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EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROLES IN WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIPS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To attract, retain and expand businesses in today's tight labor market, economic development organizations (EDOs) are becoming more involved than ever in partnerships to help meet employers' talent pipeline and training needs.

This report examines cases studies of five award-winning workforce development initiatives in which an economic development group had a central or convening role. Groups profiled include the Greater Memphis Chamber; JAXUSA Partnership in Jacksonville, Fla.; Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation in Pa.; Norfolk Works in Norfolk, Va.; and Firelands Forward in northern Ohio.

The case studies share many similar drivers. Each aims to have systemic impact on local workforce issues; plans actions based on data; and includes explicit equity goals. In addition, they are part of networks of local or regional stakeholders in workforce and economic development, and may also serve as lead champion and external communicator.

The cases feature responses which are aligned with each community's needs and the EDO's mission and strengths. Using observations from the cases, the paper identifies six roles for EDOs that seek to boost talent development in their communities. Those roles include:

- Providing data and insights
- Tracking collective impact
- Facilitating funding
- Catalyzing change
- Convening and communicating
- Building capacity and filling gaps

Economic developers interviewed for this report also shared keys to success for their initiatives. The report concludes with information on how to map a community's workforce ecosystem.



INTRODUCTION

The landscape of talent supply and development is almost unrecognizable compared to a decade ago. In 2013, people and communities were still working to recover jobs lost during the Great Recession. The same year, Economic Development Research Partners released its first report focused on economic development's role in solving workforce challenges.

In the early 2020s – amid the third year of a pandemic, the baby boomer retirement wave and rapid technological change – we are living with the tightest labor environment in living memory. With access to talent the number one concern for employers today, economic development organizations' (EDO) roles in workforce development have changed dramatically as well.

As this report finds, EDOs are particularly active in creating talent pipeline programs, but also in facilitating training programs, creating networks and filling many other roles. Many EDOs now have a leadership position dedicated to workforce development. To retain, expand and attract businesses, they know that it is critical to help meet their employers' needs for talent.

To explore EDO responses to this environment, EDRP members identified three research topics on talent and workforce. Beginning with this paper, they focus on:

- Effective economic-workforce partnerships to address talent development
- Strategies to raise community labor force participation rates
- Impacts of larger trends (e.g., remote work, demographic change) on economic and workforce development

Previous Reports on Workforce Development from EDRP

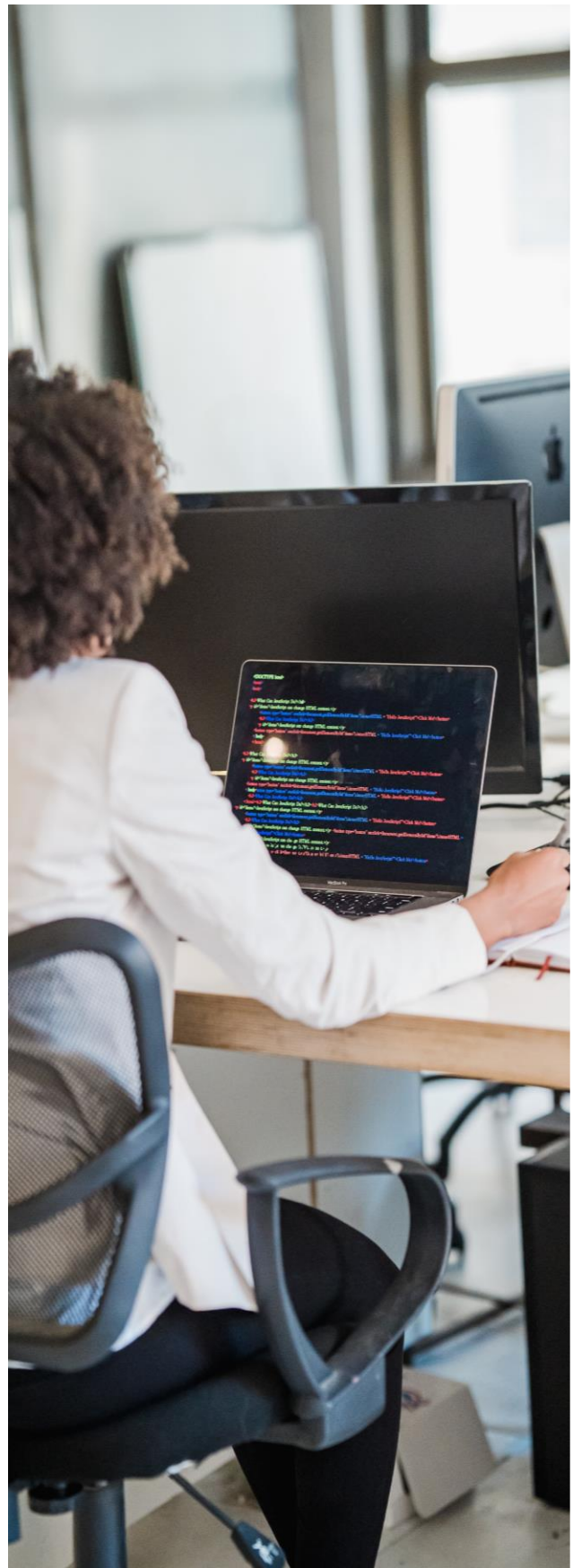
- Raising the Bar Together: Successful Strategies for Workforce and Economic Development Collaboration (2013)
- Shifting Workforce Development into High Gear: How Economic Developers Lead Workforce System Alignment (2015)
- Widening the Circle: Engaging a Young and Diverse Workforce in Economic Development (2015)
- Opportunity for All: Strategies for Inclusive Economic Development (2016)
- Great for Business, Great for Workers: Strategies that Boost Worker Prosperity and Meet Business Needs (2019)
- Industry 4.0: Supporting Small and Medium-Sized Manufacturers (2019)
- The Future of Work and Inclusion (2021)



