilities linked to studies in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and help enhance awareness among students and parents of the region as a premier locale for STEM career opportunities.

In 2008 scholarships were provided for youth at the following locations:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County, 4-H Camp Bristol Hills for 16 students
- Finger Lakes Institute - Hobart & William Smith Colleges, Kids College for 7 students
- Infotonics Summer Science Camp for 30 students
- Rochester Institute of Technology, National Institute for the Deaf for 25 students
- Finger Lakes Council, Boy Scouts of America for 30 students
- Monroe Community College Career Track for 15 students

In August of 2008, 26 educators from 14 school districts participated in this four-day industry immersion and professional development program. Educators were placed in industry shadow teams and interacted with leaders of 25 businesses in Advanced Manufacturing, Food and Agriculture, Information Technology, Biotech/Life Sciences and Optics to learn more about career opportunities and the skill requirements of those industries. This experience allows the educators to connect their classroom instruction with the workplaces their students will be entering in the future.

Educators developed informational presentations to take back to their respective schools and districts along with personalized plans for implementation in the upcoming school year. It is estimated that over 1,000 students will be indirectly impacted by the program.

Five funded programs are dedicated to providing youth ages 16-21 with the skills and competencies necessary for success in high-growth industries, and encouraging them to complete high school and pursue technical training. The programs provide a combination of On-the-Job training and work experience in the industry in order for them to be more aware of the demands of the workplaces in the region. Nearly 150 students have participated in these programs.

The Entrepreneurial Network (TEN) is a six-month program designed to introduce local entrepreneurs to new ideas by optimizing exposure to and interaction with leading entrepreneurial experts through boot camps, workshops and panel events. To date TEN has served more than 104 executives from 90 companies spanning the nine-county region.

TEN members have won approximately 8 SBIR grants, created more than 50 jobs, increased revenue by more than \$7 million and secured more than \$9 million in angel and venture capital investments.

Technology Commercialization trains qualified students, researchers and entrepreneurs with the skills technology development via classroom and on-the-job training and experience necessary to launch new businesses and raise capital, and positions them to become serial entrepreneurs. Specific training is provided in the areas of business and commercialization principles, business development and technology development via classroom and on-the-job training. The Technology Commercialization project has directly generated: \$2 million+ in investments and grants; 3 new jobs created; and 483 entrepreneurs, researchers and students have received tech commercialization training.

Pre-Seed workshops foster a collaboration of technologists and/ or inventors knowledgeable about business and provide an assessment of potential for a specific invention. In November 2008 a multi-regional conference with 70 participants from the Rochester and Geneva region pre-seed workshops was held with the aim of increasing the visibility and profile of entrepreneurial training and support provided by PSWs, as well as to enhance multi-regional collaboration and extend support to underserved areas. Over 170 researchers, entrepreneurs and students have benefited from these workshops since 2006.

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) programs advance the region's small business tech transfer efforts. Specific, hands-on training is provided to businesses services were utilized develop three Phase II SBIR/STTR grant applications. Since program inception five firms received SBIR/STTR awards leading to almost \$1.3 million in federal dollars reaching the region.

The Scholarship program allows businesses to apply for up to \$25,000 in funding to upgrade the skills of their workers to meet the demands of emerging industries including Alternative Energy, Biotech & Life Sciences, Food & Agriculture, Optics & Imaging, Advanced Manufacturing, Information Technology, Engineering, Business Services and Health Care sectors. All funded training leads to the acquisition of transferable skills and/or industry recognized credentials.

Since the program launch in September 2006, Finger Lakes Wired has allocated over \$3.7 million for 205 unique businesses to increase the skills of 5,700 workers, with \$6.4 million in matching funds provided by business.

Incumbent Worker Training programs have reached over 7,000 workers in the past three years to provide them upgraded transferable skills that can be used in emerging industries.

See <http://www.fingerlakeswired.com/about.aspx> for more details of results achieved in the Finger Lakes region through this initiative.

Lessons Learned: Bringing partners together from throughout a region is a key to enhancing the economic development of a region. Developing the capacity to work jointly through an open network is one key to the communication of the goals that must be driven by all the partners. It generally takes 2-3 years to reach a point where the momentum is such that the partnerships can achieve shared goals.

Getting beyond talk to strategic doing is very hard. It generally takes longer to ramp things up than expected because of the beauracries involved.

Partners must learn together and create win-win situations for all partners in order to continue sustainable partnerships that are powerful and focused on shared goals.

Community colleges need to work jointly to develop courses that will be provided throughout a region. They can market the courses jointly, seek scholarship support jointly, select students jointly and provide the courses in the most appropriate locations as demanded by the clients.

When more than one WIB exists in a region they can jointly plan to meet the needs of the region's businesses and unemployed or under-employed persons. The joint working of multiple partners focused on common goals will allow the resources available to the one-stop center staff to be enhanced.

Having a person in a coordination role is key to ensuring that programs done by multiple partners throughout a region is key to effectiveness and sustainability.

To develop an entrepreneurial mindset in a region there has to be a lot of learning on behalf of educators, parents, students, business and economic development leaders, and those leading collaboratives that brings partners together to revitalize a region.

Business attraction models are no longer going to work to enhance the economies of a region. We must learn to develop regional economies through entrepreneurial initiatives.

Developing a pipeline of entrepreneurs must start with changing the K-12 education system and continue throughout the higher education system.