

## **EMERGING THEMES AND WORKFORCE STRATEGIES COMMITTEE (WSC) PLANNING FOR 2007**

At least three broad strategic themes, emerging both from CWI's past deliberations and from recent state and federal initiatives, are likely to shape the larger context of CWI and Workforce Strategies Committee work in the coming year. These themes offer one possible way of focusing Committee discussion of its priorities for 2007.

### **Regions and regional partnerships**

Regionalism has been a core theme of the Governor's Grow Wisconsin initiative and CWI discussions from the outset, with "targeted regional priorities" a core WSC objective. Reflection on the state's economic geography and program challenges has driven interest in regional partnerships that transcend standard political or administrative boundaries, build innovative relationships among regional stakeholder groups, and better link economic and workforce development.

The GROW grant program, developed with WSC guidance, is the main expression of that interest. The committee has also helped guide the development of a set of regional metrics as a tool for helping GROW partnerships think and act regionally. Meanwhile, U.S. DOL's Workforce Innovations in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) program, in which the greater Milwaukee/Southeastern Wisconsin GROW region is participating, has both reinforced the state's regional efforts and identified regionalism as a growing federal priority.

Before and during the development of the GROW project, the full CWI heard presentations on individual regional efforts in northeastern, southeastern, and south central Wisconsin. Helping regions attract and retain both high-skill jobs and skilled workers aligns with the committee's stated strategic interest in helping the state as a whole to do the same. At least one respondent to the November email survey felt many of the committee's strategic priorities could be approached from a regional standpoint.

Committee members have already suggested identifying "best practices" from GROW regions as a priority activity. Identifying promising practices from other states' regionalism programs and from model regions elsewhere in the U.S. could be another. Further questions include how else to advance a regionalism agenda, and how other committee priorities can best be linked with it.

### **Industry sectors and clusters**

Both CWI and WSC have shown interest in industry sectors on both a statewide and regional basis. This has included strategic targeting of sectors that either face shortages or promise new job opportunities, as well as discussions of industry clusters as ways of linking workforce development to economic development goals and occupational demands in particular regions.

Sectors and clusters may be the natural contexts in which to address ongoing committee interests in identifying current skill gaps, emerging skill needs, and better tools for identifying and responding proactively to both. Sectors and clusters may also connect the Committee's interest in the K-12 foundations of industry skills with its interest (emphasized again in at least one November survey response) in incumbent worker training.

WSC has had presentations on health care as a critical statewide sector, and has devoted considerable time to the manufacturing sector on the way to endorsing both the Advanced Manufacturing Solutions and the MSSC programs. The WSC or its antecedent committees have also discussed some of the technology-focused sectors (such as biotechnology) now being targeted by the Governor's Jobs for the Future initiative. Each of these sectors, as well as other regional industry cluster initiatives, figure prominently in one or more regional GROW projects.

However, the committee has not formally recommended adopting a systematically sector-based approach to workforce development. Just how far in this direction the state should go, along with immediate next steps in pursuing the committee's already established interest in sectors, are among possible strategic planning issues for committee discussion.

### **Career pathways**

Career pathways offer one mechanism for aligning K-16+ education and training systems, as well as other work-based learning for both youth and incumbent workers, with industry skill needs and opportunities both statewide and region-by-region. In that respect they are a logical extension both of an interest in regions and sectors and of the committee's stated strategic interest in a more flexible, accessible, and industry-responsive workforce preparation and career advancement system (reaffirmed in November survey responses).

Presentations to WSC about career clustering, as well as the WSC's support for the Committee on Baccalaureate Expansion (COBE) recommendations have touched indirectly on the career pathways concept. Presentations about workplace learning centers, discussions of distance learning options, and more recent attention to Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAs) all concern potential tools for implementing career pathways. The committee's discussions of Project Lead The Way and its endorsement of the Manufacturing Skills Standards Certification (MSSC) initiative address potential elements of a career pathways approach in the manufacturing sector.

Although the GROW II guidelines encouraged a focus on career pathways, GROW II projects have only unevenly embraced the concept. However, the Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) initiative, for which DWD and the Wisconsin Technical College System have now been awarded a \$1 million Joyce Foundation grant, includes specific provisions for the third round of GROW grants to support career pathways even more directly. The Joyce Foundation's emphasis on the skill needs of lower-wage lower-skilled workers (as well as the DWD proposal's provisions for immigrant groups) also speaks to an explicit WSC strategic concern with underserved populations.

The RISE proposal's focus on career pathways clearly advances several stated WSC strategic priorities. Just how central a focus to place on career pathways, however, remains a possible topic for further committee discussion, as does the question of immediate next steps in pursuing a career pathways agenda in connection with the RISE initiative.

### **Further resources:**

DOL WIRED program: <http://www.doleta.gov/pdf/WIRED%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

Alliance for Regional Stewardship: <http://www.regionalstewardship.org/>

National Governors Assn. Sectors Brief: <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/06STATESECREG.PDF>

National Network of Sector Partners Sector Strategies site: <http://www.sectorstrategies.org/>

Joyce Foundation "Shifting Gears" program:

<http://www.joycefdn.org/programs/employment/employmentmain-fs.html>

Workforce Strategy Center Career Pathways guide:

[http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC\\_pathways8.17.06.pdf](http://www.workforcestrategy.org/publications/WSC_pathways8.17.06.pdf)