

**BEST
PRACTICES IN
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT:
A CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE
PERSPECTIVE**

Prepared by:

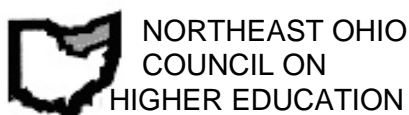
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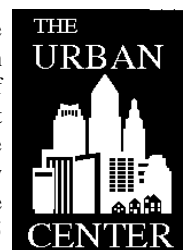


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The Urban University Program... a
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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:
A Chamber of Commerce Perspective

by

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NOW is a partnership of
The Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education and the
Northeast Ohio Research Consortium of the
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THE NOW INITIATIVE

The **NOW** (Northeast Ohio Regional Workforce) Initiative is a collaboration of the Northeast Ohio Research Consortium of the Ohio Urban University Program and the Northeast Ohio Council on Higher Education. It was formed in 1996 to examine and address issues relating to workforce development, education, and training for the Northeast Ohio region. **NOW** provides research and analysis, disseminates information, and facilitates communication and networking between and among interested parties. **NOW** maintains an on-going relationship with the National Alliance for Business, and partners with area employer-led workforce development efforts, such as those underway at the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, the Akron Regional Development Board, and in Lake and Lorain counties. With these partners and others, **NOW** convenes and organizes the Regional Workforce Development Coordinating Committee of Northeast Ohio. The collaborative nature of **NOW** allows it to pull on research expertise available through the Joint Center for Policy Research at Lorain County Community College and through the faculty and staff of Cleveland State University, Kent State University, the University of Akron, and Youngstown State University, as well as others. **NOW** is thus a catalyst and broker of change, building regional partnerships that drive improvements in the education and training and workforce development systems throughout Northeast Ohio to ensure an economically strong and growing region.

PREFACE and ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is the result of research for “Best Practices” of workforce development efforts that are housed in Chambers of Commerce or could serve as models for a Chamber-based effort. The researchers examined a wide array of programs, projects, and efforts in cities and regions across the United States. They found many with exemplary characteristics, but no exemplary “Best Practice” programs. Moreover, it is important to note that such a “Best Practice” program --even if one could be identified--would not help any given Chamber of Commerce or similar organization establishing a workforce development program decide *what* its program should do. Only careful analysis of the local and regional employment context--identifying needs, trends, resources, and capabilities--can do that. What this research and report *does* do is to identify those specific traits or characteristics--i.e., individual “best practices”--that point to an effort’s success.

This report is a product of the NOW Initiative. The research was funded in part by the Akron Regional Development Board, and to some extent is an outgrowth on ARDB’s interest in Chamber-based workforce development. (A previous report, with most of the information contained here but addressing their specific circumstances and concerns, was produced for ARDB.) The authors wish to thank ARDB for its support, and also all the representatives and staff of the many workforce development efforts examined for their cooperation in this research, their time in answering our questions, and the written materials they provided or sent. Needless to say, this report would not exist without them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Changes in the economy--at the local, regional, state, and national levels--as well as technological advances have altered how and where people work, which has brought attention to the issue of workforce development. Many public and private entities, Chambers of Commerce among them, now engage in some form of workforce development. This report examines a number of such efforts to determine the “best practices” of workforce development for Chambers of Commerce.

This report first considers the complex world of workforce development. The workforce consists of several distinct sub-populations: existing workers, new entrants, the unemployed, and the underemployed. Each has its own development needs and there is variation within groups as well. Also, there are many players in the workforce development game: K-12 education, post-secondary education, job training providers, individual businesses and their organizations, and government at all levels. Each player’s efforts are shaped by its own mission and goals, its own perception of local or regional needs, and the available resources. Those engaged in workforce development must not ignore or forget the context in which they operate.

Workforce development efforts vary widely in scope, goals, and specific program activities. However, in terms of their larger purposes they can be categorized as oriented primarily toward economic development, minimizing poverty, educational reform, or a combination of those. Within each of those very broad groupings are Chamber-based efforts, which tend to emphasize one of the following: linkage/brokerage programs, welfare-to-work, school-to-work, stay-in-school, employee training, quality management. Individual Chamber members sit on workforce boards, provide financial support, network with other participants, serve as mentors, provide internships and jobs, and advise on school curricula. However, any Chamber effort must be based on careful analysis of its own local and regional circumstances.

Although programs and efforts vary widely and there is no single exemplary “Best Practice” program, there *are* individual “best practice” characteristics or traits that effective programs have in common. They relate to how a program defines the problem, designs the solution, implements the solution, and measures results, and they can be models for others. “Best practices” include:

- *Defining the problem:* Collect data on local and regional economic trends, workforce needs, workforce development capabilities, the existing the potential workforce. Analyze the data to find the mismatches, inadequacies, and problem areas.

- *Designing the solution:* Define your mission clearly; determine the geographic scope of both problem and program; determine how large an effort you can conduct; link to other participants; target key industries or sectors; target a workforce sub-population; build in an evaluation-feedback-revision loop.
- *Implementing the solution:* Commit to active participation for the duration. Commit sufficient resources--financial and human. Establish organizational structures and mechanisms, and maintain good communications with all parties.
- *Determining effectiveness:* Establish a precedent and system for accountability. Track your results; and compare them with both your goals and the identified needs. Revise your effort to accommodate changed circumstances.

No single program or effort examined did all these things well. But many were exemplary in one or more of them, and those programs were the more effective ones. Collectively, then, these “best practices” provide the guideposts pointing to success in workforce development.

INTRODUCTION

The world of work has changed. Many individuals can no longer anticipate maintaining the same occupation--or even working for the same employer--throughout his or her working years. Technological advances--especially computers--have changed how and where we work, as has the shift from the industrial to the post-industrial economy. Moreover, our population structure has also changed, not only in the aggregate at the national level but also with variations between and within regions.

These changes have produced economic disruption and dislocations in employment in many places, prompting efforts to address those issues. Both the private and public sectors, individually and collaboratively, have undertaken initiatives relating to economic and workforce development. But there is no one “best” model, for local conditions and resources vary widely.

Among those involved in workforce and economic development efforts are Chambers of Commerce or similar organizations. This report examines a wide array of such efforts to determine the “best practices” such efforts employ. It discusses the complexity of the larger issue, and considers the wide range of workforce development efforts as well as those housed in Chamber-type organizations. From this examination emerges a set of “best practices” or procedural guidelines for others to follow in developing and implementing their own workforce development initiatives.

A COMPLEX SUBJECT

Workforce development is a very complex subject. To begin with, the “workforce” is not a singular entity. Moreover, there are many institutions involved or concerned with its development, for purposes of their own. To examine efforts at workforce development, then,

one must consider the client populations, the goals and objectives of the providers, and the larger economic and political context in which both function.

The biggest component of the workforce is existing workers, those individuals already employed. For them, workforce development means getting new skills or knowledge so they can do their present job more effectively, respond to changes in the workplace or the job itself, assume more responsibilities, or prepare for the next “level” of occupation or for a different one. A second major component consists of new entrants to the workforce. This includes those in transition from high school, vocational school, or college, of course, but it also includes former homemakers and other adults who have not been employed since completing their formal education some time previously. The employment options, career goals, and capabilities (in terms of their present levels of training or education) of these two groups are very different. And there are differences within each group as well, so no one workforce development program will serve all new entrants equally well. A third target population of workforce development is the unemployed. As with existing workers and new entrants, subgroups of the unemployed have different needs. Some individuals are short-term or temporarily unemployed due to downsizing, but have reasonably good employment prospects in terms of their career specialization and the local or regional economy. Others may have only recently become unemployed but have obsolete skills or skills in obsolete industries. The long-term unemployed may have serious skill deficits as well as other difficulties--they may not have been able to develop good work habits and attitudes, they may have disabilities or personal characteristics that have made employment difficult. It is also known that the longer one is unemployed, the higher the odds against re-employment (and the odds rise more sharply for those approaching or past age fifty). The final major client group for workforce development is the under-employed. These may be individuals in jobs that do not fully use their abilities (and thus are not challenging or rewarding) or they may be

individuals whose circumstances qualify them for only unskilled, low-wage, or part-time employment. Again, there are different workforce development needs.

