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Making Connections:  
A Regional Workforce

# Community Audit

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## The Greater New Orleans Regional Community Audit Partnership Recommendations

By:

Metro Source, L.L.C

*Building a World Class System that Prepares  
People for Careers that Sustain Families*

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## Regional Workforce Recommendations

### Demand Side Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Development of a Regional Labor Market Portal providing real-time information on the conditions of the Region 12 labor-market.

Rational: The Regional WIBs would be able to establish a permanent workforce information system in a cohesive partnership with the Department of Labor. Information provided by this portal would be consistent and current. Additionally, the data would be useful to both employers and job seekers. The data would be collected and utilized in a manner that would not conflict with any confidentiality concerns. It is supported by both the Demand Side and the Supply Side of the Community Audit report.

Recommendation 2: The Region 12 Workforce Partnership (regional WIB) should become an active participant in established cluster and industry specific organizations currently organized within the region.

Rational: Such an alliance would provide profuse benefits and numerous services for both employers and job seekers. Participation within the established industry and cluster committees will facilitate the coordination of inquiries from prospective businesses and provide a mechanism for dissemination of information about available resources and workforce development opportunities. The purpose of the alliance would be to promote a more favorable business climate that would ultimately facilitate economic development in this region. The partnership could address issues of transportation, workforce development, standardized career pathways and business development with specific focus on high-growth, high-demand clusters.

Recommendation 3: The regional workforce system should strengthen the capacity for life skills training of both One-Stop Career Centers and system partners through responsible resource allocation and development and implementation of effective standards that meet the needs of regional employers.

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Rational:

A primary function of the Regional WIBs is to assist in the preparation of a qualified labor market. In an effort to raise the standard of the workforce to the demands of employers, Life Skills training is extremely important for both the Demand and Supply sides of the regional workforce. Life Skills training is the non-technical skills, abilities, and traits required to function in an employment environment. Based on employer observations, it is particularly significant to have a capable labor market that will be able to deliver information or services to customers and co-workers; work effectively as a member of a team; learn or acquire the technical skills necessary to perform a task; inspire the confidence of supervisors and management; and understand and adapt to the cultural norms of the workplace. Based on employer needs, developing standards for these skill sets and allocating resources to promote systemic implementation of these standards is critical to closing the gap between the labor market supply and the labor market demand.

Additionally, Life Skills training benefits the personal growth and development of individuals comprising the labor market. It enables an individual to perform problem solving and other cognitive skills; oral communication skills; personal qualities and work ethic; and interpersonal and teamwork skills. Problem solving and other cognitive skills involve the identification of problems and the formulation and evaluation of alternative solutions by weighing risks and benefits. Oral communication skills include both the ability to speak well and the ability to listen well, embracing the aptitude to give and understand instructions and to communicate in ways appropriate to the situation and the audience. Personal qualities important to job performance include self-esteem, self-management, responsibility, and motivation. Interpersonal and teamwork skills are those needed to negotiate with others, to participate as a member of a team, to serve clients and customers in a way that meets their expectations, and to resolve conflicts maturely. As such, Life Skills training has the capacity for providing valuable skills that not only makes job seekers and responsive to employers, but also enhances the marketability of unemployed and under-employed workers.

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**Recommendation 4:** The Region 12 Workforce Partnership should take an active role as conveyor and facilitator of communications between the business community, K-12 and post secondary educational institutions.

**Rational:** Businesses will only expand and flourish in communities that furnish them an accessible, trained workforce, competent enough to contend both nationwide and worldwide. However, too often, there is an acute disparity between the skill needs of industry and the skill base of the regional workforce. On the “demand” side this limitation manifests itself through the inadequate preparation capability of small and mid-sized companies, to identify a skilled workforce. On the Supply Side, educational institutions are finding it problematic to remain abreast of change that meets the needs of high-growth, high-demand industries.

By facilitating communication between the business community and educational institutions, businesses can unequivocally convey their needs to educational institutions. At the same time, K-12 and post-secondary can access the information needed to develop curriculum and programs that support the emerging regional economy.

**Recommendation 5:** The Region 12 Workforce Partnership should convene employers to launch a regional public relations campaign that highlights rewarding careers in skilled occupations.

**Rational:** The principle rationale which serves as the impetus for this campaign would be to convey the benefits and broaden the image of working in skilled trades and to encourage the appreciation of lifelong learning. Given the large number of unfilled jobs in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and shipbuilding, to attract both youth and adults to careers in these industries will better ensure the continued growth of a diverse regional economy.

**Recommendation 6:** The Work Keys assessment should be incorporated into the workforce system to provide an effective mechanism for identifying the skill levels of job seekers in a manner that better ensures that the workforce system meets the skill needs of regional employers.

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**Rational:** Work Keys is an outcomes-orientated system which focuses on measurable skills. Work Keys will provide the necessary measurement of employability skills required to meet the challenging 21st century job market for both youth and adults. The Work Keys assessment process provides an opportunity to bring workforce development, educators and employers together in a joint effort to develop the community's supply of skilled laborers. Utilizing Work keys, the Regional WIBs can better ensure that youth and adult job seekers are adequately prepared for higher-skill, higher-wage jobs, ultimately resulting in higher employee satisfaction and productivity, reduced turnover and improved quality of products and services.

**Recommendation 7:** The Region 12 Workforce Partnership should aggressively and proactively promote the integration of services provided by the mandated partners of the One-Stop to include advocacy at the legislative and congressional levels.

