

West Alabama/East Mississippi WIRED  
Quarterly Report  
October - December, 2006

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Project Name: West Alabama/East Mississippi (WAEM) WIRED Project

Grantee: Alabama Department of Economic & Community Affairs/Office of Workforce Development (ADECA/OWD)

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Summary of General Grant Activities and Successes:

Substantial progress on the meat of the WAEM WIRED project was made between October 1, 2006, and December 31, 2006, as the WIRED team became fully engaged with our primary TA providers – RUPRI and CAEL. In particular, the WIRED team and TAs conducted training, developed Goal 1, Goal 2, and Goal 3&4 systems and plans, and moved to engage communities and the region in the WIRED process.

During this three-month period, WIRED staff training was conducted at each of the partner community and junior colleges. The purpose of this training was threefold: 1) give WIRED staff knowledge about each sister institution and the capabilities of each; 2) give WIRED staff a drive-through perspective of the 37-county region by having them drive to each location; and 3) provide staff training on the WIRED process. The following provides an overview of this training:

- October 6: Staff training at Jones County Junior College in Ellisville at the new Technology Center. Staff reviewed the WIRED implementation plan; reviewed Dr. Mark Drabenstott's "regional competitiveness" presentation at the Sept. 29 regional meeting; began development of college-based WIRED brochures, PowerPoints, and web pages. Staff were assigned to follow-up with each Goal Committee member for feedback and meet with local leaders to inform them about WIRED. WITS was discussed, with all colleges requesting a WITS seat. Team building and networking activities continued from the opening retreat (Sept. 20-22). In the afternoon, JCJC provided a tour of its Technology Center, training facilities, and main campus facilities.
- October 13: Staff training at Wallace Community College - Selma. Staff reported on their assignments over the past week (meeting with local leaders, Goal committee members, etc.). Staff were introduced to Jim Collins' principles from *Good to Great*. Broadband needs and opportunities were discussed; progress on brochures, PowerPoints, and web pages was reviewed; and assignments made to collect workforce and economic development studies, plans, and reports. Team building and networking activities continued. After lunch, WCCS provided a tour of historic downtown Selma.
- October 20: Staff training at East Mississippi Community College in Mayhew. Staff reported on their assignments over the past week. Review and discussion of the Florida

Region Building Program was led by team members. Basic format and content for the WIRED brochure and PowerPoint were finalized. A review of the proposed BellSouth/ATT merger was discussed, focusing on the proposed improvements to rural Broadband access for the BellSouth region. A first review of RUPRI's proposed Goal 2 action plan was conducted. Team building and networking activities continued. During lunch, the new steel plant CEO and local economic developer discussed workforce and economic growth going on in the area. EMCC provided a tour of Mayhew training facilities, the new steel manufacturing facility, and industrial area after lunch.

- November 3: Staff training at Alabama Southern Community College in Thomasville. The WIRED team that attended the Minneapolis Academy reported on information received at that important conference. Brian Dabson with RUPRI provided training on Goal 2, focusing on community readiness factors regarding entrepreneurship. Staff were assigned to identify and assess communities they consider "ready." Brief staff reports were made. A joint lunch with the WIRED Commission was held, allowing staff to network with Commission members. Following lunch, ASCC provided a tour of its advance manufacturing training facilities.
- November 10: Staff training at East Central Community College in Decatur. ECCC provided a tour of the ECCC campus, training facilities, and downtown Decatur. Staff reported on its efforts to identify communities ready for entrepreneurship development and training. Discussion of community "champions" helped define the characteristics of such champions. The economic developer for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and the leader of the Decatur downtown redevelopment initiative made presentations during lunch. After lunch, Don Macke with RUPRI conducted training by conference call. Staff, which personally assessed readiness characteristics of example communities, were assigned to interview a diverse group of citizens from each to see if their entrepreneurship readiness assessments aligned with staff assessments. Team building and networking activities continued.
- November 17: Staff training at Shelton State CC in Tuscaloosa. SSCC provided a tour of its training facilities. Don Macke with RUPRI continued his Goal 2 training via conference call. Staff reported on the interviews they conducted with local citizens...finding that their assessments closely matched local citizen assessments. Honing in on up to two communities per college, assignments were given to staff to identify champions in each of these "ready" communities. Training continued after lunch, with staff focusing on how to identify champions. Team building and networking activities continued.
- December 1: Staff training at Meridian Community College at its WEBB Center. Staff reported on its assignment to identify champions. Review of the implementation plan and upcoming activities was conducted. RUPRI training by Don Macke on Goal 2 continued. Staff focused on identifying stakeholders and challengers and how to respond to each set. Discussion was held on how to plug into existing initiatives in communities, i.e., staff can initiate, support, or do whatever is necessary to help communities move toward WIRED goals. After lunch, staff was trained on the Collaborative Work Space. Team building and networking activities continued. A tour of the MCC campus was provided.
- December 8: WIRED staff training at Beville State CC in Hamilton. A tour of BSCC facilities in Hamilton was provided. Local workforce and economic development activities were reviewed by local leaders. Continued Goal 2 training by RUPRI's Don Macke was held by conference call. Staff was assigned to develop "value cases" for each community and complete entrepreneurial asset mapping in each community.

