

TMI/MDA QUARTERLY REPORT ON WIRED

January 1, 2007 – March 31, 2007

Summary of general grant activities and successes

The first quarter of 2007 saw the WAEM WIRED Initiative begin implementation of its Goal 2 entrepreneur development plan in eight communities as well as the culmination of the regional build-up to the important Goal 1 Governors' Summit. Fiscal and planning matters also dominated WAEM WIRED activities during this period.

January 31 was the end of the fiscal year with new budgets due soon thereafter. The WAEM WIRED Commission also reviewed and updated its WIRED Implementation Plan. The revised plan was affirmed by the Commission at a January 25, 2007, meeting at Jones County Junior College (JCJC) in Ellisville, MS. This Commission meeting was held in conjunction with a regional technology meeting hosted by JCJC. Dr. Mark Drabenstott, director of the Center for Regional Competitiveness and one of the WAEM WIRED principal technical advisers, was the keynote and focused on WIRED and region building (copy of PowerPoint attached). A special Commission meeting was held on February 20, 2007, at the Alabama Southern Community College in Demopolis, AL, at which the Commission affirmed the budget for year two of the grant. (Copies of the revised Implementation Plan and Year Two Budget have been previously supplied to DOL.)

NOTE: The Year 2 Budget proposes to begin investing in innovative training programs after the Governors' Summit on May 14. A total of \$4.5 million is available for these investments.

The revised implementation plan resulted from work done by the four major committees working with WIRED. As reported last quarter, 68 leaders from the region met on Dec. 14, 2006, at Shelton State Community College. The work of these committees with RUPRI and CAEL resulted in creation of detailed workplans to guide implementation of Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4 (as required by the initial implementation plan). The WAEM WIRED Commission affirmed these workplans as submitted and incorporated them into the revised implementation plan.

Training for community college staff entered a new phase after the first of the year, in accordance with the new goal workplans. Goal 1 staff, goal 2 staff, and workforce directors began to meet separately and focus on their goal assignments.

For Goal 1 staff, this work focused on gathering economic and workforce studies and reports to support university based research and holding regional roundtables to gather stakeholder input about the region's economy as well as to build support for the regional initiative. College staff gathered numerous local, regional, and state information and supplied that data to the University of Alabama and Mississippi State University to supplement their research on the region. Contracts with the two universities called for them to review economic planning and assets for the region and submit a report to TMI and RUPRI to help inform the Governors' Summit. The RUPRI contract was amended to provide for substantial research and technical advice for the Governors' Summit. College staff also identified potential participants, issued invitations, set up the meetings, and prepared handouts and data for the meetings. The meetings began in March

and were to conclude on April 24 with a super roundtable. Input received from these events will be used to inform the May 14 Governors' Summit.

Goal 2 staff received intensive training from Don Macke at RUPRI on how to roll-out and implement the Commission affirmed "Enterprise-Ready Development System" to support entrepreneur development in communities. A "playbook" has been crafted to guide these activities. Eight communities from the region were selected for the initial roll-out: West Point, Philadelphia, Collinsville, and Ellisville in Mississippi and Jasper, Moundville, Selma, and Thomasville in Alabama. Start-up meetings were held with local leaders in each of these communities in March. Follow-up meetings including day-long planning retreats for each community are scheduled in the April to June time period. A second cohort of communities will be selected and engaged during the summer months. A target to initiate Enterprise-Ready Development System (ERDS) activities in 50 communities prior to the end of the grant period was affirmed. During this same time TMI worked to develop web based support for ERDS and to coordinate WIRED activities with the Alabama Entrepreneur Network and the Mississippi Technology Alliance, which have related programs.

Workforce directors focused on Goal 3 and Goal 4 activities. Working with CAEL a survey of college credit and non-credit workforce education and training offerings was conducted. Results will help advise the Commission on how to invest innovative training system dollars. A similar survey of K-12 and youth programs is underway. Additionally, workforce directors focused on the Career Readiness Certificate programs in each state. Alabama announced its program last year. Alabama colleges have been working to implement the system and get initial assessments conducted and certificates presented. Mississippi colleges have been working with state leaders to implement an aligned certificate program in Mississippi. With encouragement and support from the State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, the Mississippi colleges have developed a pilot certificate program aligned with the Alabama program. Initial assessments were to be conducted and certificates awarded in April 2007. Regional employers have shown interest in having aligned CRC programs along the border counties. Goal 4 activity also focused on identifying entrepreneur programming available in the region. ?????

The following is a list of events that occurred during this quarter. Community engagement events are shown in bold.

- 01.10.07-01.12.07 WAEM Goal 2 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for 15 of 16 CCJC Staff regarding WAEM Initiative. This meeting was conducted by Don Macke and Karen Dabson of the RUPRI Center for Rural Entrepreneurship.)
- 01.19.07 WAEM Goal 1 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 1 activities.)
- 01.25.07 Jones County Junior College Technology Symposium, Jones County Junior College, Ellisville MS (Mark Drabenstott of RUPRI spoke to the imperative of regionally focused economic development and the importance of the WAEM initiative to this region.)
- 01.26.07 WAEM Goal 3 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 3 activities.)

- 02.02.07 WAEM Goal 2 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 2 activities.)
- 02.09.07 WAEM Goal 1 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 1 activities.)
- 02.13.07 Enterprise Ready Development System Community Kick-Off Meeting, Ellisville MS (This is the first major event in the ERDS process for this community.)**
- 02.14.07 Economic Developers and Service Providers Meeting, Meridian MS
- 02.16.07 Enterprise Ready Development System Community Kick-Off Meeting, Thomasville AL (This is the first major event in the ERDS process for this community.)**
- 02.16.07 WAEM Goal 3 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 3 activities.)
- 02.20.07 WAEM Commission Meeting, Demopolis AL
- 02.20.07-02.22.07 Kauffman FAST-TRAC High Venture Certification Training, Jackson MS (Goal 2 CCJC Staff) in cooperation with the Mississippi Technology Alliance.
- 02.26.07 Enterprise Ready Development System Community Kick-Off Meeting, Selma AL (This is the first major event in the ERDS process for this community.)**
- 03.02.07 WAEM Goal 1 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 1 activities.)
- 03.09.07 WAEM Goal 3 Staff Meeting, Meridian MS, (Training, working and planning meeting for Goal 3 activities.)
- 03.19.07 Enterprise Ready Communities Goal 1 Regional Economic Development Roundtable Training Session, Decatur MS (Training, working and planning meeting for all Workforce Directors, CCJC Presidents and Goal 1 Staff regarding the content and execution of the Regional Roundtable Sessions.)**
- 03.26.07 Enterprise Ready Development System Community Kick-Off Meeting, Moundville AL (This is the first major event in the ERDS process for this community for this community.)**
- 03.26.07 Enterprise Ready Development System Community Kick-Off Meeting, West Point AL (This is the first major event in the ERDS process for this community.)**
- 03.27.07 Enterprise Ready Development System Community Kick-Off Meeting, Jasper AL (This is the first major event in the ERDS process for this community.)**
- 03.27.07 Enterprise Ready Communities Goal 1 Regional Economic Development Roundtable Session, Columbus MS**

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 by your 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 compounds 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.