**Rational:** The combined resources of the partners of the workforce system equals over \$100 million. Coordination of services provided by the workforce system partners would better ensure that the system possess the ability to overcome barriers to skill attainment, job retention and skill upgrade through comprehensive and efficient service delivery to both job seekers and employers.

### **Supply Side Recommendation**

**Recommendation 8:** The focus of services provided by the Regional Workforce Partnership should give emphasis to the development of career pathways for participants rather than stop gap measures of job placement.

**Rational:** Those low-income job seekers and individuals moving off of welfare and into the workforce are entering occupations that fail to pay wages that will lift them out of poverty. Persons exiting the welfare system for employment traditionally move into low-wage industries and occupations. Low-income earning workers and/or welfare recipients generally find jobs in sales, food preparation, clerical support, or other low paying service type jobs. The pay scale associated with these occupations is not high enough to lift families above the poverty level.

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Consequently, this cycle of poverty impedes the family's ability to reach any level of economic security. In order to build the skilled workforce needed to support the region's diverse economy and to raise the overall economic viability of the region, low-income job seekers must have access to information, career counseling, services and supports that will put them on paths to self-sufficiency.

**Recommendation 9:** The Regional Workforce Partnership should incorporate a holistic approach to the development of assessment and career planning.

**Rational:** Most programs endeavor to offer social services to participants. However, there is a level of perplexity surrounding the accessibility and eligibility requirements for services. This confusion is made worse by the disintegration and repetitiveness in the accumulation of information about available supportive services. Navigating a local social service delivery system often necessitates adroit negotiation of a maze of information, processes, and procedures fragmented within and among various agencies. Maneuvering through the social service delivery systems at a regional level is even more convoluted.

Not only is there confusion about service delivery systems, there is also confusion among workforce development agencies and job seekers about available and appropriate skill training programs in the region. As a result, these programs may repeatedly ask employers for the same information on skill requirements and job availability. Employers then become overwhelmed and confused by the lack of coordination and information sharing between and among workforce programs.

**Recommendation 10:** The Regional Workforce Partnership should promote system partners that offer accessible childcare services.

**Rational:** Access to quality, affordable childcare is a concern for all working families. Emphasis of the Regional Workforce Partnership should be to make certain that all working families, despite economic status, have access to quality child care that will enable them to contribute to the workforce. The Regional Workforce Partnership should support the education of workers and employers relative to the value and availability of quality child care.

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Additionally, the Partnership should seek to encourage employers to provide conveniently located childcare services as well as seek opportunities to connect parents to such care.

**Recommendation 11:** The Regional Workforce Partnership should continually strive to improve and strengthen the quality of youth services.

**Rational:** This is a futuristic approach to solving the needs of the workforce. A great benefit to the regional economy is to have programs that target the impending labor pool. The continual quality improvement of youth programs, by assisting youths in obtaining a high school diploma or GED while acquiring and mastering their employment skills so that they can become productive citizens, will only enhance the economic vitality of the region.

**Recommendation 12:** Endeavor to reinforce relationships between the WIBs and agencies providing rehabilitative services.

**Rational:** In developing a more capable workforce and, ultimately, a more viable economy, the Regional Workforce Partnership must recognize that local law enforcement, corrections, mental health agencies and other community-based service providers must work together in addressing the challenges posed by the mentally ill, ex-offenders and the disabled. The Regional Workforce Partnership also recognizes that the diverse populations, resources and needs in this region preclude a “one size fits all” approach to curbing recidivism among offenders, the mentally ill and the disabled. It is for this purpose that the regional partnership is recommending the strengthening of relationships amongst the workforce system partners and forging new and expanded relationships that support rehabilitative services.

**Recommendation 13:** Utilize resourceful methods in the effort to eliminate the transportation barriers.

**Rational:** Inadequate transportation is a barrier for many of the region’s welfare recipients and other low income job seekers who are trying to make the transition to work. There is often spatial mismatch between jobs and job seekers. Consequently, this disparity in distance makes

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commuting an expense that many entry-level workers cannot afford. Moreover, existing transit services are often insufficient to meet the needs of these workers in terms of expense, hours of operation, available routes and regional coordination.

**Recommendation 14:** Provide leadership in the development of working groups on the local level to further analyze the regional workforce profile.

**Rational:** There are several organizations within the region that have devoted a tremendous amount of effort and dedication to the issue of workforce development. Whereas each organization may concentrate on specific segments of the workforce or different industries, they are frequently attempting to convene the same stakeholders and endeavoring to obtain the same ultimate goal of meeting employers needs for workers and workers needs for good jobs. Consequently, the absence of coordination among endeavors ultimately results in an exercise of redundancy and in the duplication of efforts and ineffectiveness.

**Recommendation 15:** The Regional Workforce Partnership should assist in the establishment of a regional system that would evaluate the proficiency and education of the population.

**Rational:** The stable and consistent improvement of the local economy can be affirmed through a system of continuing qualitative and quantitative evaluation and reporting of programs, services, and activities in the secondary and post secondary educational institutions.

**Recommendation 16:** Assist in the development of an online workforce information service to assist those seeking employment.

**Rational:** The creation of an interactive Web-based portal would permit cataloging of current employment opportunities by vicinity, industry, skill-level, earnings; and listing of service providers by location, hours of operation, etc. The Regional Workforce partners could participate in the development of this tool; assist in the facilitation of information distribution across diverse agencies; and affirm the tool's used in the one-stop systems.