These four workforce subpopulations--existing workers, new entrants, the unemployed, the underemployed--do not exist in equal numbers in any area, nor do the resources to meet their varying needs. But if any group's needs are unmet, some individuals will have difficulty securing employment that is both satisfying and financially rewarding enough to allow economic self-sufficiency. Implications for a region with inadequate workforce development are three-fold: charitable and social service resources are drained to meet the needs of those who cannot support themselves and their families; their children have fewer resources and positive examples, thus potentially continuing their parents' poverty when they become adults (and thereby further draining charities and social services); and the region itself is less competitive economically relative to others. If new employers do not come to an area because its workforce is inadequate, and if existing ones do not expand (or worse still, leave), not only do individuals experience financial hardship but also the region itself suffers as incomes, property values, and ultimately tax revenues decline.

Because the existing and potential workforce contains so many different populations and because the ramifications of an inadequate workforce are both great and multi-faceted, there are many "players" in the workforce development game. One major player does not often think of itself as providing workforce development but implicitly does so--that player is education. Vocational education at the secondary level and professional or occupational degree programs in post-secondary institutions have the explicit mission of preparing their graduates for the workforce. But K-12 education also provides the basic skills--verbal and mathematical literacy, communications, critical thinking--needed for employment; higher education at two- or four-year institutions augments those skills, elevating the level of proficiency and adding in-depth knowledge of a particular subject area. Schools at all levels

also contribute to developing--or sometimes work against developing--the “soft” skills needed for employment. These include such things as attitude or work ethic, organizational skills, ability to work in teams. Although they are all, in one sense, in the same business, schools vary enormously; they are public or private, large or small, broadly or narrowly focused, and they do not all view their role as workforce “developers” in the same way. More explicitly involved in workforce development are job training providers. These may be proprietary schools--for example training long distance truck drivers or cosmetologists; they may be programs offered by social service agencies or charitable organizations; they may be divisions of government agencies or quasi-public entities. Regardless of their “home,” these job training providers tend to target a particular client population for their efforts. Somewhat akin to the job training providers in terms of their sharp and narrow focus are those who provide training in the workplace on a contract basis. For example, a computer company may offer to train a business’s employees in a new application, for a fee. Or a business may contract with a management consultant to train employees in new organizational practices. Although they are not part of the education system, these job training providers are engaged in workforce development.

Businesses also engage in workforce development, both individually and collectively. Some companies “invest” in their workforce by providing job-related training on site; others have tuition reimbursement programs for employees enrolled in higher education (with or without restrictions as to subject matter or field of study). Businesses may collaborate with professional organizations to sponsor programs for the continuing education needed to renew professional licenses. Recently, Chambers of Commerce and similar business groups have become involved in workforce development efforts as they recognize its importance to local or regional economic well-being.

The last major player is the public sector, government at the local, state, or national level. The federal government has been developing policies and funding programs to stimulate employment since the Great Depression of the 1930s. States have departments of “employment services” to match people and jobs. Local governments also have programs to match people and jobs but some go much further. When the skills of those needing work do not match the unfilled jobs, local government may partner with a school or job training provider to offer the needed career education. Some cities negotiate with businesses seeking to expand or relocate to link workforce development efforts or hiring preference programs to development approval.

Each of the participant groups in workforce development--education, training providers, business, government--views its role as different from the others but there are variations within each major participant group as well. Each participant’s efforts are shaped by its own goals and mission and by perceived local or regional needs, but also by funding opportunities and limitations. In any given area some participants cooperate across or within groups, some compete, and some do not even communicate.

Workforce Development--A Complex Subject

The workforce consists of: existing workers; new entrants; the unemployed; the underemployed.

Players in workforce development: education; job training providers; business; government.

Players’ efforts shaped by: own mission and goals; perception of needs; available resources.

The multiplicity of workforce development participants and workforce subpopulations make the whole subject very complex. Understanding the realm of workforce development is thus challenging. Even more difficult is identifying exemplary efforts or “best practices,” for there is little comparability across the entire realm. Nevertheless, it is possible to survey the *de facto* system that exists and to make some general observations.

THE “REALM” OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

It is important that the student of workforce development efforts, projects, and programs not be constrained by the institutional or programmatic “boxes” within which those programs operate. The box of “vocational education” or “welfare-to-work” limits the researcher’s perspective and potentially blinds one to important insights. A more helpful way to view workforce development efforts and programs initially is to categorize them by broadly defined goals or purposes. In this framework, most efforts fit into one of three groups: workforce development as local or regional economic development, workforce development as anti-poverty effort (i.e., directed at relieving the poverty of individuals rather than improving the economy of the locale), and workforce development as educational reform. There are also hybrids that combine one or more of these broad goals.

Workforce development as economic development

By far the greatest number of workforce development efforts have economic development as their primary or ultimate goal. Regardless of their form or of who has taken the lead, they were prompted by the realization that the locale or region is (or will become) economically non-competitive. As a group such programs have the greatest potential, for they can serve any or all subgroups of the workforce. They also vary widely in terms of orientation, size, organizational structure, geographic jurisdiction, and other characteristics. It is thus helpful

to view them as subsets categorized by how they use workforce development as an economic development tool.

One approach is to view workforce development very broadly and to view the program's role as essentially that of link or broker--of information and/or of services. Such programs tend to have a very loose organizational structure. They may be housed in one agency but have participants representing many sectors or interests: K-12 as well as higher education, business organizations, government agencies, and non-profits. They are often multi-jurisdictional as well, with representatives from several municipalities and counties, thus maintaining a regional rather than a local orientation. They collect information on local economic trends, on present or potential economic or workforce problems, on employment and skill needs, on training availability, and on related subjects. Then they feed information collected from one sector to another, either through some formal mechanism or by networking. They seek to put educators and training providers, employers, and employee placement and job readiness efforts in touch with one another. They see themselves as catalysts of change and as facilitators of communication and cooperation, helping to turn a disparate collection of workforce development efforts and projects into a regional system for workforce development. Examples of this broadly oriented linkage or brokerage type effort (which will be discussed more fully elsewhere in this report) are in Spartanburg/Greenville, South Carolina; the Silicon Valley; Louisville, Kentucky; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Minneapolis. Most of these are regional in scope.

Contrasting sharply with the broad-based linkage/brokerage efforts are those that direct their workforce development efforts to selected target industries. The overall goal is still economic development of the city or region but it is economic development that builds on existing strengths or potential economic specialties. Although they target industrial sectors these efforts do not, as a group, target specific segments of the workforce. Indeed, some combine

school-to-work programs for high school students with basic skills or job-readiness training for their unemployed parents; others seek to increase the number of specifically skilled workers in order to keep local employers from “pirating” each others’ workers. The key is that these efforts are all responding to the existing or anticipated need for a particular type of worker; they then hope to use the trained labor pool as a means to market the region for expansion or relocation of targeted industries. One of the broadest such efforts is the Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky, Industry Networks Program, which targets eight specific industries: plastics, metalworking, food, electrical machinery, non-electrical machinery, automobile supplies, printing, communication. Much smaller is the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACENet) in underdeveloped southeast Ohio, which focuses on very small food industries and furniture manufacturing. The Philadelphia Convention Center Fund targets hospitality and tourism related jobs, supporting development in the full range of job classifications needed for hotels, restaurants, and the convention center itself. Technology is the target in both Portland and Baltimore. The former has the Regional Training System for Semi-Conductors, while in the latter the Greater Baltimore Committee’s Technology Council has expanded from its initial focus on life sciences to include information technology, environmental technology, and the aerospace industry as well. All these efforts are using workforce development in targeted industrial sectors to spur or maintain economic growth in the city or region.

