

Building Employer- Responsive Workforce Systems at the State Level

A “HOW TO” MANUAL

WINS 

Workforce Innovation Networks

January 2008



Taking Care of Business:

A Series of How To Manuals on Creating and Sustaining Employer-based Workforce Development Intermediaries

As WINs worked with selected employer-based intermediaries, the partner organizations captured exemplary practices, lessons learned, and “how to” approaches of those that successfully fulfilled this role. Presented here and in related publications are these experiences in the form of four manuals. Each explains in detail how to replicate a successful intermediary strategy and tailor it to your needs. These manuals are designed for workforce professionals and employer intermediaries that wish to use the public workforce system to address the dual demands of employers and job seekers. The WINs partners present these manuals as tools to help solve our nation’s most pressing workforce challenges.

The manuals cover four topics:

Creating Community Advancement Intermediaries: Implementing a model that enables employers to move entry-level, low-skilled workers up career ladders, at the same time creating vacancies for new workers entering the job market.

Partnering with One-Stop Career Centers: Advice for businesses on collaborating with One-Stop Career Centers in strong public-private partnerships to train both incumbent workers and new entrants to the labor force.

Providing Business Services: Positioning employer intermediaries to provide business services through the local workforce system—and using this new position as a tool to grow both association membership and the number of employers who use and benefit from that system.

Building Employer-Responsive Workforce Systems at the State Level: State-level employer intermediaries organize and facilitate task forces of key stakeholders to make state workforce systems more effective and responsive to employer needs and to better align state economic and workforce development policies and programs.

In addition, WINs has prepared a guide, *Organizing and Supporting the Employer Role in Workforce Development*, that has two purposes. One is to help employer organizations to understand why it is important to better organize and support the employer side of the employment equation and to engage employers more effectively in workforce development. The second is to show the leaders of employer and employer-serving organizations why and how they should become “workforce development intermediaries.”

These manuals and *The Guide* may be especially useful to organizations involved in the U.S. Department of Labor’s WIRED Initiative. The WIRED Initiative focuses on labor market areas that comprise multiple jurisdictions within states or across state borders. It supports innovative approaches to education and workforce and economic development that prepare workers to succeed in a globalizing economy. Through the WIRED initiative, governors have a unique opportunity to design and implement strategic approaches to regional economic development and job growth. These manuals provide critical lessons from WINs’ on-the-ground experience.

These manuals and the guide will help you understand what to do and how to create and sustain employer-based workforce development intermediaries. The state and local Workforce Investment Boards and employer intermediaries described in these manuals did it, and so can you!

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Acknowledgments

This publication is one in a series written collaboratively by the WINs partners. Special thanks go to Basil Whiting, Russell Hamm, Rosemary Lahasky, Jeanette Nigro, Bob Watrus, and Amy Robins for their extensive contributions during the programmatic work and in writing these publications based on those experiences.

The WINs partners would also like to express our appreciation for the funding support and professional collegiality of The Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, and of The Ford Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, and The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation during the ten years of work by WINs on developing and promoting the model of employer associations as workforce development intermediaries.



Building Employer-Responsive Workforce Systems at the State Level

Introduction

The public workforce system, as established under the federal Workforce Investment Act, provides its services through local One-Stop Career Centers governed by state and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). Research from Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs—has confirmed, as is generally accepted, that employers throughout the nation complain that this system does not sufficiently understand their needs. Often it does not train or refer new job candidates with the skills employers require. And it too rarely provides the right training to upgrade the skills of incumbent workers to meet the challenges of high technology and global competition. WINs research also has confirmed, in support of other studies, that many employers know little about the public workforce system and seldom utilize it.

From WINs' perspective, each community's workforce system as a whole includes not only the One-Stop Centers but also other components—schools, community-based and faith-based organizations, private training providers, and postsecondary institutions, especially community and technical colleges. Seldom do these various institutions comprise a coherent system that adequately meets the needs of local economies, employers, workers, and job seekers. Further, the various components of the workforce development “system” seldom collaborate with agencies charged with economic development—whether to attract firms to a region or to support new and emergent employers within that region.

