



## **Demand-Side Community Audit Action Recommendations**

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**The data on this portal should combine statistical data as well as employer-driven qualitative, anecdotal information on the regional labor market. A section within this portal through which industry, government, education, and youth service programs can communicate regularly is also an important function that should be contained within the portal.**

**To supplement the data contained within the portal, the Community Audit Partnership should also convene regular working group meetings with MetroVision's cluster leadership to foster personal communication and relationship building.**

- 2. Members of The Regional Community Audit Partnership should become active participants in all of MetroVision's cluster committees.**
- 3. Establish a mandate to fund comprehensive Life Skill programs designed to ensure employability and post-training job retention, as a key precursor to technical skill training.**
- 4. Strengthen initiatives to increase collaboration and communication between k-12 and post-secondary education institutions.**
- 5. Convene employers to launch a massive public relations campaign that highlights rewarding careers in skilled occupations.**
- 6. Integrate the Work Keys aptitude/interest/technical skill testing system into the Partnership's workforce development initiatives.**
- 7. Work to increase integration of workforce development services provided by other mandatory Workforce Investment Act Partner agencies.**

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**An internet-based portal should be designed to perform the following functions:**

**I. The ultimate goal of this portal is to have the region's industry, job-seekers, WIBs, educational institutions, service providers, and government making informed workforce decisions based on current standard, common data on regional wages, in-demand occupations, career pathways, skill standards, training/education offering and all other elements of the workforce development system. This information has the power to truly bridge existing gaps between industry, education, government, federal and state workforce funds and programs, job seekers, economic developers and a whole range of entities.**

**The labor market information contained within this portal will allow:**

**a. Area Workforce Investment Boards, Welfare to Work and other workforce resource and planning agencies to provide clients with detailed information on in-demand occupations, certifications and industry standards required to work in these occupations and descriptions of typical duties in these occupations. The portal will also contain updated, employer-driven information on employment trends, needed skill sets and in-demand occupations so as to channel funding in the most useful, sustainable directions.**

**b. Business and industry to set wages, anticipate labor demand, develop well-rounded, complete job descriptions, career pathways and industry skill**

- standards, become aware of programs offered by the workforce development system for recruitment, training, and retention of quality employees. The site would act as a central clearinghouse for all of this information.
- c. Educational institutions from k-12 to technical and community colleges and universities, to anticipate the hiring needs of business and industry and train for those needs. Educational institutions will be able to use this portal to develop an understanding of career pathways and the needed skill sets types of training needed for in-demand careers, so that graduates of their institutions can step much more seamlessly into the working world. Educational institutions will be able to align their curriculum offering with the true needs of business and industry so that they can recruit students for in-demand programs, and place graduates in sustainable, upwardly mobile careers upon graduation.
  - d. The Workforce Development system to communicate the range of programs that it offers to business and industry as well as city and parish government and economic developers.
  - e. Area job seekers, unemployed, underemployed and new entrants to the workforce, will be able to access the online descriptions of position duties and certification/education requirements for in-demand occupations. One Stop staff as well as the career placement services in area technical and community colleges and universities, will be able to use these descriptions, which will also include education levels and competency requirements, to educate job seekers on the full range of employment options that exist within our geographic region.

A successful benchmark portal, can be found at [www.pprc.umsl.edu/wis/](http://www.pprc.umsl.edu/wis/) the Greater St. Louis Region's website created and maintained by the University of Missouri at St. Louis.

Another example of an well-regarded portal with labor market information is the ERISS labor market information system ([www.eriss.com](http://www.eriss.com)). Like the University of Missouri system, ERISS uses call center technology to gather real-time data on a frequent basis to provide the region with the most reliable data possible. These two systems use a survey process to gather large amounts of primary data directly from regional industry in a minimally-invasive manner. This data is then analyzed and formatted for ready access by both companies and service/education providers.

Although the Louisiana Department of Labor has a useful statewide labor database, it does not contain the regionally focused, just-in-time information needed to meet the needs of industry. In both the cluster workshop and in interviews, not one of the industry representatives interviewed indicated that the LOIS system met all of their needs.