Rather than targeting industries or serving a broker/linkage function, the other major way efforts use workforce development for economic development is by directing their energies toward making workers employable. Supporters of these efforts recognize that the region itself suffers when its residents are un- or underemployed, so they work to get people “job ready.” They may engage in School-to-Work efforts, running workshops or internship programs for high school students. They may perform skill assessments and either provide basic or specific skills training in house or refer clients to the appropriate job training

program. They may run GED programs, offer training on letter and resume writing or interview skills, or provide training on the “soft” skills related to interpersonal communication or work ethic and attitude. Most such efforts focus on entry-level positions for new or returning workers, but others provide training for those with obsolete skills or in transition between jobs or industries. Some also provide assistance or guidance to workers whose personal situations make employment difficult, directing them to subsidized treatment programs or child care providers. All these efforts want to get people employed. However, the ultimate goal is economic development of the city or region. Examples of these efforts are in Ypsilanti and Kalamazoo, Michigan, and in Baltimore.

Workforce development can thus serve economic development purposes in a number of ways. Efforts can be broad-based, loose networks or small, tightly organized, sharply focused programs. The capabilities of the agency or organization administering the effort, and how it views local and regional workforce issues, determine specific objectives and the means chosen to achieve them for the larger goal of economic development.

Workforce development as anti-poverty program

A second major way of using workforce development is to combat poverty, usually of a particular subpopulation within the city or region. One would expect such programs in underdeveloped areas, of course, or those in transition from the industrial to the post-industrial economy. But they also exist in areas where the overall economy is strong but there are pockets of poverty. Some of these programs are carry-overs or off-spring of projects started under the War on Poverty in the 1960s. For these programs, the poverty of individuals and families is a primary concern; economic development merely a pleasant by-product.

The most common program of this type matches people to jobs. The program may have a “first contact” arrangement with several local employers, where the employers notify the

program of new or anticipated job openings and the program screens its client lists for potential candidates. They may also have less formalized networks of contacts with employers, job training providers, or other placement efforts. One such program, Berkeley, California's First Source Employment Program, does not strictly limit participation to low-income persons but they are the primary client base. First Source also does no training; thus the clients it refers to employers are presumed to be "job ready." The Norfolk, Virginia, Industrial Development Authority's Job Readiness Program, on the other hand, has training sessions on such matters as job search approaches and techniques, employee benefits, time and money management, and budgeting. Participation is limited to those on public assistance, who are often not job ready. Both the Berkeley and Norfolk programs specifically seek to place their clients in jobs that pay above minimum wage, provide benefits (particularly medical insurance), and offer possibility of advancement in the future. The goal, then, is to turn those in or on the edge of poverty and deprivation into self-sufficient, self-supporting workers.

The Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) in Philadelphia focuses on making people employable, rather than placing them in jobs. Working with the Philadelphia Convention Center Fund OIC provides training for hospitality and tourism-related jobs; working with the local Private Industry Council OIC provides adult literacy, GED, and basic computer training. In another effort, OIC provides housing, counseling, and job and life skills training for people in transition from homelessness to self-sufficiency, serving as a support system until they become employed and remain so long enough to achieve some stability. OIC also has programs for mentally challenged adults and youths just coming out of incarceration to prepare them for employment. There is some job placement associated with OIC's programs but it is not the major focus; preparing people for self-sufficient employment is.

Other programs combat poverty by targeting potentially at-risk youths while they are still in school. One of the oldest continuing workforce development efforts is the Philadelphia High

School Academies, which began as a drop-out prevention program for inner-city youths after riots in the late 1960s. The program targets eighth-graders and encourages their enrollment in one of several high school “academies,” each of which has a different career focus (such as law, or health care). The academies integrate basic skills and career skills and also provide internship or apprenticeship experiences. Somewhat similar but on a much smaller scale is the Manufacturing Technology Partnership (MTP) of General Motors and the UAW. MTP specifically seeks out minority and female high school students to try to interest them in, and prepare them for, apprenticeships in the skilled trades such as welding. As in Philadelphia basic education is integrated with career skills, so the students see the transferability and relevance of their education and also have the opportunity to see some application in the workplace. A major impetus for MTP was the under-representation in the skilled trades and the apprenticeship programs of women and minorities (who traditionally have had less access to higher paying jobs).

Whether they are directed at youth or at adults, all these efforts have in common the larger goal of eliminating or preventing poverty. Clearly the cities and regions where they are located will benefit from their success, but the efforts themselves are really directed at the people they serve. These efforts are also directed at a much smaller subset of the workforce than those that approach workforce development as economic development, for their attention is directed at those who are or will be otherwise unable to support themselves and their families.

Workforce development as educational reform

A third major orientation of workforce development is represented by two examples, both from Maryland; that is workforce development as educational reform. These efforts explicitly recognize the role that educational institutions inherently play in preparing people for employment.

The Biotech Education Program of Baltimore City Community College grew out of a curriculum reform effort to determine whether students were appropriately prepared for careers in biotechnology. Although the program is housed at the community college, it extends in both directions, thus providing career-based technical education from high school to Bachelor's degree. The curriculum at each level combines applied and theoretical knowledge and grounds both in practical experience through internships. The program has resulted in considerable reorganization at the participating high school to accommodate more meaningful science labs and the internships. Faculty at all participating educational institutions--high school, community college, and four-year colleges--communicate with each other and with representatives from industry on curricular matters. Upon completion of whatever degree, many graduates find employment where they had interned as students. Although the program is targeted to a particular industry sector, the motivating impetus was educational reform, not economic development.

The State of Maryland Department of Education efforts are much broader, but also based on educational reform. The underlying principle is that every student graduating from high school in Maryland should be able either to get meaningful employment in the workforce or to enroll in higher education. Education is standards-based and oriented toward high performance and continuous improvement, but schools have flexibility in designing approaches to meet their particular students' needs. Standards exist for both basic skills and "soft" skills (called "Skills for Success" in the reform program). Career and Technology Education (formerly vocational education) has been revised and upgraded so that those students who do not go on to higher education graduate from high school with a solid core of skills in a recognized occupation. Throughout the state are "K-16 Partnerships" that involve not only primary and secondary schools and higher education but also business groups and employers. Their input helps teachers devise meaningful exercises for students. The business sector has also helped generate support for the educational reforms.

These two examples from Maryland bring the supply side into the workforce development equation. But they also affect only one subset of the workforce--new entrants from school. There is potential for some particular projects to address adult literacy or skill deficits but the overall orientation of workforce development as educational reform is really to prepare future workers.

Hybrid efforts at workforce development

The final group of workforce development efforts does not fit neatly into any of the above three categories, for programs in this group combine elements of more than one. Moreover, although one focus--usually economic development--may be primary, another large purpose is really too strong to be considered secondary. These efforts generally take one of two forms: they combine workforce development as economic development with anti-poverty by (directly or indirectly) targeting a particular workforce subpopulation; or they combine workforce development as economic development with educational reform.

