

TMI/MDA QUARTERLY REPORT ON WIRED

April 1, 2007 – June 30, 2007

Summary of general grant activities and successes

The highlight of the second quarter of 2007 was one of the projects top strategies. Both Gov. Bob Riley and Gov. Haley Barbour jointly keynoted our Governor's Summit, May 14, in Monroeville, AL. They were together pitching bi-state cooperation just days after bi-state cooperation between the two lead led to major announcements that Thiessen Krupp would build a modern steel plant in Washington County, AL, and Toyota would build a new automobile assembly plant in Union County, MS.

“This is the greatest opportunity this area has ever had and ever will again,” Gov. Riley told the representatives from the 37 WAEM counties. “It’s going to be on your shoulders. Can we do it? Absolutely. Should we do it? No question. But, we’re going to have to turn up the intensity of our efforts.

Gov. Barbour echoed those comments. “This region is unusually well positioned to be an extraordinarily successful rural region as far as economic development is concerned,” he said. “Right now, the sweet spot is between Northeast and East Mississippi and Northwest and West Alabama. “The opportunities here are breathtaking.”

The Governors were jointed on stage by Tommy Dale Favre, executive director of the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, Bill Johnson, director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, and Mark Drabenstott, director of the RUPRI Center for Regional Competitiveness.

The Governors’ Summit was the culmination of local input through five regional roundtables; review and analysis of community, county, and regional economic and workforce plans by the University of Alabama and Mississippi State University; and region analysis conducted by four regional economists under the leadership of RUPRI. A synthesis of economic review was provided to the two Governors prior to the Summit – a copy is attached as Appendix I.

(The previous report highlighted the roundtables. Three were conducted this quarter:

- April 4: Regional roundtable at Newton, MS hosted by ECCC with 34 attendees;
- April 9: Regional roundtable at Selma, AL hosted by WCCS with 41 attendees;
- April 12: Region roundtable at Gilbertown, AL hosted by ASCC with 19 attendees.

A super roundtable including representatives from the four regional events was held April 24 in Meridian, MS hosted by TMI.)

Using electronic voting machines, the invited regional representatives reviewed the findings presented by Mark Drabenstott, then voted on top regional priorities for the short-term and the long-term. The results of this voting were:

SHORT TERM

Advanced Manufacturing 99% (with Steel and Fabricated Metals 97 %, Wood Products 91 %, Motor Vehicles 88%, Aerospace 72 % the principal types of manufacturing),

Healthcare 99%

Entrepreneurship 97%

Warehousing and Distribution 94 %

Tourism 88%

LONG TERM

Innovative Energy 96%

High Technology 95%

Business Services 90%

Branded Food Products 78%

The Governor's Summit results advised Goal 3, per the plan, and immediately a WAEM Workforce Training Framework was drafted that targets innovative access and training for advanced manufacturing (a copy of this framework is included as Appendix II).

The WAEM WIRED Commission met May 31 at East Central Community College to review and affirm the training framework.

A special taskforce of college career and technical deans and workforce directors immediately began crafting the centerpiece of Goal 3, per the plan – a regional credential guided by the Governors' Summit. During June, much progress was made toward a Modern Multi-Skill Manufacturing credential that would provide innovative access and training in advanced manufacturing and complement the already implemented Career Readiness Certificate. More on this in the next report.

Goal 1 staff were assigned after the Summit to take the results and go visit economic developers, local officials, and others to see if they, too, supported the findings. All interviewed supported the findings, some offering comments.

While the focus during this quarter was on the Summit, Goal 2 activities continued.

- June 13: WCCS hosted at “opportunity retreat,” the second stage in the ERDS roll-out process, at Selma, AL.
- June 14, EMCC hosted a ERDS kick-off meeting in Macon, MS.
- June 19, WCCS hosted a Town Hall Meeting (the 3rd ERDS stage) in Selma, AL.

Other such events will be reported in the next quarterly report. Goal 2 is active in a number of communities, but is running somewhat behind schedule. TMI is taking steps to improve performance against the timeline.

Other significant events this quarter included:

- Representatives of DOLETA, ADECA, MDES, and WAEM WIRED met in Meridian on May 30 to work on metrics for the WAEM WIRED grant.
- WAEM WIRED co-hosted a meeting on June 26 in Meridian, MS of school superintendents. Goal 4 strategies were discussed in part.

- Goal 2 staff were trained on June 28 on KC Sourcelink. WAEM WIRED has purchased a similar tool to use for this region.
- TMI purchased and implement Share Point software to run its own collaborative workspace.

Update on leveraged resources in support of WIRED activities

Gov. Haley Barbour is considering taking statewide the Goal 2 *Enterprise-Ready Development System* for community-based entrepreneur support. A draft plan showing how the ERDA works and projected costs was submitted for review and funding at the request of his office.

The proposal to the Phil Hardin Foundation was not funded. ACT support for college implementation of the Career Readiness Credential is leading to pilot CRCs in the WAEM Region of Mississippi; this will leverage state workforce development support for CRCs across the state. This system will parallel the Alabama CRC system.

List of any metrics developed and being utilized by your region

As noted above, DOLETA, ADECA, MDES, and WAEM WIRED are jointly developing metrics. ADECA is the lead entity on this effort.

Challenges to project process

Nothing new to report.

Promising innovation processes and success stories

In addition to previously reported innovations, the pending eight-college WAEM Alliance partnership providing career and technical and workforce training collaboration throughout the bi-state region is a significant innovation. The modern multi-skill manufacturing credential, once fully developed and implemented, is another. These two together have the potential to change not only workforce training in the region, but also economic development approaches. This innovation is what will ultimately brand the region.

Other information

Bill Johnson, director of ADECA, replaced Vickie Locke on the WAEM WIRED Commission by appointment of Gov. Riley.