This paper draws on cases of five award-winning workforce development initiatives in which an economic development group had a central or convening role. Those EDOs include the Greater Memphis Chamber, JAXUSA Partnership in Jacksonville, Fla., the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation in Pa., Norfolk Works in Norfolk, Va., and Firelands Forward in northern Ohio (Erie, Huron and Ottawa counties). Types of organizations represented include one chamber of commerce, two regional 501c(3) marketing groups, one city department and one unincorporated initiative. Community types served include rural, urban and between. Four of the five have won IEDC Excellence in Economic Development awards.

Each is finding multiple roles in talent development that are both similar and unique to those of other EDOs. The partnerships profiled share similar drivers, while their varying expressions are aligned with their communities and the EDO's mission and their strengths. These aspects are explored further in the following sections of the paper:

- Overview of recent changes to the labor market and their impacts
- Common drivers of EDO workforce partnerships
- Case study descriptions
- Roles and recommendations in which EDOs are having an impact on talent development in their communities



LABOR MARKET CONTEXT

It's hard to overstate the unique nature of the recent labor market. From the end of World War II to 2018, no year on record had more job vacancies than unemployed workers. But by end of 2019, there were 90 unemployed workers for every 100 jobs; by the end of 2021, just 60 unemployed people for every 100 vacancies.¹

The reasons are many, including demographic change as well as pandemic-related health and caregiving impacts, among others. The national labor force participation rate – the proportion of the working-age population that is either working or actively looking for work – has been declining since a high of 67.3 percent in 2000.² The decline accelerated sharply during the pandemic as jobs vanished and people left the labor market. And though job opportunities are much improved since spring 2020, the labor force participation rate in September 2022 of 62.3 percent still lags its pre-pandemic level of 63.4 percent in February 2020.³ What is significant is that the tight labor market is likely to persist, even in a recession.