Those that combine economic development with an anti-poverty orientation in workforce development will use the region's theoretical workforce capacity to recruit new employers or the expansion of existing ones. Rather than focusing on existing workers or students, however, they direct their energies toward the un- or underemployed. They may act as a broker or link between training programs and job openings, or actually provide basic skills or life skills training. Agencies operating such efforts may negotiate for employee benefits, such as transportation assistance or subsidized child care, when working with a company planning to expand or relocate. These benefits are most meaningful to those at the bottom of the pay scale and directly affect their ability to remain employed. These efforts also may either formally limit participation to low-income persons or make their services available in low-income neighborhoods. The Portland Development Commission's JobNet program is

an example of this type of hybrid. It also relates to other PDC efforts that stimulate economic development by focusing on the workforce.

Programs that blend economic development with educational reform work to involve employers directly in the educational process. This can be for a particular company or industry, as in Berkeley's Biotech Education effort, or for an entire school system or region, as in Medina County, Ohio, or Fort Worth, Texas. In these efforts employers and educators work together to design and implement curricula that prepare students for the workforce. Teachers are actively involved in internship and apprentice programs, spending time in the workplace so they gain a better understanding what is expected of the students they teach. Representatives from different companies or occupations work with teachers to create assignments that combine applied and theoretical knowledge. Employers and educators work together to analyze data on skill sets needed for different job categories and levels and to design curriculum elements that will meet the needs. Equally important, both the education and employment sectors gain appreciation of the constraints under which the other operates. The result is a systemic change within the schools, which produces more qualified job applicants and employees, which in turn makes the city or region more competitive economically.

Collectively, the hybrid efforts combine the breadth of the most broad-based workforce development as economic development programs with the sharper focus and organizational mechanisms of more targeted efforts. They also, of course, require more effort and resource commitment than other approaches to workforce development

The Realm of Workforce Development

Economic development: serve as broker or link; target industries; make people employable.

Anti-poverty program: match employees to jobs; help people become job-ready; target at-risk youths.

Educational reform: integrated re-orientation of entire system or components.

Hybrid: economic development and (1) educational reform, (2) anti-poverty.

CHAMBER-BASED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Chambers of Commerce participate in the full range of workforce development activities. Chambers are engaged in workforce development for all of the interrelated purposes of economic development, the reduction of poverty, and educational reform. Their efforts range from serving as information and service brokers to engaging directly in curricular development for school-to-work programs. This section summarizes the most common types of Chamber of Commerce involvement.

Information Broker

The Chamber of Commerce often plays the role of information broker for a variety of workforce development constituents. As described above, this can involve collecting data regarding employee skill requirements, the supply of skills available to a region, and the availability of training providers to help increase skill levels. The Chamber sometimes also serves as the coordinator of information: for local schools, businesses, labor, and other constituencies interested in workforce development. In California, for example, the San Jose

Metropolitan Chamber through “Joint Venture Silicon Valley” provides regular forecasts of employer needs, which are then used by teams of schools to work toward providing skilled new entrants. The Fort Worth, Texas, Chamber conducted (and updated five years later) an extensive survey of occupational needs and associated skill sets. The Minneapolis/St. Paul “Building Our Future” program serves as an information clearinghouse to increase the availability of relevant labor market information to regional businesses and educational institutions. The Louisville, Kentucky, Chamber through its “Kentuckiana” programs conducts annual surveys, again with a goal of identifying employer needs and the abilities of local providers to meet those needs.

Employee Training Programs

Chambers also participate in programs designed to increase the skill levels or overall productivity of currently employed members of the workforce. These programs tend to be of two types: training in particular skills or training in Quality Management. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, the Workforce Development Board supports an “Incumbent Training Program” wherein educational institutions conduct job analyses, estimate and project training needs, propose training plans, and provide trainers to individual firms. Several programs (e.g., Louisville, Kentucky; Spartanburg/Greenville, South Carolina) focus on the efficiency of the entire firm through Quality Management programs. In 1983 the Chamber of Commerce in Spartanburg initiated its “Quality Institute,” which provides training for employers throughout the region.

Stay-in-School Programs

Other programs that Chambers support are those designed to increase the skill levels of youth through encouraging them to stay in school. These include programs that bring various social services to the schools as well as those that connect businesses to education through teacher internships, student visits to businesses, and similar activities. One project (in Fort Worth,

Texas) goes so far as to provide training to the *parents* of students, in order to present models of the potential positive effects of education and training. Chambers of Commerce can be very active in these efforts, working with teachers to revise curricula and providing internship opportunities for teachers and students.

School-to-Work

Probably the most widely-known of the Chamber based programs are the many school-to-work programs. These are logical companion or follow-up programs to the stay-in-school efforts since they help students make the transition from student life to the workforce. The common theme of these programs is to link employers, workers, and schools, combining work-based with school-based learning, and leading to certification in a field. Chambers play a variety of roles in these programs, including curricular development, but most important are their individual members' commitments to provide apprenticeships for the students. Examples of Chamber efforts with school-to-work components are those in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Fort Worth, Texas; Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor), Michigan; Louisville, Kentucky; and Silicon Valley, California.

Welfare-to-Work

Chambers of Commerce also have been involved in providing programs designed to increase the employability of welfare recipients. These range from programs to provide basic literacy and mathematics skills to those providing job search and interviewing skills. These programs sometimes also involve internships with Chamber member firms, as in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The Tulsa Chamber also provides training in the skills required for a particular industry (i.e., metallurgy).

Hybrid Efforts

Chambers of Commerce participate in many other types of programs that are not easily placed in any of the above categories. These include the “Endorsed Course of Study” program in Medina County, Ohio, and programs like Philadelphia’s “Career Academies” and Baltimore’s “Tech Prep” referred to earlier in this report. It is also important to note that many chambers are simultaneously involved in multiple workforce development efforts. The Minneapolis Chamber’s “Building our Future” program, for example, serves as an information broker but has a stay-in-school component and some school-to-work components as well. The Tulsa Chamber, through the Workforce Development Board, is involved in welfare-to-work, school-to-work, and employee training programs.

Chamber Based Programs	
Information/Service Broker or Link	Employee Training
Welfare-to-Work	School-to-Work
Quality Management	Stay-in-School

Roles for Chamber Members

Clearly Chambers of Commerce are active in a wide variety of workforce development efforts. Likewise, they have varied relationships with those programs and their members play many different roles. In many cases they provide the “person-power” to get the program operational and keep it going. They give their time to serve on advisory boards and committees or contribute to the salary of a paid staff. They contribute office space or supplies. For example, Fort Worth’s C³ program is administered by and from the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce office. They provide financial support directly (with their own funds) and indirectly (by soliciting funds from foundations or other businesses). When initial funding was running low, the Minneapolis Chamber went to local and national foundations but also

solicited its members for operating funds for “Building Our Future.” Chamber members join with others in the region to sit on workforce development boards as in Tulsa. Individually they “partner” or network with other local or regional players in workforce development. Networking has been particularly strong in Baltimore and Spartanburg/Greenville. Chamber members mentor students or job program trainees. Their firms provide internship opportunities or part-time jobs for students, and may promise jobs (or give hiring preference) to program graduates. Job applications from graduates of Medina County, Ohio’s Endorsed Course of Study go to the “top of the pile” at participating companies. Chamber members provide advice or guidance on curriculum and help design classroom activities and exercises related to their company’s or industry’s needs or products. Fort Worth’s C³ is one of the most highly developed programs of integrated school system-Chamber of Commerce interaction. Because Chamber members are the region’s employers, their participation and commitment is essential.

Roles Chamber Members Play

Sit on workforce development and other boards and committees;

Provide financial support;

“Partner” and network with other workforce development participants;

Act as mentors, provide internships, provide jobs;

Advise on school curriculum and design classroom exercises.

