Strategic Collaboration with Antelope Valley Stakeholders to Develop and Implement WIRED 3.1 Initiatives

Greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance (GAVEA)
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GAVEA is pleased to share this brief outline with CSA partners as an example of local synergies which developed in the Antelope Valley, supporting best practices to:

a) Enhance and expand partnership between stakeholders
b) Support outreach to local businesses; to engage them in a progressive dialogue
c) Use the findings of the WIRED 3.1 Survey Summary Report to provide context for initiatives that will measurably impact the region's innovative companies by addressing their workforce needs

As interesting as the WIRED 3.1 Survey and Summary Report recommendations are, their greatest value can be measured by the extent to which they serve as a launching point for meaningful initiatives for economic change. Here is an excerpt from the WIRED 3.1 Summary Report for the Antelope Valley:

How skills will evolve:
Greater cooperation and synergies are required between employers and educational stakeholders to develop and modify curricula to anticipate future needs and meet present needs. There are some provisions for local follow-up to enhance the dialogue between the stakeholders, but our region currently lacks any major type of oversight from which to build future initiatives.

All of the partners face the similar challenge of implementing WIRED 3.1 initiatives to create positive momentum; to do so requires ongoing leadership, encouragement, active participation and consistent follow through. As GAVEA is demonstrating in the Antelope Valley, the key to our success is sharing the WIRED culture and deliverables with like-minded organizations to achieve sustainable improvements for our local workforce.

GAVEA has been actively involved with other Antelope Valley organizations in an outreach process which may be replicated by partners in other regions within the CIC. The process is summarized below as a series of steps:

Summary of Outreach Process:

1) Steering Committee formed of stakeholders

2) Survey of workforce issues effecting the general business community, using experience gained from the WIRED 3.1 Survey implementation

3) Findings compiled and presented, along with WIRED 3.1 Survey data and other pertinent local workforce information at "Meeting of the Minds" symposium

4) Feedback and initiatives developed during the symposium break-out sessions compiled and organized into two areas of focus: Pre-Workforce and Current Workforce

5) Form two Taskforce Committees (Pre and Current Workforce) to review and select one or two key initiatives for implementation

6) Taskforce Committee Chairs recruit community leaders with expertise needed to develop and execute targeted action plans to achieve selected initiatives

Antelope Valley Case Study

Local Partnerships:
GAVEA completed the WIRED 3.1 Survey and Summary Report early in the third quarter of 2008. During this process, GAVEA had begun working more closely with the LA County Workforce Investment Board, and had become part of a steering committee to develop and implement initiatives to make a real and lasting impact on the region's economic viability through workforce development.

The goals of WIRED 3.1 directly correlated with one of the primary goals set forth in the LA County WIB's 2008 Strategic Plan:

"Provide leadership on workforce issues by convening and facilitating public and private stakeholders to impact the economic health of the region, (the region identified for recommended action was the Antelope Valley).

Recommended Action:

3.1   Schedule meetings with community colleges and economic development agencies for the purpose of creating a strategy to address workforce needs, including adult schools, regional occupational programs and private vocational schools in the discussion/process."

Douglas Barr, President and CEO of Goodwill Southern California and LA County WIB Board Member, was assigned as "point person" to "engage stakeholders in planning and collaborative efforts.

Steering Committee:
The LA County WIB organized a consortium of economic development organizations, City economic development personnel, workforce service providers and educational stakeholders to form a steering committee. Steering committee member organizations include:

- City of Palmdale and City of Lancaster
- Antelope Valley Board of Trade (AVBOT)
- Greater Antelope Valley Economic Alliance (GAVEA)
- Antelope Valley College

> ➤ Antelope Valley and Palmdale WorkSource Centers
> ➤ Employment Development Department (EDD)
> ➤ Goodwill Southern California
> ➤ LA County Workforce Investment Board (LA WIB)

Workforce Survey:

The steering committee's first task was to gain a better understanding of the specific workforce needs of the Antelope Valley region. With assistance from GAVEA and the City of Lancaster the team developed a survey using elements from CSA's WIRED 3.1 survey, though simplified, to capture response from all sectors, including service, retail and healthcare. The survey instrument was accessed via user-friendly Survey Monkey, which allowed responses to be gathered and compiled online.

Meeting of the Minds:

The "Meeting of the Minds" symposium was held at Antelope Valley College on August 7, 2008. Invitations for this event were sent to Lancaster and Palmdale businesses of all types, as well as to all stakeholders. 64 companies attended.

