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Workforce Transformational Opportunities

A major leitmotif of the WIRED project is *transformational change*. The move to identify and assess regional economies based on Clusters of Opportunity is one such change; another is the development and refinement of cluster strategies, already in-place and on-going for many CIC agencies. However, the data from project 3.1 show significant gaps between the needs of the driver industries and the readiness of workers in the regional economy, and the capacity of the education/training infrastructure. Workforce Investment Boards are poised to seize the opportunity to be the convener and advocate of transformational change, and to drive the integration of workforce development with economic development, serving not just the supply side but the demand side of the labor market.

Workforce Investment Board Assets and Transformational Roles

The 'grow our own' approach, advocated by the Orange County 2008-2013 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, applies not only to workforce training – to prepare the local workforce for a future economy – but also to economic development in expanding and growing local economies rather than attempting to bring new industries into a region. California's Workforce Investment Boards are in an unmatched position to engage full as the driver of this transformative dovetailing approach due to a number of unparalleled assets:

- Industry and labor representatives on the WIB able to provide access to leaders within their communities;
- Education representatives on the WIB able provide continuous input from the entire education/training lattice;
- Community representatives can bring channels of access for the WIB to local community circles;
- Board members bring individual relational networks to the board.

Having noted the assets of WIBs, three immediate transformational roles become apparent: that of an advocate in informing support in the legislature to grow these regional economies, and that of a neutral, trusted convener of stakeholders. These roles are structured around the Corridor's triumverate framework of regional prosperity: business development in the driving clusters, workforce investment to supply the driving clusters, and K-12 education to change the perception and heighten interest in careers in the driving clusters.

As advocates who are leaders in their own industry and fields of expertise, WIB members are uniquely qualified to inform, encourage, and amplify political change, that will benefit both the supply-side of the workforce, and the demand-side, that of the business community.

As a neutral, trusted convener, WIBs can bring industry, education, labor, and community leaders to the same table, to build cluster-based stakeholder groups that will drive demand-side workforce development policies and strategies, including:

- Assessing labor market issues, shortages, or disconnects;
- Determining the root-cause(s) of these issues, shortages, or disconnects;
- Developing strategies to leverage, increase, and build capacities of the regional education/training infrastructure, both to meet an immediate need, and to plan for meeting future needs;
- Changing expectations in the community.

In addition, in both the convener and advocate roles, workforce support must be addressed; i.e., adequate transportation across the labor-shed, affordable housing at every income range, and access to healthcare for workers and their families. These regional resources allow a skilled workforce to continue to contribute to the regional economy, rather than migrating away to other areas of the country, taking their valuable experience and skills with them.