THE “BEST PRACTICES” OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS FOR CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

The foregoing discussions illustrate the breadth of workforce development efforts in general as well as those based in or spear-headed by Chambers of Commerce. As noted previously, in most communities the Chamber is not the only party involved in workforce development. Variation among workforce development efforts reflects differences in local and regional needs, differing perceptions of those needs, different orientations of the parent organizations, different opportunities to relate to other parties, and different commitment of resources. These variations and differences consequently make comparisons across or between efforts virtually meaningless. Moreover, attempts to compare them are counter-productive for they obscure the individual or specific traits and practices that lead to success. At the same time, however, a Chamber of Commerce embarking on workforce development would be best served by information about those traits; that is, the “best practices.”

Several specific practices have been identified that improve chances for success. Their importance is underscored by the difficulties or failures various workforce development efforts have encountered. Most of the specific practices described below are practiced by one or more of the workforce development efforts examined, and each can serve as a model for a Chamber-based effort. The “Best Practices” of workforce development efforts fall into four major task groups: defining the problem, designing the solution, implementing the solution, and determining effectiveness.

Areas of “Best Practice”	
Defining the problem	Designing the solution
Implementing the solution	Measuring success

Defining the problem: *The “best” solution to the wrong problem is no solution.*

Before an effort is begun, there must be a clear and accurate understanding of the nature of the problem. It is not always what it appears to be. There are several aspects of this phase.

Collect data on local and regional economic trends. The Chamber must understand its own economic base, how that base is changing, and how it relates to changes in key industrial sectors. This cannot be based on “common knowledge” or “conventional wisdom” assessments. Many Chambers get this information from state or federal government departments and reports or other sources, and then publish it in their own publications. Researchers at area universities are another good source of data, for faculty in business schools or departments of economics or human resources often engage in relevant research.

Collect data on workforce needs. This includes information about the number of workers needed in various occupational categories, as well as the skills needed for the occupations. This can be done by surveying a carefully constructed sample of employers and their workers, as the Fort Worth Chamber did. Tulsa has hired a consulting firm to draw up a profile of workforce needs--both current needs and a ten-year projection. Louisville identifies needs through its Annual Employment Survey and Joint Venture: Silicon Valley forecasts employer needs for its region. It is crucial that the data collection be broad based; anecdotal evidence based on a few individual members’ experiences will be misleading.

Collect data on workforce development capabilities. To begin designing a solution you will need to know what educators and training providers in your area are offering--or have the capacity to offer--the education and training for jobs and skills local employers will need. Louisville, Kentucky's Kentuckiana program collects this information for its "Training Resource Database."

Collect data on the existing and potential workforce. This includes not only knowing who is employed in what capacities, but also knowing who is theoretically employable but not presently working (and why), as well as projecting future population trends. For example, in five or ten years does the region face an increase in 18-to-25-year-old entry level workers but declining population between 30 and 40? Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor), Michigan, does some of this with its "Employability Index." Local, county, or regional planning agencies often have or perform population projections, and researchers at area colleges and universities are also a potential source of information.

Analyze the data to determine mismatches, inadequacies, and problem areas. As with the data collection this can be done in-house or contracted out, but it is an essential step in defining the problem. In all likelihood, there is more than one problem, but this step allows the chamber to identify the most crucial ones or those it is best suited to address.

Defining the Problem

The best solution to the wrong problem is no solution.

Collect data on: local and regional economic trends; workforce needs; workforce development capabilities; the existing and potential workforce.

Find the mismatches, inadequacies, and problem areas.

Designing the solution: Tailor the “solution”--i.e., your plan or effort--to the problem at hand. Once you know the nature of the problem make sure the program you design will, in fact, address it. You must differentiate between superficial symptoms and root causes, as well as between those forces and factors you can affect and those you cannot.

Clearly define your mission and the specific goals and objectives of your effort. What exactly are you trying to do? Is the effort a short-term program to meet an immediate need or part of a long-term systemic change? How does it relate to other Chamber programs and activities? These questions must be answered as precisely and concretely as possible; vague generalities cannot guide implementation nor produce measurable results. Many Chamber-based efforts have well defined mission statements. Their workforce development committees have set achievable goals and measurable objectives. This is important not only for guiding implementation but also for maintaining the participation of your members and partners. They need to be able to see some progress, and being able to refer to a list of explicit goals and objectives helps.

Determine the geographic scope of both the problem and your effort. Is the problem locally isolated or regional in nature? Does (or can) the Chamber’s territory cross jurisdictional lines? Labor markets do not respect political boundaries, and city/county distinctions often have little meaning to them. Fort Worth’s C³ program has reached beyond the municipal boundary and school district to Tarrant County Junior College and it is also looking to nearby Arlington (a city of 250,000 people with its own Chamber of Commerce and also a major campus of the University of Texas).

Determine how large an effort you can conduct. Will you attempt to deal with all aspects of the problem or only some? You must match the program or effort to available resources. A broadly based program, like Tulsa’s or the effort in Minneapolis, needs either a lot of support

or many partners if it is to have much depth or substance. Spartanburg/Greenville's is consequently more narrowly defined. This is also why many Chambers focus only on school-to-work or stay-in-school, for example.

Link to other participating sectors. Even if a program seeks to perform all functions itself --training workers, linking them to jobs, hiring them--others in the area are also performing some of those functions. Workforce development is the exclusive purview no single organization or sector, so it is important to link to educators, government, and non-profits. This not only prevents unproductive duplication or competition but makes it less likely that someone will "fall through the cracks." Examples of linked efforts and their partners include: Tulsa--city government, K-12 schools, community college, PIC; Louisville--county schools, labor, higher education, government; Spartanburg--technical colleges, employers; Joint Venture SiliconValley--city (the Mayor co-chairs), education, community leaders; Fort Worth--K-12 schools, Junior College; Washtenaw Education Work Consortium--city, school districts, higher education. The most effective linkages are truly collaborative efforts involving equal partners.

Target key industries. Targeting provides focus for a program. However, the target(s) must be well chosen in terms of the area's resources (both economic and human) and growth potential. You want to position yourself to be attractive, not get into a competition (against more attractive players) that you cannot win. Chamber-based efforts that target specific industries or occupations include: Tulsa--initially metallurgy, but has expanded to include health and international business (banks, importers and exporters); Fort Worth--hazardous materials program; Wilmington, Delaware--financial services. Sometimes the targeted programs are more *skill* based than industry based. For example, Fort Worth and Joint Venture Silicon Valley both have a strong computer literacy focus.

Target a sub-population of the workforce, based on identified needs. Will you direct your efforts toward existing workers, emerging or returning workers, or the unemployed? Trying to be all things to all people rarely succeeds. The stay-in-school and school-to-work programs specifically target youth. AFDC recipients are the participants in Tulsa’s welfare-to-work program. In an interesting variation Minneapolis programs have focused on businesses paying a “household supporting” wage.

Build an evaluation-feedback-revision loop into the program at the design stage. This will be essential for determining your progress or success, as well as enabling you to respond to a change in circumstances. But it is very difficult to add after-the-fact, when resources are finite and fully committed. (This will be discussed in more detail below.)

Designing the Solution

Tailor the solution to the problem.

Define mission clearly; set specific goals and measurable objectives.

Determine the geographic scope of both problem and program.

Determine how large an effort you can conduct.

Link to other participating sectors.

Target (1) key industries and (2) a sub-population of the workforce.

Build in an evaluation-feedback-revision loop.

Implementing the solution: *“The best laid plans of mice and men . . .”*

History is replete with examples of unfulfilled hopes and dreams, unreachd goals, and other types of failure. The best-designed solution to the correctly identified problem must still be implemented. This presents challenges, but one can learn from the example of others.