**II. The portal should provide for continuous, dynamic communications as well as a series of interlocking operating relationships between the stakeholders. For each stakeholder, specific needs should be addressed. This can best be accomplished utilizing a “virtual office” platform. In the virtual office configuration, each industry cluster would have access to the following:**

- a. A calendar of training and education courses that may be relevant to that cluster, with links to class descriptions, either on the page or on the website of the institution offering the training.**
- b. A structured discussion area that may be accessed by industry, education, government, and youth service organizations to exchange information on industry needs, workforce training offerings, and open dialog on how to close gaps between the two.**

**These discussions should be monitored by members of the Partnership so that institutions and policy makers that can affect needed changes will be aware of both the need and potential support of these stakeholders.**

**Industry representatives, whether the owner/manager of a small business or the human resources manager of larger firms, should believe that this is a place where they can express their needs and have others listen and respond, and form active partnerships to accomplish their workforce goals. For educational institutions and service providers, administrators and educators should believe that this is a place where they can find the true needs of industry, communicate their abilities and limitations, and work to develop support for policy and administrative changes that would make them more effective in meeting industry needs.**

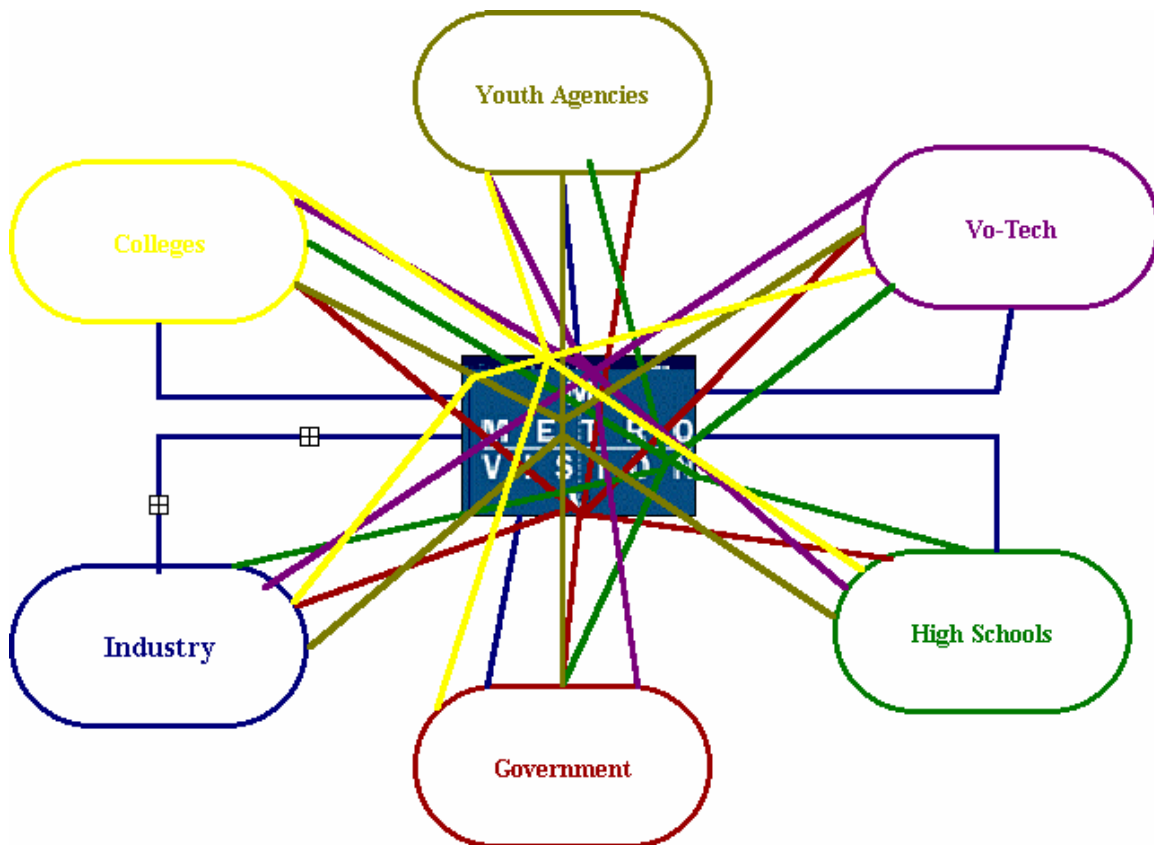
**The desired end result of this portal is to connect regional stakeholders on a perpetual basis. The labor market information contained within the portal should act as a magnet, drawing stakeholders back into the portal on a regular basis, using the information on regional wages, hiring patterns, career pathways, skill standards etc. as they seek to educate, train, recruit and create jobs within the locate workforce system.**