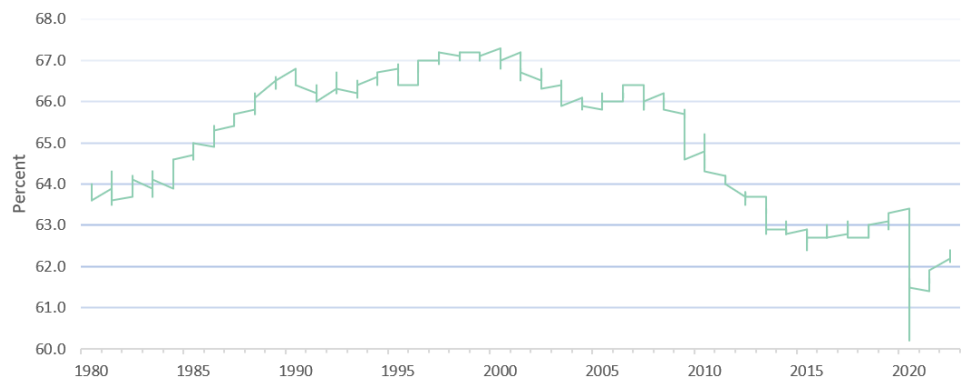
Other factors have altered the landscape of work and employment in recent years. Changes in the types of job skills required

and how people look for jobs reflect continued growth of the knowledge

economy and the impact of increased automation on all fields. The normalization of remote work, childcare shortages, and increases in wages and inflation also contribute to changing talent assumptions.

As employment continued to tighten and the need for specific skill sets intensifies, EDOs, workforce development boards, education and training providers, employers and other community partners have been offering many new programs to help employers fill positions and job-seekers to get or improve their employment. Work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeship and internships programs, have expanded significantly. More short-term credentialing programs are available for IT, manufacturing and other fields. In K-12 groups, more career education, fairs, guides, curriculum and teacher training regarding jobs skills that are in demand locally are taking place.

Figure 1: U.S. Labor Force Participation Rate, 1980-2022



Source: St. Louis Federal Reserve

¹ [A ratio for labor market tightness](#), St. Louis FED, March 2022

² [Labor force participation: what has happened since the peak?](#), U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Sept. 2016

³ [Labor Force Participation Rate](#), St. Louis Federal Reserve, Oct. 2022

Targeted and wraparound services also are more common as communities seek to help disadvantaged populations enter the workforce.

Many of these trends reflect the changing role of employers in workforce training. Employers used to provide training to entry-level workers in many fields, but over time, many have come to rely on communities to provide a work-ready workforce. Thus EDOs and other groups have become more creative and entrepreneurial, improving their range and capacity in talent development and training not only to provide a pipeline of workers with strong basic skills, but also for “last mile” training, including some technical skills.

As shown in the case studies, EDOs are collecting data to isolate problems and using it to set common goals with partners, translating business needs and connecting to solutions, seeking grants, and establishing programs that help residents get local jobs. They are convening stakeholders, thinking regionally when appropriate, communicating widely, and planning long-term. They are working to bridge the gap between announcements of new jobs and the scramble to ensure that those jobs can be filled when they are posted.

The cases show variation in the challenges addressed and the responses developed. Most EDOs play a significant role in research, connecting and communicating. They are facilitating training either by partnering to offer it, providing a physical facility for it, or helping seek funding for it.



However, career pipeline initiatives – those that help companies access local talent and that help jobseekers understand and access pathways to good jobs in their community – were the most common. Career pipeline facilitation is a natural role for EDOs, who have the relationships with local employers to connect them with educators and to provide insights needed to align training resources with industry needs. These programs often include a web-based platform for users; curricula and resources to counselors, career and technical educators and others; special events and guides.

Common drivers and characteristics among EDO-workforce partnerships

EDO roles in each partnership shared multiple drivers. They:

- **Aim to have systemic impact on local workforce issues.** All recognized the importance of communicating and working as a connector and gap-filler among existing systems. They identified needs and where they could plug in to build capacity, keeping the broader workforce ecosystem in mind. However, they also sometimes played a role in changing those systems when they were not meeting local talent needs. They are willing to have difficult public conversations about how roles are being fulfilled and dollars spent.
- **Plan actions based on data (particularly growing occupational demand and wages, as well as targeted clusters and occupations).** EDOs in all cases used data to understand current and projected training and pipeline shortcomings and opportunities among growth industries and occupations. They frequently played a key role in providing data and insights to the community's workforce ecosystem, first-hand on local industry needs but also helping pay for studies, publicizing them, interpreting the results, and advocating for action.
- **Include explicit equity goals.** Most EDOs' workforce partnerships specifically focus on providing opportunities for underrepresented populations to secure good-paying jobs. They are targeting services by geography, population and income, and tracking relevant metrics.
- **Are part of networks of local or regional stakeholders in workforce and economic development, often the convener of these networks.** EDOs are identifying a common lack of connection and performing their natural roles in coordination and communication. They are bringing together different sectors and levels of workforce development stakeholders in the community to ensure they know each other and what is happening locally.
- **May also serve as lead champion and external communicator.** EDOs are often the public face or facilitator of partnerships. They can speak to and for the business community and the broader community in local media, at events, etc. They provide a conduit for major employers to have an impact on the workforce development system, bringing together decision-makers who otherwise wouldn't find themselves in the same room.