All partners must commit to active participation for the duration of the effort. The bigger the problem or program, the longer it will take to get results. Workforce problems result from slow, incremental processes. There are no “quick fixes;” so partners must be willing to stay involved--even when it seems like nothing is happening. If you have a three-year program, players should expect to remain actively involved for three years; if *systemic* change is your goal, involvement may be indefinite. (Or, participants may choose to alter their “normal” operating procedures.) In Fort Worth and Louisville, Chamber members provide internships and serve as mentors, and expect to continue doing so. Likewise, most school-to-work programs have some apprenticeship needs. In Medina County, Ohio, each year the number of companies--many of them Chamber members--that give hiring preference to graduates of the Endorsed Course of Study has increased. One of the most common concerns expressed by program administrators was the difficulty of getting volunteers to continue after the first few months; if key participants cease meeting their commitments or attending meetings, the entire program may be weakened. The implicit message is: “This program is not *that* important.”

Be willing to commit sufficient resources--both financial and staff. This is another reason for linkages and partnerships; there are opportunities to share resources. Different participant sectors have access to different funding sources. Some programs receive federal or state support. For example, Louisville received \$900,000 one year from the state of Kentucky in support of its program and the Portage County (Ohio) PIC has received a \$100,000 grant for initial school-to-work costs. But others are privately financed: Joint Venture Silicon Valley started fundraising for its “Challenge 2000” program with million dollar pledges from local Chamber members. Also,

the staff time, office space, phone, fax, and photocopy needs of the effort must be realistically anticipated when the effort is planned, then provided for. Who is going to do what, and where? If workforce development is a priority, it must be given priority status. Tasks not specifically allocated and provided for tend not to get done. Also, the Chamber, its members, or its partners may need to provide resources or financial assistance to educators or training providers. This is particularly so if computer proficiency is a goal. Most schools and non-profit training providers operate on very tight budgets, with few funds to upgrade computers or software. But if graduates are to be truly job-ready, they need access to the kind of equipment and computer programs they will encounter in the workplace--not a ten-year-old Apple IIe shared with thirty other students. Fort Worth's C³ has seriously committed to computer capacity throughout the schools, and is also training more teachers in computer use and education.

Whether you operate the program alone or with others, there must be clear organizational structures and mechanisms. This need not be formalized. Informal networks as in Spartanburg/Greenville or Portland often work very well, especially when people have a long history of interaction and every one knows who all the players are. But all partners need to know who all the others are and what their roles are. They need to know how to get (or give) information as well as where to get it from (or to). The Louisville and Fort Worth efforts operate within their respective Chambers and the responsible parties are clearly identified. Elsewhere the organizational structure is an independent corporation, with broad representation on boards and committees that have clearly defined roles. This is the case in Tulsa, Washtenaw County, Michigan, and several other places.

Communicate regularly with both your members and your partners. You will sometimes want or need to ask for assistance--volunteer time, financial or in-kind contributions--from individual Chamber members who are not part of the effort itself; to get and keep their support you must keep them informed of what you are doing. If all partners are not kept abreast of each others'

activities and progress, elements of the effort that should mesh get “out of synch.” Building Our Future in Minneapolis puts out a newsletter that serves as an information clearinghouse for participants and other interested parties. Although it no longer comes out as often as it did in the early years, it still keeps people abreast of developments.

Implementing the Solution

The best-laid plans of mine and men . . .

Commit to active participation for the duration of the effort.

Be willing to commit sufficient resources--financial and staff.

Establish clear organizational structures and mechanisms.

Communicate regularly with both members and partners.

Determining effectiveness: *How do you know you've succeeded?*

Once your program is up and running you are still not done. You have identified a problem, and designed and implemented a solution. Now, when do you stop? The answer to this, of course, relates to the evaluation-feedback-revision loop mentioned above.

Establish a precedent and system for accountability. This is essential not only for your effectiveness but also for your credibility. The person overseeing each phase or aspect of the workforce development program must be accountable to the program as a whole, for weakness in any of the parts weakens the whole. But there must also be accountability for the entire effort. Whether you are spending your own money (contributed or raised by members) or someone else's (e.g., foundation or government grants) someone needs to be accountable for management of the program and for results. Where does the “buck” stop?

Track your results. Regardless of the type of workforce development effort you mount, you must track the results in a *meaningful* manner. Establish measures of outcomes (not inputs, or even outputs), then set up a system for reporting and recording them. As in defining the problem, “conventional wisdom,” “common knowledge,” and anecdotal evidence will not do. You need hard data. This is a weak spot in many programs, which is understandable, because few plan in advance to do it. Also, it takes time and effort. It is much easier to document that fifteen people completed your program’s cycle than to say that twelve of those fifteen got suitable jobs and that six months later nine of them are still in the same positions while three have advanced. But only the latter will tell you if your effort has been meaningful. Minneapolis does some tracking of results and Wilmington, Delaware, conducts post-program interviews at three months and again at nine (although there has been some difficulty finding people for the follow-up contact). The Career and Technology Education program of the Maryland Department of Education follows up with employers that hire the program’s graduates both to see how well they perform or meet employer’s needs and to ascertain some employment history. A Chamber-based program has a real advantage here because its members *are* the employers. The important thing is to set up a system at the beginning to track results.

Compare the results with your goals and objectives, as well as with identified workforce development needs. Are you doing what is needed? Are you doing it well? What’s working- and what is not? Where are the difficulties? How this is done and on what schedule will vary with the program goals and design, but it needs to be done. Minneapolis seems to do this to some degree; many others do not have the information to allow them to do it very effectively.

Be prepared to revise the solution--i.e., redesign your effort--based on results or changed circumstances. You may need to shift your focus a bit, change your target industries or workforce segment, reassign tasks and responsibilities, or cultivate new partners, depending on what your results show. If you are doing the same thing the same way in Year Five that you did in Year One of your program, you are probably not doing the right thing. Incorporating an evaluation-feedback-revision loop into your effort also allows you to be flexible enough to respond to changes in the economy, in technology, or in the workforce. In summer 1996 Fort Worth's C³ completed a follow-up to its earlier survey of employers' occupation and skill needs. Now its participants--businesses and teachers--can adjust curricula and classroom exercises accordingly.

Determining Effectiveness

How do you know you've succeeded?

Establish a precedent and a system for accountability.

Track your results; and compare them with goals and objectives, and with identified needs.

Revise or redesign accordingly, if needed.

CONCLUSION

There are several fundamental points that stand out from this analysis of Chamber-based workforce development programs. First is that workforce development is a complex, multi-faceted effort, and no single entity can attempt to engage in all aspects of it. Consequently, several players should expect to be involved and several constituencies may be served. A second is that there is no "best practice" that addresses all needs or spans all programs. However, there are characteristics of "good" programs that can be models for others. This report identifies some of those characteristics, and provides examples of programs that exhibit

them. Finally, it is clear that comprehensive evaluations of workforce development programs have not been adequately performed. This is partly because many programs are too new; but it is also because evaluation and feedback mechanisms were not built into the program designs.

In our view, a model development effort should include several characteristics: a well-focused mission and clear assessment of the needs of the region to be served; a commitment of sufficient resources--both time and money; a recognition of all partners as “equals” and inclusion of key constituents in the planning process; and mechanisms for measuring success and revising the program as needs change. We encourage a Chamber of Commerce or similar organization to take these factors into consideration when embarking on a workforce development effort.

APPENDIX

MAJOR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BASED OR ENDORSED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

A wide range of workforce development programs and efforts, some based in Chambers of Commerce and some housed in other agencies or organizations, were examined for this research. Many were briefly discussed or referred to in the text of this report and a complete list of those programs follows this appendix.

This appendix provides more detail in summary overviews of eight major efforts that are housed in or endorsed by Chambers of Commerce and that provide useful lessons. The programs discussed are presented in alphabetical order by metropolitan area.

