



## **Seventh Planning District Consortium WORKFORCE INVESTMENT PLAN PY 05- PY 06**

### **A. Regional Vision and Priorities**

#### **1. Describe your LWIA's vision for a Regional workforce investment system aligned with the Governor's statewide vision.**

The vision for the Seventh Regional Labor Market Area is to prepare well educated and trained people caring enough to perform their jobs successfully who will determine the economic vitality and quality of life in any society. The Seventh Planning District Workforce Investment Boards recognize that work is basic to both economic prosperity and personal dignity. The renewal of Northwest Louisiana depends on the renewal of our workforce system. This vision is consistent with Governor's ideas for the State of Louisiana.

Since the inception of the Workforce Investment Act, it has been the mission of the local WIA programs to make available to the customers an array of employment, education, training and workforce development services, so that individuals and employers can make informed choices about their needs. The Louisiana Department of Labor and the Workforce Investment Boards for Region 7 believe that a sound economic base is essential to maintaining the quality of life in our area. It is evident that the availability of labor is a key regional economic factor. As firms locate or expand in our area, a sufficient supply of skilled labor - a vibrant and diverse applicant pool - is necessary for continued economic success.

The need to provide businesses and job seekers with a more comprehensive package of services is critical to our area's well being. Therefore, the Louisiana Department of Labor Workforce Development and the Local Workforce Investment Boards are undertaking a restructuring of the delivery of employment and training services for our area and across the state. Our new service strategy will eliminate duplication of services and reduce Administrative overhead through integration of the Wagner-Peyser and the Workforce Investment Act delivery services. This new integration model will ensure that the business needs of hiring, retention, training, and advancement of workers are met, and help to connect businesses that are looking for qualified workers.

It is expected that customers will secure more and better jobs in the region and increase their earnings potential; employers are expected to strengthen their competitiveness and add to their workforce better educated and skilled employees; and the community as a whole is expected to derive a greater economic well being. The Workforce Investment Boards believe that in order for the WIA delivery system or the new demand driven system to reach its optimum effectiveness in the regional communities, there must be maximum coordination between the partner services and regular communication with each partner; coordination with economic development entities; strong linkages with employers and maximum support from the various educational institutions.

Aligning our workforce and economic development efforts and closing the poverty gap through work first and demand-side strategies is part of the vision of how the region's WIBs will help Northwest Louisiana attain its strategic goals. The two (2) year vision is a streamlined system, which will reduce or eliminate duplication, thereby eliminating isolated delivery programs.

The system is embarking on a business reengineering project that will result in redesigned and

reinvented employment and training services. This will lead to a dramatic improvement of our service delivery resulting in a shift from a task-based system to a process-based service delivery system. Through the shared vision of the region's elected officials and workforce boards, these goals can be achieved by integrating the services of the welfare, education, and economic development systems within the workforce investment system.

## **2. What are the Regional economic development goals for attracting, retaining, and growing business and industry in your Region?**

Economic development agencies can be especially helpful in developing a strong regional workforce by assessing business trends and workforce needs and helping the regional workforce investment areas stay abreast of emerging and high growth industries.

Through partnerships and collaboration with economic development agencies, the WIBs expect to attract, retain, and expand regional businesses by offering labor exchange services, occupational skills training, rapid response, labor market information, and incumbent worker training through the Louisiana Department of Labor and other business services.

The Seventh Regional Labor Market Area Goals Include the Following:

- Building a better workforce using WIA Title I funds as well as other funding sources that are a part of the one-stop center integrated system to link employers and individuals to education and training funds and programs, such as OJT, to help employers retain employees as well as provide skilled employees to existing and new businesses.
- Serving as the region's workforce broker bringing employers and qualified applicants together.
- Promoting long-term employability, employer retention and lifelong learning by providing access to training to insure competitiveness in today's labor market.
- Setting systems policies, priorities, and budgets that support stronger connections to employers and economic development as well as directing services to targeted populations.
- Providing access to current workforce data and labor market information in helping customers design individual training programs that will result in gainful employment.
- Decrease the level of unemployment while increasing employment opportunities by providing inducements for industries to locate, expand, and start new businesses in the region.
- Build on the success of local businesses and industries which have growth and expansion potential, promote programs and policies which will support the further growth of these industries.
- Promote advancement of existing medical hubs in the region through expanded and integrated medical related services and industries.

## **3. What is the LWIB's vision for maximizing and leveraging the broad array of resources available in your Region in order to insure a skilled workforce for your Region's business**

## **and industry?**

One of the best ways to leverage federal, state, and local resources to insure a skilled workforce is to make the most of the dollars going to education and training in our region. The state currently has an Incumbent Worker Training Program to assist businesses to upgrade the skills of their current workers. Region 7 leads the state with 217 employers assisted from the inception of the program (June 1998 - July 1999) through the most current program year (June 2005 - July 2006). Region 7 is second only to Region 1 (New Orleans) in number of dollars awarded with \$50,416,227 dedicated to training for local businesses during the same time period.

Region 7 also leverages their dollars with Adult Education Programs, TAA (Trade Adjustment Assistance), TOPS (Louisiana's Tuition Opportunity Program), PELL, Louisiana Rehabilitation Services training dollars, and economic development programs.

Of course, one of the primary roles for the regional workforce investment system is to insure that the region will have a sufficient pool of skilled workers. The Workforce Investment Boards intend to focus some of its resources on targeted industries, especially those that can provide a sustainable wage for entry-level workers and good career ladders.