The cases had other characteristics in common. One of these was strong EDO staff leading the workforce partnership – highly skilled at communicating and building and maintaining relationships. In each case they were familiar with the community, with education and workforce systems and with the target populations, in some combination. In four of the five cases, the person leading workforce development efforts for the EDO had worked in or closely with local education systems. Their knowledge of how those systems work, and existing relationships with the people and organizations in them, likely eased partnership formation.

To engage businesses in workforce development initiatives, EDO leaders emphasized the importance of showing them enough alignment with their needs that they want to take time out of their day to participate. “All organizations have their own missions and visions. Very few are going to stay involved out of the kindness of their heart for the region,” said Karianne Gelinas, the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation’s vice president of regional partnerships and talent strategies. “You have to ask what they need to have at the end of it to stay on board.”

“Because individuals and leadership change, you have to be constantly cultivating relationships, communicating the ‘why’ of what you are doing and how that benefits everyone.”

Anna Lebesch, JAXUSA senior vice president of talent and strategy

They also position their businesses to champion the EDOs’ workforce efforts, educating them about problems and solutions and helping them advocate effectively. “One thing our investors have come to grips with is that when they take their hands off the wheel, [the workforce ecosystem] can get misaligned very quickly,” said Amity Schuyler, the Memphis Chamber’s senior vice president of workforce development. She refers to the chamber as the “connective tissue” of the workforce ecosystem.

CASE STUDIES

The table below lists the cases by community, economic development organization and highlights of one or more of each EDO’s partnerships. (Note that this is not comprehensive description of each EDO’s involvement in workforce development; each is active in other ways than those highlighted here.)

<p>Greater Memphis Chamber <i>Memphis, Tenn.</i></p>	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>EDO role in workforce development</u>: Providing data and insights (regional skills taxonomy; benchmarking), convening, building capacity - <u>Impetus/goal</u>: Create a rapid credentialing system; boost employer involvement in workforce system - <u>Partnership(s) highlighted</u>: Workforce Mid-South (WDB) and others
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The Greater Memphis Chamber has been active in workforce development for years; its current focus is on creating a system for accelerated skill credentialing in the region. The training is needed for the region generally in fields including logistics, technology and construction, but also to prepare residents for the opening of a Ford vehicle assembly site in 2025 (bringing 5,800 direct jobs). One of the chamber’s roles is to build a regional skills taxonomy for these leading and growing industries.

The chamber is part of a collaboration led by Workforce Mid-South, the region’s workforce development board, that secured a \$21.5 million EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant to establish a rapid credentialing system. As part of the project, the chamber is providing the facility for a new, comprehensive one-stop center. It also serves as a convenor and catalyst, helping private-sector leaders understand the region’s workforce development challenges, and why and how they can lead on solutions. In addition, the chamber benchmarks outcomes of the community’s workforce efforts.

<p>Firelands Forward <i>Erie, Sandusky and Ottawa counties, Ohio</i></p>	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>EDO role in workforce development</u>: Providing data and insights (childcare and housing studies), convening, building capacity (ERN, childcare center) - <u>Impetus/goal</u>: Halt population decline and provide talent for local employers - <u>Partnership(s) highlighted</u>: Three-county workforce initiative of government, business and community leaders
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Firelands Forward is a multi-county workforce development collaborative created by local leaders in 2019 to address the challenges of a region with a growing economy and a declining population. Firelands Forward is a partnership among community leaders, educators, employers, and local philanthropists to increase retention, increase labor force participation rates, decrease unemployment, and systemize the breakdown of employment barriers. (The partners invest in the unincorporated initiative, which is hosted by the Erie County Economic Development Corporation, and serve on its board.)