- December 13: WIRED staff training at Shelton State CC in Tuscaloosa. RUPRI's Don Macke met with Goal 2 staff to review progress to date. Frustrations, issues, and opportunities were discussed. Macke also discussed how to hold community meetings and review components of an entrepreneur development system. Final input was received from staff on the RUPRI prepared Goal 2 work plan to be presented to the Goal 2 Committee on Dec. 14. Joel Simon with CAEL met with college Workforce Directors to finalize the CAEL prepared Goal 3 plan to assess existing workforce development programs. Goal 1 staff met to review the RUPRI prepared Goal 1 plan dealing with regional competitiveness.

In addition to supporting and conducting the training described above, the WIRED management team worked closely with RUPRI and CAEL to develop training tools and implementation plans that were presented to the WIRED Goal Committees at Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa on December 14. Sixty-eight (68) participants met to review goal workplans. Goal 3 and Goal 4 committees met together, since the program assessment process developed by CAEL applies to both. Goal 1 and Goal 2 committees met separately.

Brian Dabson presented RUPRI's Goal 1 plan to the Goal 1 Committee to review. Active discussion was held, leading to strong buy-in by the committee. Two key components of the proposal are: 1) a consortium of leading regional economists led by RUPRI will develop a 30,000 foot baseline assessment of the region's economy; and 2) area universities will synthesize information gathered by community colleges to develop a bottom up assessment of the region. RUPRI will pull the two views together for the May 14 Governors' Summit. The committee affirmed the plan as presented.

Don Macke presented RUPRI's Goal 2 plan and Enterprise-Ready Development System to the Goal 2 Committee to review. Avid discussion was held, leading to strong buy-in by the committee. A key component of this proposal is development of the Enterprise-Ready Development System, i.e., the process by which communities develop entrepreneur support systems. The committee affirmed the plan and system as presented.

Joel Simon presented CAEL's Goal 3 plan (which includes Goal 4 assessments) to the Goal 3 and Goal 4 committees. Lengthy discussion was held, particularly on Goal 4. Workforce directors will work with CAEL to assess college-based programs, and then move on to WIA programs and K-12/youth programs. The committee affirmed the plan as presented.

Goal committee reports will be presented to the WIRED Commission at its next meeting on Jan. 25, 2007, along with revisions to the WIRED Implementation Plan resulting from these reports.

Associate Director Mason Bonner conducted research on engaging WIRED in "STEM" activities. STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. STEM is of particular interest to the National Science Foundation.

In addition to WITS seats for the eight community and junior colleges, TMI acquired WITS seats for RUPRI, MDA, ADECA, TMI, MDES, MSU, U of A, ADIR, and ADO. These agency partners will use WITS on behalf of WIRED and help us assess the usefulness of the tool. Training on WITS was held September 18 and December 5, 2006.

On December 7, the WIRED team met with representatives of Mississippi State University, the University of Alabama, and RUPRI at East Mississippi Community College in Mayhew to discuss engaging the universities in Goal 1 research. This meeting built upon meetings held the prior quarter with both institutions and their presidents. Both universities showed eagerness to participate in WIRED. Contracts with both are in process.

On December 15, EMCC WIRED staff and WIRED management met with Mississippi State University researchers and RUPRI to provide input into MSU's asset development project sponsored by the Appalachian Regional Commission. This grant works in alignment with WIRED and will provide asset mapping tools to the WIRED initiative.

#### Update on Strategic Partnership Activities:

A collaborative project planning related to Goal 4 is ongoing with the Phil Hardin Foundation, Jobs for the Future and MDC, Inc. The Phil Hardin Foundation is committing \$300,000 to support this work.

#### Update on Leveraged Resources in Support of WIRED Activities:

A collaborative project planning related to Goal 4 is ongoing with the Phil Hardin Foundation, Jobs for the Future and MDC, Inc. The Phil Hardin Foundation is committing \$300,000 to support this work.

#### List of Any Metrics Developed and Being Utilized in the WAEM WIRED Region:

The Montgomery Institute, in December, initiated proceedings to engage Jim Lott, an experienced employment security professional, to give leadership to our metric development in concert with the TA providers engaged by ETA and TMI. Mr. Lott is to begin work in January 2007.

#### Challenges to Project Process:

In communities and agencies conditioned to operate programs in existing jurisdictions thinking regionally is frequently a challenge. "Why do regional asset mapping when we got 'strategic plans' on every agency and jurisdiction bookshelf in the 38 WAEM Wired Counties?" is a frequently encountered question, stated and unstated. The project process requires collaboration on a new scale and thus is a profound challenge. The challenges of aligning various systems from both states compound the difficulty of our processes.

Communication about a complex, large scale project such as WAEM Wired is a huge challenge. Multiple audiences and broad geography compound the challenge. Plus, "innovation" or "change" is not a welcomed topic in much of this region. Thus getting our message defined and appropriate champions to deliver the message(s) is a continuing challenge.

Promising Innovation Processes and Success Stories:

The emerging goal two “Enterprise Ready Development System (ERDS)” and the accompanying asset identification work supporting the ERDS hold great promise for rural community “make a job” development. It’s very early in the crafting and grounding of the ERDS but a solid start is underway.

Other Information:

Efforts were initiated to obtain dates from Gov. Bob Riley and Gov. Haley Barbour for the proposed Spring 2007 Governors’ Summit.