Efforts to improve this situation often focus on the local level, seeking to upgrade services or enhance collaboration within this array of agencies and institutions. Yet almost all of the components of both workforce and economic development systems are ultimately controlled by state governments. Federal funds generally flow through state agencies that may also draw on state appropriations; state-level governing bodies control policies and practices of most local components of these systems and/or license and regulate their functioning. For example, the federal workforce development system is governed at the state level by state Workforce Investment Boards, appointed by governors, which establish policies and procedures for the local WIBs. Community colleges and economic development agencies are also governed at the state level in almost every case.

If employers want these systems to be easier to navigate and more responsive to their needs, then a major point of intervention is logically at the state level.

Why State Employer Associations Should Take the Lead

A state-level employer organization can be an effective steward of change to improve a state's workforce development system. One reason is that such associations can reach and convene most of the relevant stakeholders in the system. Associations also have the stature, contacts, political power, and mobilizing ability that are needed to foster and implement change. And associations have staying power: political leadership in legislatures and governor's offices may come and go and, in most cases, face a variety of changing needs and pressures, but state employer associations are generally permanent fixtures and can maintain long-term commitments.

This manual can help leaders of state-level employer associations—generally affiliates of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and/or the National Association of Manufacturers—take on this challenge. It provides examples from South Carolina, Washington State, and Wisconsin, where state associations did so with support from WINs and the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor.

Step 1: How to Begin

Ensure a Clear Purpose and Strong Internal Commitment

Before starting, a state employer association should clearly articulate its reasons for becoming involved in building a more demand-driven state workforce development system. It should do this for its own leaders, board, and member firms. Later, it will also use this in recruiting other stakeholders. The association should not proceed until its leaders and board are firmly committed to the kind of process and mutual outcomes described in this manual.

Adopt a Strategy of Collaboration Among Key Stakeholders

State employer associations often advocate for legislation and governmental operating policies that support employers and healthy state and local economies. The associations are fully aware that each of the various components of the workforce and economic development systems has its constituencies who will defend their “turfs”—their roles and their appropriations. Facilitating change in procedure, policy, practice, or structure in these agencies and systems will be challenging, so success will depend on building a strong consensus among key constituencies and among political leaders for needed changes.

In such circumstances, one promising strategy for a state employer association is to utilize its stature and its political and other contacts to *convene and facilitate a collaborative process* over two, three, or more years, reaching out to the various stakeholders of the workforce and economic development systems. The overarching purpose is to involve them in an effort to make state and regional economies better able to compete in the global economy.

Assess Political/Economic Conditions and the Association's Assets

A collaborative effort to build a more demand-driven state workforce system is more likely to succeed if state political and economic conditions are favorable and the association has the assets needed to take on the leadership role. It is important to recognize up front that moving the system at the state level is much more difficult than any comparable local effort. Accomplishing system change of this magnitude has proven to be time-consuming and challenging. Therefore, the association's leaders should ask themselves a number of questions in two areas:

- *Conditions:* Are key workforce system stakeholders and political leadership aware that the state needs to enhance its ability to compete in the global economy and that workforce issues play a critical role in the state's ability to accomplish this? Is there a history of key stakeholders working together on various projects? How open to change are key components of the system? Is the political climate—especially the relationship between the governor and legislature—reasonably congenial? Is there room in the state budget to allocate more resources for workforce development (e.g., for incumbent worker training)?
- *Association Assets:* Does the association have a reputation as an honest broker, open to hearing all sides of a question? Can it reach and convene all relevant stakeholders? Are its senior leaders well regarded by most/all stakeholders? Can those leaders devote the time needed to lead a process over several years? Does the association have—or can it raise—enough funding to pay for meeting costs, facilitator fees, consultant fees to undertake studies, and more, over a two-year process or longer?

If the answers are generally positive, associations may feel confident in proceeding. *If not, then the association would be well advised to wait until conditions are more favorable.*

Step 2: Implementing the Change Process

Convene and Facilitate a State Workforce Team

The association should assemble a roster of key stakeholders and recruit them to participate on a “State Workforce Team” that meets periodically over two to three years to plan and begin to implement changes in the state workforce system. In general, the goal will be to make the workforce system more responsive to employers, more supportive of economic development, and more effective in serving employers, workers, and job seekers.