**MetroVision has already organized itself around the region’s dominant eight clusters, and the Partnership should develop a working partnership with MetroVision to implement and manage the communications portal. Under the Workforce Investment Act, provision has been made for investment in systems that would directly increase the ability of workforce skill providers to provide needed skills and education, and would increase the amount of private sector investment in workforce enhancement activities. A dynamic portal should meet both of these requirements.**

**Development of this LMI/communication portal would integrate the collaborative and market-driven principles of clusters into the goals of the workforce community**

**audit. It would also provide the regional WIBs with constant, dynamic communication with the industries that most impact the future of the region. This action would clearly align the workforce investment boards with the industries they were designed to serve, and give the industry clusters most likely to increase wealth in the region a powerful competitive advantage. The ability of industry to communicate their needs as they arise, and have service providers and institutions respond immediately to those needs, can dramatically increase the rate of innovation, growth, profitability, employment, and wages paid by the region's industry clusters.**

**The development of the proposed portal and the resulting communication exchange between the stakeholders will take a considerable amount of time, energy, and money to implement. Funding for this project will have to come from a combination of Partnership member investment, industry contributions, government grants, and grants from private foundations such as the Ford Foundation, which have a particular interest in fighting poverty through economic development. A task force should be formed immediately to solicit full proposals and design layouts for the portal, and to review the existing University of Missouri at St. Louis system. These two elements should then be combined into a master proposal that could be used for fundraising purposes. The goal of the partnership should be to have the portal up and running by the first quarter of 2004.**



2. Members of The Regional Community Audit Partnership should become active participants in all of MetroVision's cluster committees. The Partnership should also begin to work with those committees to build standardized career pathways for critical occupations identified within each cluster. Cluster development, the discipline of increasing regional competitive advantage through strengthening the linkages between and among geographic concentrations of like or related industries with similar needs and market opportunities, has tremendous potential to drive effective workforce development. Because clusters foster ongoing, dynamic communication and technological development, education and skill development has been a cornerstone of the most successful regional cluster efforts worldwide. The Partnership should become an active partner throughout this process.

That involvement begins with active attendance and participation in MetroVision's active cluster committees. A Partnership representative should contact the MetroVision staff member responsible for each cluster committee and ask for a meeting with the cluster committee chairs to explain their desire to participate and discuss the most effective way to accomplish a productive relationship with each cluster. In addition, participation in the development of a dynamic communications system would solidify the Partnership's standing in this MetroVision initiative. Such an action would also show industry that the Partnership has sincere desire to increase it's effectiveness and through this, the region's competitiveness.

**3. Establish a mandate to fund comprehensive Life Skill programs designed to ensure employability and post-training job retention, as a key precursor to technical skill training. Life Skills training will focus on the new basic skills such as problem solving, teamwork and continuous improvement along with life skills such as communication, punctuality and work habits. In the Greater New Orleans region, the New Orleans Jobs Initiative (NOJI) has created the ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Success Principals’ which is a model for successful pre-technical training ‘life skills’ preparation. This program teaches participants the personal characteristics, work habits and coping skills such as decision making, teamwork, punctuality and internal discipline, that they need to make them excellent employees once on the job. The NOJI program also provides participants with knowledge of how to seek out resources, such as a workplace mentor, that they will need once on the job in order to guarantee their workplace success. The program introduces those who go through it to on-the-job working conditions and norms, to ensure that they will be moving into workplace situations and conditions with which they already have a working knowledge, thus promoting retention after job placement.**