Firelands Forward’s work includes programming, advocacy, and education. It formed an Employer Resource Network (ERN) to provide an onsite wellness coach to employers to address turnover; established an informal Tourism, Hospitality, and Main Street Business Industry Sector Partnership; and educates students about regional job opportunities through its own web-based platform and through partnerships with the three county-level business advisory councils. In addition, it works to address larger barriers to employment in the region, including childcare, transportation and housing, by funding needs assessments, establishing a working committee to guide a housing assessment currently under way, and partnering to renovate a building for a childcare center.

<p>JAXUSA Partnership <i>Jacksonville, Fla.</i></p>	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>EDO role in workforce development:</u> Convening, building capacity (provider of Career Pathways program to support educators and employers) - <u>Impetus/goal:</u> Move students and unemployed adults into in-demand jobs in region with Career Pathways program - <u>Partnership(s) highlighted:</u> Educators, guidance counselors, CTE programs, Career Source NE Florida (WDB), key employers
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In 2019, with a new strategic plan and new leaders, JAXUSA Partnership focused on how to better engage local talent to explore the region’s growing industries. It created a strategic career pathways campaign with collateral on EarnUp.org and training for the region’s talent stakeholders. School districts, colleges/universities, community partners, students and parents were targeted to reach the EarnUp populations (students and transitioning adults). The region-specific resources support in-depth awareness of target and support industries and highlight the multitude of career pathways in growing Northeast Florida industries.

JAXUSA is active in workforce development in many other ways. It convenes networks of workforce-economic development stakeholders at leadership, working and program levels, serving as a communication hub. JAXUSA works closely with its WDB, which has created industry managers in its targeted sectors. It is currently working to create a platform for work-based learning opportunities in the region (apprenticeships and internships), Connect Now. In addition, it has secured grants for programming, including fintech training at two local community colleges.

<p>Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation <i>Lehigh Valley, Pa.</i></p>	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>EDO role in workforce development:</u> Providing data and insights (initiated/funded workforce studies); convening and catalyzing; building capacity (internship resources and Hot Careers Guide) - <u>Impetus/goal:</u> A 2015 study confirmed the need to build a talent development pipeline for local companies - <u>Partnership(s) highlighted:</u> Workforce investment board and other workforce stakeholders, particularly higher education and employers
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The Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC) began leading a regional talent supply initiative in 2015. At the time, with the local workforce development board, LVEDC co-funded a study on how to improve collaboration between employers and educators. One outcome was to convene a regional Education and Talent Supply Council, comprising regional schools, employers, economic development, and workforce agencies, to meet regularly. The council secured a state grant that enabled a second, more in-depth study of the region’s talent supply and hired a staff member to drive the initiative.

After the second study, LVEDC took on two key roles: 1) promoting and expanding internship programs (a summit and resource guide) to support employers in starting and expanding internship programs and connecting with colleges and universities, and 2) producing an annual, data-driven, regional career pathways publication to help students and educators guide career choices. Further, LVEDC created work groups to take on other recommendations from the study, such as employability skills and attracting and retaining talent.

<p>Norfolk Works <i>Norfolk, Va.</i></p>	<p>Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>EDO role in workforce development</u>: Convening, building capacity (WeldNOW training partnership with community college) - <u>Impetus/goal</u>: To ensure that Norfolk residents can access good jobs created by business expansion and new enterprises - <u>Partnership(s) highlighted</u>: Creation of Workforce Investment Network (WIN) of workforce providers/stakeholders; community college
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Created in 2016, Norfolk Works became the flagship program for the city’s Economic Development Department. Norfolk Works’ core mission is to align economic and workforce development efforts; champion diverse Norfolk talent to support business attraction, retention and expansion; and collaborate with workforce partners to help residents prepare for and connect to in-demand employment opportunities. It has three program components:

1. Norfolk Works Job Resource and Community Career Center – a street-level, direct connection for the public to access newly created jobs
2. Norfolk Works Business Services – fully integrated into the department’s business retention, expansion and attraction programs to support Norfolk businesses via connections to qualified city residents
3. Norfolk Works Workforce Investment Network (WIN) – interagency network to collaborate on workforce projects that mutually support job seekers and businesses

Recently, Norfolk Works collaborated with Tidewater Community College to create the WeldNOW mobile welding training lab. It aims to fill jobs at Lyon Shipyard and other area employers that are adjacent to one of the region’s greatest concentrations of poverty. The training initiative prepares people for employment in shipbuilding and advanced manufacturing, emphasizing work-readiness and industry-recognized certification.

ROLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS WHERE EDOS ARE HAVING IMPACT ON WORKFORCE

In the five case studies, each EDO played several roles in workforce development partnerships. Those roles (with overlap among many) are explored below with case examples.

- Providing data and insights
- Tracking collective impact
- Catalyzing change
- Facilitating funding
- Convening and communicating
- Building capacity and filling gaps

Providing data and insights

As noted earlier, providing data is a common role for EDOs in their community workforce ecosystems. They initiate and often help pay for studies, but also may be able to generate significant data in-house. They publicize and interpret the results, and can lead the talent conversation in the community with it.

In Pennsylvania, the Lehigh Valley EDC partnered with its workforce development board (WDB) to fund two studies, including applying for a state grant. Its latest study was more in-depth, validating data with focus groups and surveys and also getting community buy-in through that engagement process. LVEDC bases conversations with workforce stakeholders on data from the studies, which include job forecasts in targeted sectors (highest employing and highest GDP) for five years. It also shares data with business leaders on college graduates in the region, such as counts, demographics and field of study.

As a regional, multi-sector initiative, Firelands Forward in northern Ohio is able to initiate studies that cover the three counties collectively, providing a broader range of data and sharing the cost. Among other data initiatives, it commissioned regional childcare and housing studies to assess barriers to work for the region's residents.

In addition to data, EDOs provide insights from business and industry to workforce development systems, bringing a depth of knowledge about in-demand industries and jobs locally that no other group has. "We have the inside scoop," said Anna Lebesch, JAXUSA's vice president of talent. "We know the companies and industries we are prospecting, and we have the history on where the new jobs are coming in."

Recommendations/potential roles for EDOs:

EDOs can play an active role in securing data to diagnose disconnects in the workforce system, advocating for industry needs and ensuring data is the foundation of its involvement in any strategies. If a community has not completed any comprehensive workforce analysis, EDOs can begin the conversation about doing so. The first steps may be to create a map of key workforce partners (see appendix for information on workforce ecosystem mapping), convene them, and pool resources or apply for a grant to fund a study. Specific data and insights EDOs can provide to the local workforce system include targeted and growing industries and occupations, as well as the needs of specific employers.

Tracking collective impact

Most communities have multiple pots of state, federal and private workforce dollars coming in that are distributed among multiple organizations. Collecting the data and analyzing the collective outcome is a powerful tool for driving investment and change, and a feasible and impactful role for an EDO to assume.

In Memphis, no one entity was tracking the input and output of workforce dollars in the community until the Greater Memphis Chamber took it on. Amity Schuyler, the chamber's vice president of talent, found that annually about \$60 million was coming in, in all forms (e.g., career and technical funds to high schools, WIOA dollars, free dual enrollment, free college, Veterans Affairs dollars, etc.). Yet few were happy with the output, so they looked for the breakdowns. One was the inability to use federal individual training account dollars because the region lacked training vendors on which to spend them (see section on facilitating funding).

With the help of Brookings' Inclusive Economic Indicators Lab and in collaboration with local partners, the chamber created "People Powered Prosperity," a collective impact initiative designed to measure and monitor Memphis's progress toward becoming more globally competitive region. The benchmarks and dashboard collect indicators such as economic mobility (e.g., housing burden, food insecurity, share of people of color making at least \$15 per hour); job access; human

Workforce development boards in brief

Workforce development boards, also called workforce investment boards, are responsible for ensuring that investments of federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) dollars in adult and youth workforce development services are strategic, fiscally sound, and effective. The boards are mandated by federal law to comprise of members who represent private sector employers, labor unions, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. WIOA designates funding and responsibilities to both states and local areas.

capital (e.g., growth in opportunity/quality jobs; degree attainment, unemployment rate gap by race); inclusive economic growth and shared prosperity (e.g., median household income, GINI coefficient; poverty rate gap and change over time, among others).