The State Team can vary in size—probably 12 to 20 members. It should include such individuals as: one or more leaders of the association, a few major employers from the state's key employment sectors, a representative from the governor's office, perhaps key legislators, a representative of organized labor, and the heads of key agencies. These agencies include those responsible for the workforce investment system, the education system, the higher education system (especially community and vocational/technical colleges), the

welfare and anti-poverty programs, and the department of commerce (especially in its role as the economic development system, which is often lodged in commerce departments).

The association will staff the State Team and provide professional facilitation for its meetings, either from its own staff or from qualified consultants. The State Team's first meeting should explore and define its initial goals and initiate such studies and subcommittees as its members agree on. The Team then meets periodically to approve recommendations and devise additional steps to be taken by itself, its subcommittees, or its member organizations.

State Teams can vary considerably in the way they function, depending on the degree to which they cohere into an effective and committed group. This, in turn, depends on relations among the members and on the quality of facilitation and other staff support. Some State Teams are highly effective groups that meet numerous times—South Carolina's met fourteen times in two years. In other cases, the State Team may meet only a few times as a full body (the Washington team met once; Wisconsin, twice) yet operate in subgroups, or its members may provide important individual support to the association staff and others pursuing the Team's agreed goals. However, it will be important to ensure that the membership and purpose of this team do not duplicate the existing state Workforce Investment Board.

Seek Specific Outcomes

A State Team process should lead to an agreed-upon list of desired products, outcomes, or changes in state workforce systems. The list presented here reflects the broad spectrum of such products. It is not exhaustive of all possibilities but rather reflects the actual accomplishments of the South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin State Teams as part of WINs.

Inventory of state workforce development services: All three states felt the need to begin by gaining a better understanding of the nature and range of workforce services available. Hence, the State Team commissioned inventories of such workforce services, then used the results and made them available, sometimes via Web sites, to employers and others throughout the state. This served to deepen the team's knowledge of the state workforce system and also to better familiarize employers with the system and how to access it.

Survey of employers regarding their workforce needs and their views of the assets and liabilities of the state workforce system: This better informed the state workforce agencies as to employer workforce needs and reinforced the commitment of team members to make changes to meet the concerns of employers with how the system was functioning.

A matrix comparing employer workforce needs against the workforce system's offerings and identifying gaps to fill with new or expanded services: This provided important specific opportunities to improve system services.

Adoption of common language for worker skills across the workforce system: For example, a State Team adopted the terminology used by the popular WorkKeys program. This helped promote service consistency across the workforce system, based in language employers found realistic and comfortable.

A roster of business leaders willing to serve on workforce-related boards: A state association surveyed its members on their willingness to serve on State and Local Workforce Investment Boards, community colleges, and other workforce entities. Over 400 executives signed on as candidates for such positions; a year later, 20 of them were serving on such boards. A “sign-up” page for such community service is now on the association’s Web site. This has increased the influence of employers in the governance of the various components of the workforce system.

Training materials for employers, including potential nominees, to sit on boards: A state association developed a “resource book” on the components of the state’s workforce system and how to access its services. The association also offered a two-hour Webinar on the state workforce system, and then added the content to the Web site. These steps responded to a common employer statement that they were reluctant either to use the state workforce system or to participate in its governance because they knew little about it.

Improving WIB/One-Stop business services: A state association worked with a One-Stop Center in southwest Washington to mount a pilot project to make its business services more responsive to the needs of employers. The One-Stop Center contracted its business services to a nationally known firm with highly effective customer services to firms, including tightening job order descriptions and closely screening referrals. The state WIB has taken notice of the fact that employers were highly satisfied with the result of the pilot; a second One-Stop Center has asked the firm to bid on providing its business services. This has helped the One-Stops and the state WIB to better accept that employers are customers of the workforce system and that services must be attuned to their needs.

Design of a “Loaned Executive” program: A state association developed a program in which executives from business and the public workforce system can switch places temporarily. Leaders from both constituencies come to understand the other’s needs and concerns better.

Establishing a workforce development policy committee within a state association: One result of engaging in this change process has been to elevate workforce issues on the agenda of the state association. It has also led to the inclusion of workforce issues on the association’s legislative agenda.