**Looking at other models, the University of Tulsa sponsors various Life Skills workshops available to individuals throughout the community that are in need of these skills. These workshops are an excellent way for the university to train its future social workers and could be duplicated by local universities that offer graduate programs in social work such as Tulane University and Southern University at New Orleans.**

**Another Life Skills program recognized as a national best case model is the Shreveport, La.-based Providence House ([www.providencehouseshreve.com](http://www.providencehouseshreve.com)). Providence House primarily works with homeless families to add structure to their lives through programs such as an intensive eighteen-week Life Skills curriculum that includes intensive behavior modification practices. The program has an 89 percent success rate.<sup>1</sup> A survey done in 1997 found that for every \$1.00 invested in the Providence House program, \$4.00 is returned in savings to the taxpayers and \$5.00 is put back in the community through employment-generated returns.**

**Based on studies of the Greater New Orleans regional economy, dropouts would be one of the population segments that could most benefit from these programs.**

**The partnership between the Cabinet for Workforce Development’s Department for Technical Education and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, which allows technical education students to simultaneously enroll in high school**

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<sup>1</sup> When a family graduates from the Providence House program they are drug and alcohol free, and the parents have received their high school diploma, GED or worked in a position congruent with their highest level of ability. Some have graduated from a training/education program with an accredited local institution. The family has completed a behavior modification program geared to instill successful living skills. They have saved 50 percent of their total income earned while in Providence House, maintained two budgets, worked full-time for 90 days and have housing and furnishings to begin over again. During their time at Providence House, they have become self-sufficient in the sense that they have not received other forms of public assistance.

and community or technical colleges and later transfer these credits, is an excellent model which addresses career track and dropout problems. The current leaning of the government of the State of Louisiana tends towards “pay a little now for education or a lot later in the form of public assistance or corrections” –this indicates that funding for a similar program could possibly come from the public coffers.

4. Strengthen initiatives to increase collaboration and communication between k-12 and post-secondary education institutions. Programs such as the MetroVision School-to-Career Partnership, which exposes grammar and high school students to the range of existing career options, must be broadened in reach throughout our region and receive funding on a level commensurate with the key role that they play in the workforce development continuum.

On the post-secondary education front, an initiative must be launched to align the curriculum and scheduling options available through area universities, community and technical colleges, with the needs of the business community. The Labor Market Information Portal referred to in recommendation #1 can play a key middleman role through informing the education community of the key in-demand occupations, skill sets and competencies as reported by area business and industry so as to better orient their curriculum to fit labor demand. The relationships established between post-secondary education and business as well as the broadened skill sets of post-secondary graduates will, in turn, potentially promote the recruitment of area post-secondary graduates by area businesses and the retention these graduates within our geographic area.

5. Convene employers to launch a massive public relations campaign that highlights rewarding careers in skilled occupations. “The Best Careers Are Right Here!” or similarly themed campaigns could feature skilled craftsmen talking about the rewards of their career choices. The purpose of this campaign would be to 1) communicate the advantages and enhance the image of working in skilled trades and 2) promote the value of lifelong learning.

6. Integrate the Work Keys aptitude/interest/technical skill testing system into the Partnership’s workforce development initiatives. The Work Keys system developed by ACT (formerly American College Testing, the entity which created the ACT college test) is a system that provides a framework for profiling, testing against and comparing skill levels for key positions within an industry. As detailed on their web site, [www.act.org/workkeys](http://www.act.org/workkeys), Work Keys functions on the 3 following levels:

- a. Working with experienced employees, authorized Work Keys Job Profilers evaluate key skills and levels of competency required for specific jobs within a company.