Recommendations/potential roles for EDOs:

EDOs should be familiar with key funding sources (such as WIOA) and how they are being used in the community. Tracking community-wide metrics – incoming dollars and their uses, outputs and outcomes – can provide a valuable perspective on the workforce ecosystem.

For programs, keep track of metrics that drive your effort and those show impact. Firelands Forward’s success metrics are to keep the region’s unemployment rate below Ohio’s mean and to increase labor force participation above 63 percent. JAXUSA tracks visits to the EarnUp website, presentations made and requests to provide support and training on resources.

Catalyzing change

Workforce needs have changed faster than many governments and large institutional entities have been able to serve effectively. Looking for assistance with talent pipeline and training challenges, employers have been forcing questions and new approaches in many communities. EDOs are looking to workforce development boards and other partners to collaborate with, and seeking new approaches. Frank conversations and new expectations are pushing change at existing institutions, and communities are creating new organizations and frameworks where that change is stymied.

In northern Ohio, Firelands Forward was formed to focus on workforce development because of the need seen by a similar regional group, the Firelands Partnership, to address the region’s population decline. No group was strategically addressing this trend to ensure the region’s employers would have the workers they needed in the future. Firelands Forward’s advisory board includes leaders from the region’s three counties, representing educators, employers, public leaders and philanthropists who came together to invest in a new approach. It is structured as an agile entity that can collaborate, problem-solve quickly, and enact solutions without the constraints that public or regional groups may have. Firelands Forward now runs an Employer Resource Network to aid talent retention, is a primary driver of career education in schools, and is working to remove systemic barriers to employment around childcare, housing and transportation.

“Regionalism is hard, especially initially. It’s necessary to cross those lines to get one county to talk to another, but difficult. We ensure we are overcommunicating with everyone throughout the region so they understand the bigger strategic picture.”

David White, director, Firelands Forward



In Memphis, through listening sessions early in her tenure, the chamber's talent VP Amity Schuyler heard that education providers and industry weren't talking to each, and from businesses, that workers coming out of existing programs didn't have the skill sets they needed. Schuyler helped business leaders understand why that was happening and why they needed to be involved in the workforce system – especially in relation to rapid credentialing opportunities and on-ramps for middle skill jobs in the region.

To show them what that could look like, Schuyler and the relatively new director of local WDB Workforce Mid-South, took 33 members of the chamber's CEO Council to visit a program at a Florida college worth emulating. The chamber, Workforce Mid-South and the University of Memphis are now all collaborating to implement millions of dollars' worth of grants that will enable a new, comprehensive one-stop center and training opportunities. "We have been clear with our investors that they have to stay in the front" in terms of leading to get the workforce results they want, said Schuyler. "Now that they understand it, they won't lose sight of it again."

When the Lehigh Valley EDC started its workforce development initiatives in 2015, candid conversations needed to take place in the community about why this was relevant work for the EDO. Other groups, such as the WDB, were working to alleviate unemployment, but that did not address the talent attraction and retention pain points for LVEDC's employers and prospects.

"Some of it is just those hard conversations of understanding where your partners are coming from and how you can navigate to work together. "You need to lay a foundation of understanding to drive collaboration," said Karianne Gelinas, LVEDC's vice president of partnerships and talent. "Those are big, hard conversations, and ongoing conversations. With changes in leadership, funding, and metrics attached to funding – all things that never go away – you have to maintain them."

Recommendation/potential roles for EDOs:

Because of their nonpartisan, cross-sector nature and their business relationships, EDOs are often have the trust and clout to push for change that other organizations do not. They use data and effective communication to convene and align groups.

"Some people just don't like change, so have a deliberate strategy for that change management. Get the influencers in your region to champion your effort, show results, then get buy-in from larger and larger groups," advised Firelands Forward director David White.

Facilitating funding

Whether for their own workforce efforts and or to support those in the community, seeking funding is a key role for EDOs. As noted above, data or studies on local workforce issues are a common place for EDOs to invest in the workforce system.