Legislative initiatives: The team in one state supported passage of an Education and Economic Development Act that would establish career clusters, push professional development for teachers, upgrade guidance and counseling, and provide alternatives for poten-

tial student dropouts. In another state, the association hosted an informal coalition to support three bills to provide greater incumbent worker training.

A gubernatorial order relocating the state workforce system: One state moved responsibility for the workforce system from the Employment Security Commission to the state Department of Commerce, where it would be more employer-oriented in its services and more closely linked to economic development efforts. Such a major restructuring ties workforce and economic development policy and practice more closely together.

A comprehensive, five-year strategic plan for enhancing workforce development: In the state that took this step, the plan's key component is the establishment of a senior-level public/private coordinating body to rationalize and coordinate the fragmented services and funding streams. This body is staffed by the Department of Commerce. Such a plan keeps key stakeholders engaged in a process of continuous improvement.

Appointment of the state employer association executive heading the State Workforce Team as director of the state's workforce system: Having effective people from the business world directing such state workforce agencies or sitting on governing bodies better ensures their responsiveness to employer needs.

Step 3: Surmount Challenges

The major challenges facing an association leading a State Team will emerge when assessing the state's political/economic conditions and the association's assets during Step 1. In one of the three pilot sites, South Carolina, the process of building an employer-responsive workforce system at the state level was highly successful because, from a WINs' perspective, conditions were favorable and the association brought impressive assets to meeting the challenges. Key stakeholders had been accustomed to working on similar task forces, there was a broad awareness that the state needed to improve its workforce system, and the political system was supportive. The South Carolina Chamber of Commerce was well regarded, had excellent relationships with the key stakeholders, and assigned an effective Chamber executive to lead the State Team. The Chamber could build on some of the projects instituted prior to the inception of the WINs initiative.

Wisconsin and Washington faced more difficult political situations, and WINs accomplishments were less comprehensive. The most difficult specific challenge that each association faced was that of facilitating a large team of individuals with conflicting political and other interests that made it difficult for them to embrace a common, comprehensive vision. These State Teams thus chose to pursue specific, discrete projects, with limited but tangible outcomes that could be accomplished mainly by association personnel and consultants and within the timeframe available.

What Constitutes Success?

At the outset, it is important not only to set goals but also to determine measurable indicators of success—tangible and intangible—in a long, complex collaborative process.

Perhaps the most impressive tangible product from the three states was South Carolina’s five-year plan for revamping and restructuring state workforce services, along with initial changes implemented during the project’s two-year timeframe. But success could also be represented by a number of the specific outcomes listed in Step 2, all of which were deemed by an association and participating stakeholders as significant and worthy investments of their time and effort. It would be appropriate to poll or interview State Team members on this question. Another indicator of success would be greater use by employers of the state workforce system and greater satisfaction with its services. Surveying employers on these views would yield measures of such success.

Less tangible successes would include increased respect for the state employer association and its acceptance by workforce system stakeholders as a valued colleague and “player” in this arena of state policy. Surveys would be appropriate here, too, as would interviews of stakeholder leaders. In addition, the appointment of state employer association personnel to state WIBs and other governing or advisory bodies, or to state executive branch positions, would be indicators of success. Increased membership and dues for the state association, because of its successful activism in changing the workforce system, is the kind of indicator that is heavily valued by membership bodies like state chambers or other employer associations.

More broadly, if the reforms and improvements in the workforce system help make the state more competitive, then success would mean improvements in the state and local economies, as indicated by the relocation of firms into the state and the growing of targeted clusters or sectors of industry.



South Carolina Chamber of Commerce

The South Carolina Chamber realized virtually all of the elements of the model proposed by WINs and had impressive outcomes. The effectiveness of its State Team exceeded expectations, and significant structural changes in the state's system resulted, with more improvements likely as the five-year plan rolls out and the team continues to support that plan.

In early 2004, soon after the WINs state project began, the associate vice president of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce formed a State Team comprising 20 high-profile representatives of a broad range of public and private workforce stakeholder organizations, many of whom had previously worked together on state committees and task forces related to education or training issues. The team quickly coalesced into an effective, committed working group that met 14 times during the project's two-year operating phase (far exceeding the quarterly meetings suggested by WINs).