BALTIMORE

Greater Baltimore Committee Technology Council

The Greater Baltimore Committee Technology Council grew out of a recognition in the late 1980s that Baltimore needed to restructure its economic base. The manufacturing and port sectors that had long been dominant were declining while science-based sectors were growing; but many area residents lacked skills or education for jobs in emerging fields. In 1992 GBC and its partners developed a Life Sciences Strategy, which has since broadened its focus to four industry clusters: bioscience, information technology, aerospace, and environmental.

The primary goal of the GBC Technology Council is economic development of the greater Baltimore region, but workforce development is a key element of that. Members realize that a skilled workforce is critical for building on the region's scientific and technology capabilities. However, the council does not view itself as a long-term program provider. Rather, it is a strategic facilitator. Its role is to uncover or discover industry's technology-related needs and then develop start-up proposals to hand off to a new or existing program or organization for implementation.

The Technology Council is an operating unit of the Greater Baltimore Committee, a private-sector, member-funded Chamber-of-Commerce type organization serving Baltimore and five surrounding counties. The council has a 23-member board with representatives from the four industry clusters as well as from higher education (at the senior administrative level). Thus it is broad in both geographic scope and perspective.

The Technology Council has worked particularly closely with faculty and staff at Baltimore City Community College. It has been involved in curriculum development and course content in several occupational fields to ensure that graduates would be properly trained for existing and anticipated jobs. The council has also launched an entrepreneurship program to get start-up innovative technologies into the business mainstream (which, in turn, has shown the need for training in business development and management). In addition, the Technology Council's Director maintains contact with others involved in workforce development and education at the local, regional, and state levels.

As its own research, information gathering, and data base capacity is somewhat limited the Technology Council has relied on the Greater Baltimore Committee's annual needs assessment. Its broad representation has also helped in this regard because of the networking and information sharing that occurs at council and committee meetings. Still, the effort could benefit from more staff and a formalized system for staying on top of technology and industry changes, particularly given its role as a facilitator. Despite this difficulty, the Technology Council's regional scope and industry targets combine to make it a useful example for others of a facilitator/brokerage effort.

FORT WORTH

Project C³: Community-Corporations-Classrooms

Initiated in 1989, Project C³ developed from the confluence of two forces. One was the concern about the quality of public education, expressed at both local and national levels in the United States, and a push for educational reform. The other were blows to the Texas and Fort Worth economies in the mid-to-late 1980s. This produced a recognition that business and education needed to work together and with the community at large to institute the changes needed to prepare Fort Worth residents for the next generation's workplace needs.

The initial goal was a comprehensive reorientation of the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD), instituting systemic change throughout the district to make public education relevant and appropriate for broadly-defined employment needs in the region. This remains the primary goal, but the effort has also broadened its focus to begin addressing the needs of un/under-employed or displaced adult workers.

Although Project C³ is housed administratively in the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, both educators and business people view it as a genuine partnership of equals. Neither sector feels the other has "taken over" the program or is pushing its own agenda. In addition, the Steering Committee, Project Work Teams, and various ad hoc groups and committees have broad representation. Furthering the "connectivity" and networking potential is the fact that

the Chamber division administering C³ also administers Fort Worth Works (which is essentially a Workforce Development Board-type linkage program for targeted areas of the city to connect employers and their needs with the city and the not-for-profits engaged in job training and placement).

Working toward C³'s principal goal are several discrete programs. Applied Learning connects teachers with employers' and community representatives to develop "real world" curricular elements across all disciplines. It also links the FWISD's Adult Education program to the PIC, focusing on strengths in the Fort Worth economy while addressing the needs of former defense industry workers. Vital Link is a two-week "internship" now available to all seventh graders in the district, to give them workplace exposure and illustrate the "real life" applications of classroom instruction. Teachers go through the program as well. Moreover, for their professional development teachers can join with business representatives engaged in management development activities; both groups gain from the shared perspectives and contacts, and students then benefit. Technology Education works to give all students exposure to the types of computer hardware and programs they are likely to encounter in the workplace. The business and education sectors have worked together to determine computer training needs and design appropriate curricula, and FWISD has committed to upgrading the equipment and providing teachers sufficient opportunities to learn how to use it effectively. Other programs in Project C³ focus on better preparing minority and disadvantaged students for opportunities and success in college, on revising student assessment procedures and measures, and on providing access through the schools to social and medical/health services, where such needs impose on the education process. FWISD also maintains a Graduate Placement Center that local employers often contact (in preference to the Texas Employment Commission) when they have job openings.

One of the most impressive elements of Project C³ was the extensive groundwork that preceded program development and implementation. More than 3000 employees of 300 firms (representing 790 jobs in 350 occupations) were surveyed to determine both generic and specific skills and levels of competency needed for their work. Five years later the process was repeated (though with a smaller sample) so that the Project C³ programs could incorporate appropriate changes. Project C³ coordinators did not rely on limited personal experience or anecdotal evidence to determine workforce needs; they did extensive data gathering and analysis either in-house or with consultants. They also invested the time needed to develop meaningful collaborative relationships.

The principal difficulty has been in tracking results. The program is system-wide--in a district of 75,000 students--but elements have been implemented at different times in different schools. This, combined with mobility in the student population, makes it difficult to determine which FWISD graduates have participated in which program elements and then to

follow their employment or higher education progress. Still, continued involvement after six years by all participant sectors--education, employers, and the community at large--speaks well of C³, as does its expanding focus.

LOUISVILLE

Kentuckiana Education and Workforce Institute

In 1990, the Louisville Chamber of Commerce launched the Kentuckiana Education and Workforce Institute (KEWI) to promote the development and delivery of an educated, quality workforce. This is to be done through the development of business, labor, education, and governmental partnerships with the following objectives: identifying employer workforce development needs; providing information on the knowledge and skills needed to create a high-performance workplace; and serving as a catalyst to ensure the community provides the right education and training experiences.

KEWI has been an integral part of the Louisville Chamber. However, the current plan is to create an umbrella organization--the Metro Area Workforce Development Council. This council will provide policy leadership and coordination by bringing all workforce development interests together. KEWI will become part of the council, but still remain housed in the Chamber.

Since its inception, KEWI has convened working groups of individuals from business, labor, education, and government in fourteen industry clusters that span the regional economy, to identify changes shaping the demand for workers and the skill mix needed. Since 1992, KEWI has worked closely with both the Louisville City and the Jefferson County schools to facilitate the design and creation of the comprehensive model for school-to-work programs. Participants in this effort have included labor, secondary and post-secondary education, workforce development constituents, community-based organizations, and government. The resulting program was designated as one of five "Benchmark Initiatives" sites in the United States.

In addition to the School-to-Work program, KEWI has ongoing responsibility for collecting and disseminating data and other information on workforce issues. These include an Annual Employer Survey and Database, a Training Resource Database, and several "special studies" for key industries. KEWI also served as a major resource in the development of two management programs offered by the Chamber's Total Quality Transformation Council: Quality and Business Excellence (QuBE) and the Louisville Chapter of the Center for Quality Management.

MINNEAPOLIS

Building Our Future

Building Our Future is a multi-jurisdictional regional initiative to implement economic development strategies in the Twin Cities. “Quality jobs and ownership opportunities that enable individuals to support themselves” are key elements of this process-oriented effort that began in 1992. Although largely initiated by the then-President of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce (and still housed and staffed in the Chamber) Building Our Future is a regional coalition. Its Steering Committee includes public and private sector representatives from both Minneapolis and St. Paul, their respective counties, as well as from Bloomington and the suburbs. By focusing on the region as a whole--and emphasizing that the “outside world” views the area as a single region --Building Our Future has been able to counteract localism.