Keynote speaker Paul Stewart, President of the CA Manufacturers and Technology Association, shared information about workforce trends and issues on a state-wide level.

Survey Findings:

Presentations of findings from three recent business climate and workforce issue surveys were presented by the organizations which spear-headed them:

1) **WIRED 1.1 Business Climate Survey for LA County**: administered by the LAEDC, the survey was comprised of responses from 5,000 businesses throughout LA County, including 103 which were classified as high-tech or innovative companies.

2) **WIRED 3.1 Workforce Survey of High-Tech and Innovative Companies**: administered by GAVEA, the survey was comprised of responses from 22 companies in the greater Antelope Valley including Lancaster, Palmdale, Mojave, Ridgecrest and Tehachapi.

3) **Meeting of the Minds Survey**: administered by the Lancaster/Palmdale Steering Committee with responses from Lancaster and Palmdale businesses.

Interestingly, the results of the WIRED 3.1 Survey which were based exclusively on responses from innovative companies mirrored those of the general business community with the exception of engineering. All three surveys emphasized a comprehensive need for:

> ➤ Problem solving skills
> ➤ Basic skills such as math, science and English
> ➤ Workplace success skills

Feedback and Initiatives:
After findings from the three surveys were presented, a facilitator helped summarize the commonalities. Attendees formed topic-oriented groups to develop specific initiatives to address the skill gaps outlined. After the breakout sessions, the facilitator helped the group select the most important initiatives and rank them by relevance.

The steering committee made the commitment to keep the participants, as well as the AV business community in general, of progress made to implement these initiatives.

Taskforces Formed:
The initiatives from the feedback sessions were organized into two categories: those that primarily addressed the needs and issues pertaining to the Pre-Workforce and those pertaining to the Current Workforce. Some of the initiatives appeared on both lists.

The steering committee brainstormed to identify leaders in local business, government and education to lead the two taskforces. Chairs and co-chairs were suggested and members of the steering committee were assigned to facilitate the taskforce creation.

Initiatives Selected for Implementation:
Each taskforce reviewed the initiatives put forth from the symposium and selected the most compelling item for follow-up. Action plans are being developed and implementation is in the planning stage. In the Antelope Valley, both the Pre and Current Workforce Teams selected a similar initiative: To create a resource guide of all programs available to meet the workforce needs. In the taskforce discussions, members expressed concern that we do not spend precious time, money and resources "re-inventing the wheel."

One of the main problems perceived by both taskforces is lack of awareness of the various programs and resources that are already available in the Antelope Valley. For example, few members were aware that the Antelope Valley College makes its extensive job placement department available to non-students. Or that comprehensive curricula already exist for workplace success skills that could be shared between private and public educational districts.

For the *pre-workforce* initiatives, the resource guide will focus on delineating "pathways," in some cases going as far back as middle school, to increase awareness of resources and skill requirements for certain careers. In addition to serving the population of new and future workers, the resource guide would serve businesses, identifying opportunities for partnerships with educational institutions and agencies such as ROP and the Aero Institute.

For the *current* workforce initiatives, the resource guide will focus on opportunities for job-specific certification and skill-upgrades. For example, in the Antelope Valley, Business Degrees are highly desirable in order to progress into advanced project management required for systems engineering. Another current workforce need that was identified was for training on multi-generational workplace collaboration. Purdue

and Pepperdine both offer these programs, but like other educational stakeholders including AVC, they sometimes struggle with attempts to gain wide-spread awareness of the resources they offer. Information does not always get into the hands of the project leads within companies. For this reason, the taskforce teams will be including key business leaders, gaining commitment and involvement from the very top managers within organizations.

Current Status:
In the Antelope Valley, the outreach process is still evolving. GAVEA expects to be able to report tangible success, as these initiatives, which reflect the findings and recommendations from WIRED 3.1, are implemented. The target date for the completion of the resource guides and the detailed plan for a community awareness campaign to promote the guides is the end of first quarter, 2009.

Although the process is in its early development, here are the foundations that have been laid which predict success:

➢ The collaboration between like-minded organizations in the Antelope Valley has become focused on tangible, measurable and sustainable results.

➢ It has created a desire for greater networking and combined effort that will not only facilitate regional economic growth, but help link employers to academia and provide support for entrepreneurship.

➢ The ongoing dialogue and cooperation between agencies continues, as does the dynamic value of WIRED 3.1. GAVEA was asked to discuss the WIRED 3.1 Summary report at the LA County WIB Annual Board Retreat at the end of October. Moving forward, GAVEA will continue to support the process of implementing the taskforce initiatives, which mirror those of WIRED 3.1.