The team's first need was to better understand what comprised the state's workforce development resources. It hired a consultant, who produced a detailed compendium of highly fragmented workforce-related services and funding streams, totaling \$1.1 billion in federal funds each year. From this knowledge base, the team went on to influence or directly cause a number of significant outcomes:

- In April 2005, the governor reassigned WIA funding and operations from its traditional location in the Employer Security Commission to the Department of Commerce. The push for this shift began prior to WINs, but the WINs team supported it, and the governor tapped seven members of that group to be on the transition advisory team.
- The team reached consensus on the need for a common language for worker skills across the workforce system, and on adopting WorkKeys, the program used for that purpose most widely in the state. The state WIB's new five-year plan quickly incorporated this WINs-team recommendation.
- With the team's support, the state enacted the Education and Economic Development Act, which establishes career clusters, pushes professional development for teachers, upgrades guidance and counseling in schools, and provides alternatives for potential student dropouts.

- The team produced a comprehensive, five-year strategic plan for enhancing workforce development in South Carolina. The key recommendation was to establish a senior-level, public/private coordinating body to rationalize and coordinate the fragmented services and funding streams—and that it be staffed by the Department of Commerce. The governor has agreed with the recommendation and the administration is implementing it.

Topping off these accomplishments, the governor appointed the WINs State Team leader (the chamber associate vice president) to direct the new workforce development agency at the Department of Commerce.

Finally, at the end of the WINs grant period, the State Team planned to continue to support the full implementation of the outcomes of its work.

The Institute for Workforce Development and Economic Stability, an Affiliate of the Association of Washington Business

The Association of Washington Business and its affiliate, the Institute for Workforce Development and Economic Stability, found that its State Team did not cohere and function as a highly effective working group. However, its members were individually supportive of the project's goals. The team decided not to focus on major structural or policy change in favor of improving relations between business and the workforce system and improving the system's responsiveness to employers through a number of specific outcomes.

The Institute for Workforce Development and Economic Stability (IWDES), an affiliate of the Association of Washington Business, mounted its WINs project in 2004-05, a period when the state public policy context was roiled—both early on, by a contentious and long-unresolved election, and, continuously, by an unusually severe imbalance in the state budget.

The IWDES executive director saw WINs as a way to enhance the presence, visibility, and role of his three-year-old organization as a new and significant business player on workforce and economic development issues. He assembled a State Team broadly representative of relevant workforce development stakeholders, many of whom had previously worked on similar committees and task forces assembled by the departing governor.

The State Team met only once, in the summer of 2004, a meeting facilitated by a consultant. IWDES was wary of convening the group again for several reasons. First, the group did not cohere well in the first meeting. Moreover, the logistics of bringing leaders together from distant locations in a large state were daunting, and many leaders had commitments to meet for other established advisory and other groups. Finally, IWDES was confident that it could develop effective bilateral relations with them on specific WINs

State Team issues. It did the latter, and the Washington State Team devolved into a useful reference group of relevant and supportive individuals.

The single State Team meeting did establish themes for the effort: to define business expectations of the workforce system; to improve the business services of the state's WIA/One-Stop System; and to find ways to encourage employer investment in workforce development.

As the project progressed, however, team members and IWDES questioned the primacy of the WINs goal of a systematic restructuring of the state workforce system and its policy and practice. They proposed instead a "cultural shift" in understanding, communication, and productive relationships between employers, on the one hand, and state workforce system people, on the other. This could significantly improve the system's responsiveness to employer needs—and thereby employer use of the system—while being easier to attain than structural and policy changes whose nature and feasibility were not readily clear.

IWDES thus proceeded on its specific proposed projects and subsequent team-defined themes with the following outcomes:

- *A roster of business leaders willing to serve on workforce-related boards:* IWDES surveyed the members of the Association of Washington Business on their willingness to serve on the State and Local Workforce Investment Boards, community colleges, and other workforce entities. Over 400 executives signed on as candidates for nomination to such positions. A year later, 20 volunteers had been placed on such boards—eight at WIBs, ten at community colleges, and two on the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. A sign-up page for such community service is now on the association's Web site.
- *Improving WIB/One-Stop business services:* IWDES collaborated with the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Center to mount a pilot project to make local One-Stop Centers' business services more responsive to the needs of business.
- *Training materials for employers (including potential nominees to sit on boards):* IWDES developed a resource book on the components of the state's workforce system and how to access its services. IWDES presented a two-hour Webinar on the state's workforce system, much of which is now available through the Association of Washington Business Web site.
- *Public policy:* IWDES hosted a meeting of stakeholders interested in legislation that would provide greater state support for incumbent worker training. This has evolved into an informal coalition supporting three bills that will be introduced in the legislature. The Association of Washington Business has created a workforce development policy committee, and, for the first time, it has included several workforce proposals in its legislative agenda.

