

National Association of Regional Councils



2006 NARC Policy Brief

NARC policies are developed yearly from consultations with and information provided by the association's working groups, committees and its membership. The policies provide a context for NARC's national agenda on significant national and legislative issues. Each policy brief includes a rationale for NARC's position on topics relevant and important to America's regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations, metro and rural, large and small.

Workforce Development

Issue

Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005
Administration's Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development Initiative

Background

S. 1021, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 Reauthorization

S. 1021, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 Reauthorization or the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) was enacted to create a streamlined workforce development system that could effectively respond to the needs of workers and employers alike. The Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005 builds upon the success of WIA while addressing other concerns. S.1021 was introduced on May 12, 2005 by Senators Michael B. Enzi (WY) and Edward Kennedy (MA). The legislation focuses on changes that ease implementation; foster a more comprehensive, high quality workforce investment system; encourage creative approaches to serving workers and large and small businesses; improve access to services; and expand opportunities for education and training.

S. 1021 is the product of an extensive bipartisan effort that represents the committee's "commitment to respond to the workforce development needs of business and workers throughout America at a time when it is critical that everyone who is able and chooses to participate in the workforce has the skills to do so, and when the need for skills is increasingly critical to this country's ability to compete in a global economy. (The Committee believes the) bill will do much to strengthen the workforce investment system by enhancing services to business, unemployed and dislocated workers and others in need of workforce development assistance, while strengthening the relationships between the public and private sectors and States, counties and cities."

Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development Initiative

On Wednesday, February 1, 2006, the U. S. Department of Labor announced a major initiative that is a part of the Bush Administration's Competitiveness Agenda showcased in the President's State of the Union Address to the Nation. The Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) initiative calls for the U. S. Department of Labor to invest \$195 million in 13 regional communities.

The WIRED initiative encourages "regional communities to partner together and leverage collective public and private sector assets and resources to develop a more highly skilled workforce that can act as the linchpin to attract new economic development and employers." WIRED's "goal is to transform regional economies by enlisting the skills of the numerous and varied players in those economies to research and produce long-term strategic plans that prepare workers for high-skill, high-wage opportunities in the coming years and into the next decade."

A total of \$15 million each over a three-year period will be provided by the Department of Labor to 13 regions that include:

- Coastal Maine (11 counties, including Augusta and Brunswick);
- Northeast Pennsylvania (9 counties, including Scranton, Allentown and Reading);
- Upstate New York (9 counties, including Rochester and the Finger Lakes region);
- Piedmont Triad North Carolina (12 counties, including Greensboro and Winston-Salem);
- Central Michigan (13 counties, including Lansing, Flint and Saginaw);
- Western Michigan (7 counties, including Grand Rapids);
- Florida Panhandle (16 counties, including Tallahassee and Pensacola);
- Western Alabama and Eastern Mississippi (17 counties in Alabama, including Tuscaloosa and Selma and 19 counties in Mississippi, including Meridian and Starkville);
- North Central Indiana (14 counties, including Lafayette);
- Greater Kansas City (10 counties in Missouri and eight counties in Kansas, including Topeka);
- Denver Metro Region (8 counties, including Denver, Boulder and Ft. Collins);
- Central and Eastern Montana (32 counties covering mostly rural areas); and
- California Coast (13 counties, including Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego).

Preliminary Recommendations:

In the past, the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) and its membership believed that major changes to the current WIA could prove disruptive. It was suggested that changes in the current legislation be minimal, allowing another five-year cycle before any major changes are made. During consideration of reauthorization, NARC urges Congress to:

- Retain the responsibility of local elected officials to appoint members of the workforce boards and for the overall governance of the program;
- Expand the service area in large urban communities to include the entire regional marketplace;
- Require extensive cooperation among metropolitan workforce boards and surrounding rural area workforce boards through a coordinated planning process;
- Retain oversight of the one-stop centers by local elected officials and workforce boards;
- Provide a line item funding for one stop centers or require states to allocate contributions from all one-stop mandatory partners;
- Consolidate and simplify performance standards and performance measures, and
- Provide adequate funding for the program. If program funds are consolidated, allow considerable flexibility in utilizing those funds at the state and local levels. Consolidation of funding streams should not translate into reduced program funds.

NARC Policy: A trained workforce is critical to metropolitan and rural areas seeking to retain existing industries and to attract new ones. NARC supports the current Workforce Investment Act and urges more regional and market-based approaches to worker training. NARC suggests that population figures should not be used to designate a service delivery area. The regional market place, rather than municipal boundaries, should be the focus of workforce development efforts. NARC also strongly supports the continued role and oversight of the program by local elected officials.

NARC recognizes the value of the Administration's WIRED initiative that uses a regional approach to workforce innovation. NARC strongly encourages, where appropriate, for the Administration to work with regional councils of government or other multi-county efforts.

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