Building Our Future undertook an extensive strategic planning process, considering both internal and external factors, that produced a clear set of goals, principles, strategies, and tactics. The effort used the research capacity of the University of St. Thomas to determine regional work and skill needs. Primary elements of the effort related specifically to workforce development include a school-to-work component that partners with local schools for 2-plus-2 and apprenticeship programs. This both connects businesses to the schools and includes an assessment element to drive educational reform. Another major thrust is technology in the schools. There has been wide variation both across and within various school systems in the region with regard to student access to computers and training on them. Here, too, the business sector is actively involved.

Like many Chamber-based efforts Building Our Future does not view itself as a long-term service provider but rather as a convener and facilitator. It has a well-developed communications program--including a newsletter that is faxed to more than one thousand individuals--to keep people updated and facilitate networking. It thus connects people in different parts of the region and in different sectors (e.g., public, private, business, education) with one another and has reached the point where those interests look to Building Our Future. It has also been able to maintain large-scale volunteer involvement; more than three hundred people serve on the Steering Committee, task forces, and major programs.

SAN JOSE/SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Joint Venture: Silicon Valley

Joint Venture: Silicon Valley grew out of a 1991 meeting of members of twenty-six business organizations to examine and address issues facing a then-sluggish regional economy.

Although initiated by the San Jose Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, the effort is directed at the entire Silicon Valley, which also includes portions of three adjacent counties. The primary goal of Joint Venture: Silicon Valley is regional collaboration among business, government, education, and the community to sustain economic vitality. Due to dislocations the economy suffered in the late 1980s, workforce development is a key element of JVSV.

JVSV operates with a relatively small (25-30 members) board that includes representatives from the four major sectors (business, government, education, community) from throughout the region and a much larger (400+ member) Leadership Council. Programs are carried out under eleven initiatives, all of which are not-for-profit entities or which operate directly under Joint Venture: Silicon Valley. Those that most directly relate to workforce development are “21st Century Education Initiative: Challenge 2000”, “Workforce Silicon Valley”, and the Career Action Center.

Challenge 2000 seeks systemic improvement in school systems throughout the region. It provides “venture capital” to “teams” of schools that make up a K-12 chain. Schools compete for funds to institute programs directed at the Challenge 2000 goals. Funded efforts must include outcomes assessment and tracking mechanisms, as well as strategies for wider application of successful innovations (including how that application will be funded for the long term). Although an outside resource person is provided to funded teams, there is no requirement that funded projects work closely with local employers to help establish student performance standards or design curricular elements.

Workforce Silicon Valley functions as a regional workforce development board for state or federally funded school-to-work initiatives. It attempts to project future workforce needs, then work with employers to provide work-based learning opportunities and also develop new approaches for recruitment, training, and recognition of teachers. Connecting teachers and employers will provide for flexibility to meet changing needs.

The Career Action Center actually predates Joint Venture: Silicon Valley but has reoriented its focus. Recognizing that individuals can no longer expect to have a single occupation for the same employer throughout their work life, the Career Action Center now focuses on career self-reliance to help workers cope with changing circumstances. It maintains a resource library and provides career counseling as well as information on employment opportunities, corporate programs and services, and education and training. The Career Action Center serves both individuals and corporate members, thus linking employers and employees.

SPARTANBURG/GREENVILLE

Quality in Workplace/Quality Institute

This effort in Spartanburg/Greenville South Carolina grew out of the 1983 request from a major supplier of silicon wafers for information regarding the potential of quality management in the region to improve the competitiveness of its local plant. The Chamber agreed to help develop the information, conducted a survey of business leaders, and held a conference on the subject. This led to classes offered to executives and top managers in the region, and ultimately the creation of the “Quality Institute.”

The primary goal of the institute is to “provide a wide range of quality-improvement programs for businesses, education institutions, and service organizations.” This involves regular offering of workshops, seminars, and other services and resources. In addition, the Institute helps businesses to “network” and share their experiences in quality improvement.

Initially Chamber-based and coordinated, the Institute is now affiliated with the University of South Carolina at Spartanburg, and receives hard dollar support from the University. It offers a regular menu of short courses, in addition to customized programs.

TULSA

Tulsa Training Coalition

The Tulsa Training Coalition grew from a perceived need in the community that the future vitality of the local economy depended on the availability of a high-skilled workforce. Business and community leaders saw the attraction of new firms to the region as a key source of growth, and understood that the quality of the labor force was a key determinant of the attractiveness of the region.

The training coalition has a workforce development board made up of representatives from city government, the Chamber of Commerce, public utilities, banks, and educational institutions. The board oversees the operation of programs in four major areas: School to Work, Welfare to Work, Incumbent Training, and the PIC programs. Each of the programs is organized as a non-profit organization that is a subsidiary of the Chamber, including the welfare to work program (INDEX). The programs are administered by Chamber staff.

Given the incredible breadth of Chamber programs, the involvement of a wide range of partners is required. The Chamber has successfully engaged several--(thirteen)--school districts, as well as businesses, local governmental units, and institutions of higher education

in its programs. The Tulsa Junior College is instrumental in the design and provision of training in both the school-to-work (Careers Partners Inc) and incumbent training (QUEST) programs, for example.

The Chamber is especially well-known for its “Career Partners Inc.” program. This initially had a focus in the metallurgy industry, but it has expanded now to include programs in the areas of Health, International Business, and Transportation. The Tulsa Training Coalition is probably the most broadly-scaled workforce development effort examined.

WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

Wilmington Employment Core

The Wilmington Employment Core is the result of efforts by the Mayor of Wilmington and a local State Senator to increase the employability of young city residents. The program is fewer than three years old. While technically not a “chamber-based” program, it is “endorsed” by the Newcastle County Chamber of Commerce.

The primary goal of the Employment Core is to provide training and placement services to residents of the city aged eighteen to twenty-four. Participants have high school diplomas or the GED. The Employment Core, which is funded by the state, has a staff of three people. Their primary responsibilities are for assessment of applicants and placement services. In the case of unqualified applicants, the staff works closely with the Delaware Department of Labor, which provides basic skills training. Placement activities include job search training and coordination of the provision of references. The program also includes a wage reimbursement component for employers who hire participants. In addition, job skills training in the areas of data entry, customer service, and conflict resolution is provided by the Delaware Technical Community College. These programs are designed primarily to serve the region’s banking and financial services industry.

To assess the impact of the program, the staff attempts to survey program participants within three months of participation. Moreover, they are currently developing a survey for employers to be given one month after employment. It is still too soon, though, to determine how effective these measures will be.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS EXAMINED

The following workforce development efforts, programs, or projects, listed alphabetically by city or region, were examined and analyzed for this report:

ACENet - Appalachian Center for Economic Networks
Baltimore City Community College - Biotech Education program
Baltimore City Community College - Training and Professional Development program
Greater Baltimore Committee Technology Council
Bay City (Michigan) - MTP/GM Powertrain
Berkeley Biotech Education program
Berkeley First Source
Fort Worth C³
Kalamazoo Workforce Development Board
Louisville - Kentuckiana Education Workforce Institute
Louisville/Jefferson County Industry Networks
Maryland Department of Education
Medina County (Ohio) Endorsed Course of Study
Minneapolis - Building Our Future
Norfolk (Virginia) Job Readiness Program
Philadelphia Convention Center Fund
Philadelphia High School Academies
Philadelphia Opportunities Industrialization Center
Portland (Oregon) Development Commission - JobNet
Portland Regional Training System for Semi-conductors
San Jose - Joint Venture: Silicon Valley
Spartanburg/Greenville, South Carolina Quality Institute
Tulsa Training Coalition
Washtenaw (County) (Michigan) Education-Work Consortium
Wilmington (Delaware) Employment Core
Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce

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In addition, various newsletters, reports, strategic plans, and other publications and documents produced by the different workforce development efforts were consulted.