Exit interviews of stakeholders by the State Team indicate that IWDES/AWB had, through WINs, become well-respected and welcome players in the state workforce development arena. The IWDES director has been appointed to the state WIB. He says the WINs experience provided IWDES with “-bility,” that is, “visibility, credibility, and respectability” within the Association of Washington Business, the business community, and the public sector.

Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce Foundation, an Affiliate of The Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce

The Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce and its affiliate, the Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce Foundation, confronted major changes in the political landscape as they moved through their first year of the WINs project. In the second year, they faced a context riven by political conflict. The chamber nonetheless generated useful outcomes. As in the other states, moreover, the WMC and the WCCF plan to continue a newly active role in state-level workforce policy.

The director of Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce Foundation (WCCF) and the lead for the WINs state project in Wisconsin assembled a State Team of major workforce development stakeholders comparable to those participating on the State Teams in South Carolina and Washington. At its first meeting, in July 2004, the team agreed that Wisconsin’s workforce programs were poorly coordinated and that employer use of the system needed to be increased. The team adopted an agenda of specific projects to this end.

However, the Wisconsin State Team did not cohere into an effective working group. Some team members seemed wary of cooperating with the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce or its affiliate, the WCCF; others seemed jealous of their traditional turf and unsure of the utility of the team’s role. Most important, the state’s political climate worsened as the project progressed, resulting in growing tensions on the State Team.

Nonetheless, the WCCF began to pursue the agenda agreed upon in the first team meeting:

- It fielded the first ever survey of Wisconsin employers regarding their workforce needs and their views of the Wisconsin workforce development system. The survey yielded important information on both subjects that informed WCCF’s next steps.
- The foundation hired a vendor to pull together from widely disparate sources a compendium of information on training programs available throughout the state. This was compiled on a new Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce Web site, designed to provide employers and workers with this information on a regional basis. Further, the Web site was designed to enable employers to present their training needs and enable the

WMC to aggregate them and facilitate the development by trainers of programs to meet those needs and pool state and other resources to support the training.

- The WCCF explored the creation of a matrix to identify matches and gaps between employer training needs and provider offerings, as well as a process for training employers who wanted to serve on local Workforce Investment Boards.

The State Team's second and last meeting, in April 2005, identified several items in the governor's proposed state budget that could improve and expand incumbent worker training in the state—a major need identified by employers. The political climate, however, did not allow the Team's members to advocate for these measures.

Nevertheless, the WINs Wisconsin state project clearly elevated awareness of workforce development and of the state's system within the employer community and on the agenda of the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce. The WMC/WCCF has outlined an ambitious, seven-stage process of continuing and expanding their efforts to improve the public workforce system by working bilaterally with many of the stakeholders of the system in coming years.

WINs Resources

The following WINs resources are available on the Web sites of the WINs partners, along with many more resources on employer-responsive strategies for community advancement models, workforce intermediaries, building workforce pipelines, employer engagement, training strategies for non-traditional workers, and more.

- Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers: www.nam.org/workforce
- Jobs for the Future: www.jff.org
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce: www.uschamber.com/icw

Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries (Jobs for the Future 2003): Information and extensive resources on the role of workforce intermediaries in planning, developing, operating, and expanding career ladders. It summarizes lessons learned from innovative work across the country.

Employer-focused One-Stop Centers: Businesses Getting the Most for Their Investment (U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2004): Hundreds of One-Stop Centers across the country are meeting and exceeding employers' workforce development needs. ICW has the names of the businesses and their stories to prove it. Search the Online Database at: www.uschamber.com/icw/.