By engaging customers in jobs that are career oriented, the region will achieve long-term economic benefits. By targeting specific employers and industries, it will be easier for the region to develop stronger business relationships as opposed to trying to serve the needs of all employers.

#### **4. What is the LWIB's vision for insuring a continuum of education and training opportunities that support a skilled workforce?**

Region 7's workforce system must listen to business and industry and insure that training and education prepare our citizens for both current and future jobs of businesses seeking to grow and expand in our area.

One effort currently underway to improve the continuum of education and training opportunities is the distribution of guidance handbooks entitled "Louisiana Rocks: Start Planning Now for Your Career" created by LDOL, the Department of Education, and the Louisiana Workforce Commission. This tool will give middle and high school students better information about what kind of jobs will be in great demand when they graduate. Region 7 will continue to support the "Work Ready Certificate" program to help insure that its participants meet the expressed needs of the business community.

Preparing the future workforce for the region will also be a major challenge in the area of education. It is imperative that the region's workforce system provide the type of educational and training services that will help to reduce drop-out rates, and increase workforce skills. Providing tutoring services and study skills training will continue to be a major activity in addressing these concerns.

The WIBs will work closely with the school systems in the region regarding the national concept of "No Child Left Behind" as appropriate. The use of the state's Eligible Training Provider List will continue to be a major factor in the pursuit of training. Training customers for demand occupations in the region will be at the forefront of our approach.

- 5. What is the LWIB's vision for bringing together the key workforce development players in the Region, including business and industry, economic development, education, and the workforce system to continuously identify the workforce challenges facing the Region and to develop innovative strategies and solutions that effectively leverage resources to address those challenges?**

The Workforce Investment Boards are a key player in the development of a constructive workforce for the community and the region. They have a broad range support among their membership with business members exercising primary roles. The WIBs can adopt policies that allow them to reach out and embrace these key organizational groups. The WIBs commitment to their goals and vision will help to keep the focus on developing the community workforce needs on a long-term basis.

Region 7 has taken part in and continues to support several efforts designed to bring together key players in workforce development to identify challenges and solutions. Among those are the Health Works Initiative and the Governor's Solutions to Poverty Summit. In addition, a Labor Management Team, made up of members from economic development, education, WIA, LDOL, and private business, has been formed to address the needs of businesses facing layoffs or closure.

- 6. What is the LWIB's vision for insuring that every youth has the opportunity to develop and achieve career goals through education and workforce training, including the youth most in need, such as out-of-school youth, homeless youth, youth in foster care, youth aging out of foster care, youth offenders, children of incarcerated parents, migrant and seasonal farm worker youth, and other youth at-risk?**

The development of our youth is a key initiative in our regional strategy. They are the future leaders of our community and our workforce.

The goal of the youth services is that youth are empowered with the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes necessary for employment and economic independence in high wage careers and lifelong learning.

It is envisioned that youth in the region will become self-sufficient through entered employment and achieve educational attainments and certificates in recognition of their positive outcomes. As stated earlier, reducing the drop-out rate in the region will be a key initiative.

The investment of WIA resources will be demand driven affording the youth an opportunity to obtain skills needed by businesses so that these youth can succeed in the 21st century economy. We also intend to involve as many youth agencies in the region that share this common mission in our approach to meeting the needs of our youth. Agencies, such as the local Job Corps Program and the Louisiana National Guard Youth Challenge Program, will be looked at very closely for coordination and collaboration.

To address the needs of those targeted "at-risk" groups, Region 7 will continue to collaborate and communicate with such organizations as the Caddo Parish Homeless Assistance Program, Providence House, CASA, social service agencies, boys and girls clubs, and those associated with the juvenile justice system.

- 7. Given the labor shortage that will increase over the next 25 years, describe the LWIB's**

**vision for how it will insure that older individuals receive workforce training that will prepare them to reenter the labor market and become a workforce solution for employers.**

As our population continues to age, older workers will play an increasingly important role in maintaining the region's economy and leadership in the labor force. They are returning to the workplace in record numbers. They are a dedicated and experienced core of our workforce.

This population of mature workers includes individuals who are retiring at young ages and want second careers but not necessarily a full-time job. They bring to the table such factors as sound judgement, commitment to quality, attendance, and punctuality. These are characteristics that employers value highly. Their loyalty makes them an attractive resource for employers and possibly mentors for young workers.

WIA funded training and employment activities are available to any individual. Some of the older clients, including former homemakers who have never worked before, are finding themselves in need of jobs. However, services to older workers, age 55 years and older, will primarily be provided through our partnerships with Experience Works and the AYUDA Program. These senior employment programs provide training, motivation, and guidance to clients as they prepare to reenter the workforce with employers in the community. Many of the services offered to these senior workers include unsubsidized employment assistance, work experience, on-the-job training, job shadowing opportunities, and community services employment. Employers gain motivated employees who are ready and eager to work.

Currently, the Bossier Parish One-Stop in conjunction with Bossier Parish School Board Adult Education staff, offer updated computer training for older workers, which includes knowing computer basics and terminology, learning the Internet, and instruction in how to use Microsoft Word and Excel programs.

Our vision for this new workforce demand driven system will be clearly established as we view the unfolding of the methodologies and processes contained throughout this plan. Employers are the driving force of our economy, and that's why the regional workforce investment programs are committed to being business friendly. Our priority is to meet the demands of business by providing adults and youth with the necessary educational, occupational, and other skill training and services needed for high demand occupations in the 21st Century.