- b. **Standardized Work Keys skill assessments are administered to job applicants or current employees to pinpoint their skill levels in up to eight critical areas.**
- c. **Subsequently, the skill levels demonstrated by each test taker are compared to the minimum skill levels required for the profiled jobs, enabling the company to immediately evaluate a job applicant's qualifications or, in the case of a current employee, to determine that employee's training needs.**

**Work Keys job profiles accomplish the key task of job analysis, helping employers identify the levels of skills current and prospective employers need in order to be successful on the job. Job profiles also provide individuals with a clear picture of the skill levels that they need to qualify for and be successful in the jobs they want. Positions are profiled using a framework of eight of ten potential areas—Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, Applied Technology, Business Writing, Listening, Locating Information, Observation, Readiness, Reading for Information, Teamwork, and Writing. Each skill is addressed by a distinct skill scale, developed with the help of businesspeople and educators. Specific jobs are then profiled according to the skill level needed for each area on a declining numerical scale, by which individual scores are compared.**

**The gaps between needed skill levels and individual test results allow the Work Keys test reviewer to immediately pinpoint gaps between the needed skills and current applicant skill levels. Applicants can then be placed in specific skills training modules to upgrade to the needed levels, or placed in positions that better match their current skills.**

**Work Keys has been successfully utilized nationwide by numerous organizations. Two examples, again provided by the Work Keys website, [www.act.org/workkeys](http://www.act.org/workkeys), show the variety of ways in which Work Keys works.**

- 1. Work Ready in Des Moines, Iowa, provides adults who are under-prepared for work—lacking experience, academic training, or credentials— with guidance and a well-planned path to establish a new cycle of learning, improving and increasing independence. The approach involves four steps: 1) Initial Work Keys testing during Work Ready orientation 2) A two-week career exploration and job-seeking skills course using Work Keys scores and other information to develop short-term and long-term plans 3) A six-week, 120-hour curriculum designed to build the skills required for workplace success 4) A second Work Keys assessment at the end of the program.**

**The results? 85% of participants improved their skills, 80 percent of first-year participants are now either in college or employed in better-than-minimum-wage jobs and behavioral changes such as greater punctuality, appreciation for learning, and independence have been documented in the individuals that participated in the Work Ready process.**

**2. The Wichita, Kansas aerospace cluster used Work Keys as the vehicle for cooperation between business and education when Wichita's aerospace cluster saw a growing need to hire people with increasingly complex skills. Rather than import people or export jobs, the cluster decided to work with the city, schools and internally amongst the companies themselves, to expand the local skilled workforce.**

**In 1994, the Business Education Success Team funded Work Keys as a driving force for educational reform in public and private schools. Meanwhile, Wichita employers and the Wichita Area Technical College began profiling crucial blue- and white-collar jobs in the aerospace industry. Wichita State University also began Work Keys testing for engineering seniors. In the fall of 1996, Wichita became the first school district in the country to make Work Keys testing a graduation requirement.**

**The results include:**

- a curriculum that's better aligned with the needs of local employers, particularly in the high-wage aerospace sector**
- a 100-page booklet entitled "Keys to Working in Wichita" which compares profiles of popular jobs in the cluster with students' current skill levels**
- a systematic flow of hard data to measure progress in teaching job-relevant skills**

**The Regional Community Audit Partnership, working with MetroVision's clusters, represents the perfect vehicle for implementation of Work Keys throughout the region. Profilers and Assessors can be certified through ACT's Work Keys training program relatively inexpensively and the program is inexpensive to administer in comparison with other workforce investments. Work Keys, working through MetroVision's cluster committees, can provide the framework for dramatic and near-immediate change in the entire workforce skills system.**

**7. Work to increase integration of workforce development services provided by other mandatory Workforce Investment Act Partner agencies. The One Stop agencies and the Workforce Investment Boards should work to coordinate with partner agencies such as TANF, the Louisiana Department of Labor, and Louisiana Vocational Rehabilitation Services. This will facilitate the provision of more streamlined access to services to companies, as well as individual job seekers so that the myriad of these services will be available in one centralized location, thus reducing duplication of efforts and confusion on the part of the client as to which agency does what and where.**