Filling America's Jobs Series (Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers): A Series of How-To Guides. "Working with CEOs to Communicate the Importance of a Skilled Workforce in Sector Workforce Development"; "How Businesses Can Implement Sector Workforce Development Strategies for Jobs and Economic Growth"; "How Employer Associations Can Help Small Firms Be More Competitive by Improving the Productivity of Entry-level Workers"; "How to Increase Supervisory Impact on Retention"; "A Guide for Public Workforce Professionals"; "A Guide for Employers to Benefit from the Public Workforce System."

Finders, Keepers: Business Taking Action to Secure Skilled Workers (U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2006): A series of best practices that share the successes of five chambers of commerce (four local and one state) that were supported by the WINs initiative to develop innovative pilot programs in workforce development.

Meeting the Workforce Needs of the Milwaukee Construction Industry: Case Study of the Center of Excellence (Jobs for the Future 2006): Profile of the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership's Center of Excellence, which addresses the boom in construction and a skills shortage in advanced manufacturing and, at the same time, connects low-wage workers to advancement opportunities in these industries.

The Role of the Workforce Intermediary CD-ROM (Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers): This CD-ROM describes the importance of regional collaboration—driven by the business community—to train the worker pipeline.

Surviving in a Dynamic Economy—How Chambers Can Help Navigate the Workforce Development System (U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce 2004): How chambers are helping employers meet labor force needs in three geographically diverse communities that are facing challenges—a shrinking manufacturing base, the expansion of services in the health care industry, and demographic shifts in the workforce.

The 2005 Skills Gap Report: A Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce (Center for Workforce Success at the National Association of Manufacturers 2006): The results of this survey provide a picture of the broadening gap in the availability of skilled workers and the employee performance requirements of 21st century manufacturing and what should be done to ensure a future U.S. manufacturing workforce.

Workforce Intermediaries and Their Roles in Promoting Advancement (Jobs for the Future 2004): The origins and elements of workforce intermediaries, their strategies for advancing workers to family-sustaining careers, and the challenge of securing financing to sustain intermediary services and expand them to a scale that makes a real difference to communities.

Locating a One-Stop Career Center: The America's Service Locator

www.servicelocator.org

For a variety of workforce needs, the most efficient first step for an employer is to contact a One-Stop Career Center. The One-Stop Centers provide assistance with recruitment and training. Prepare for a visit to the local One-Stop Center by determining as precisely as possible your employee needs. The America's Service Locator Web site lists One-Stop Centers by state, zip code, services, and more. One-Stop Centers can also be located by calling: 1.877.US2.JOBS or 1.877.889.5627 (TTY).

Also, learn more about the public workforce system by visiting www.doleta.gov/business and www.workforce3one.org.

Workforce Innovation Networks—WINs

WINs is a partnership of:

- The Center for Workforce Success, the nonprofit education and training arm of the National Association of Manufacturers' Manufacturing Institute;
- The Institute for a Competitive Workforce, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and
- Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based national nonprofit working on education and workforce development.

From 2003 to 2005, with the support of the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, WINs honed the capacity of employer-based organizations to function as workforce development intermediaries that can play a new and important role on the employer side of the nation's workforce equation.

The Role of Employer-based Workforce Intermediaries

Employer associations and other similar employer-based organizations are uniquely suited to being workforce development intermediaries: they understand and aggregate employer workforce needs, speak employer language, and enjoy employer trust. Since 1997, the WINs partnership has identified and refined the core elements of the role of effective, employer-based workforce intermediaries. Such organizations:

Convene, organize, and support employers on workforce development matters, including aggregating and conveying employer needs to the federal job training system and other providers of workforce services;

Directly provide education and training to workers and job seekers or broker such services to them by linking them to the public workforce system's One-Stop Career Centers and other education and training providers;

Work with education and training providers to upgrade their offerings and make them more relevant to evolving employer needs (e.g., incorporate skill requirements, including formal skill standards; help design curricula; and work to certify programs and credential graduates);

Help govern the various elements of local workforce development systems (including but not limited to federally funded Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Career Centers, community colleges, and voc-tech centers at the secondary and postsecondary levels), and make them more employer oriented and effective in serving both employers and workers; and

Conduct research and development (e.g., research employer needs locally and experiment with new workforce development techniques and partnerships).