At a minimum, it is important for EDOs to understand the primary streams of workforce dollars coming into the community, their eligibility requirements and how they are being used. The largest pot typically is Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds, distributed by the federal government to workforce development boards. However, WIOA funds are restricted and can be used only in certain ways for certain populations. As a result, many people who need assistance don't fall within eligibility, so there are important roles in talent pipeline development and training that can't be filled by those dollars.



“WIOA is the turkey at Thanksgiving but not the whole meal. It can do a lot but is very restrictive,” said Kyla Guyette, CEO of Workforce Mid-South in Memphis. Hence the WDB partnered with the Greater Memphis Chamber and others to secure a \$21.5 million EDA Good Jobs Challenge grant to create a rapid credentialing system. That additional funding for training opportunities also will help the region to access WIOA individual training account funds amounting to millions of dollars annually that were going unspent because of the lack of training vendors in the region.

JAXUSA has secured grants from private foundations (Helios Foundation through the Florida College Access Network and the Scheidell Family Foundation) to support its career pathways campaign. It also collaborated successfully to win \$3.7 million in grants for fintech training at two local community colleges. Norfolk Works, the only public-sector EDO case, accesses a variety of funding sources, including startup funds from the Norfolk Economic Development Authority for specific projects (e.g., WeldNOW and DriveNOW, which offer short-term welding and commercial driver training).

Firelands Forward has proposed a public-private partnership to use American Rescue Plan funds to renovate a building for a childcare center. The project arose from a needs assessment the group funded in partnership with the local childcare resources group. Because childcare is much needed in the region but involves a difficult business model, Firelands Forward aims to lower operating costs through capital investment to aid or eliminate rent.

Recommendations/potential roles for EDOs:

Seek funding from federal sources other than WIOA (e.g., EDA) to fulfill specific capacity-building goals identified by good data. Also track state grants for workforce programs, as well as those from private foundations (community and national). Note that many local and state governments are currently using American Rescue Plan funds for workforce development projects. Learn more about how some of these funds are being used via the National League of Cities' [Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker](#).

Convening and communicating

Three of the EDOs profiled in this paper serve as the communication hub of their local workforce networks. They are the managers, and often initiators, of both community-level networks (e.g., comprising K-12, career and technical education, community-based organizations such as Goodwill, the workforce board and others) and leader-level networks (CEOs, public officials, heads of college and universities). They keep groups connected and communication open with regular meetings (less often at the leader level, monthly at the community level).

Norfolk Works' Workforce Investment Network (WIN) brought together 14 local, state and federally funded agencies to collaborate on workforce projects that mutually support job seekers and businesses. The groups now better coordinate efforts to facilitate access to employment for city residents and communicate a common brand to the business community.

Based on a 2015 workforce study, Lehigh Valley launched the Education and Talent Supply Council comprising large employers, public officials, and heads of college and universities. The high-level group meets twice annually to talk about skill needs and talent strategies based on five-year job forecasts in the highest-earning and highest-emplying occupations. The council is the vehicle across industries and organizational types with which LVEDC shares data and which provides feedback to guide talent strategies.

To bring them together, "Make sure what you are talking about is highly valued to employers so you get the right people you are trying to support at the table," said LVEDC's talent VP Karianne Gelinas.



To get things done on the ground, LVEDC also created work groups to address five recommendations from an additional study completed in 2018, such as supporting experiential learning with an internship summit and career guide.

JAXUSA runs three networks or committees to ensure it is tapped into supply, demand, and program sides of workforce development (see sidebar). “We would not be able to touch the number of individuals we have touched with career pathways resources if we hadn’t built the network,” said JAXUSA’s Anna Lebesch.

Recommendations/potential roles for EDOs:

EDOs are key connectors of workforce stakeholders. All organizations involved should be clear about what success looks like in their lane and collectively. Seek to add value regarding all actions and requests of others’ time/effort.

Building capacity and filling gaps

EDOs used data, studies, knowledge of local workforce systems, conversations and partner insights to determine where they could have the most impact with programmatic roles (in addition to their strategic or evaluative roles).

Career pathways work in schools is key to efforts for JAXUSA, Lehigh Valley, Firelands Forward (and Memphis, though that work is not discussed in this report). JAXUSA determined that it could effectively fill a hole in the workforce system by connecting students and others with in-demand jobs at local employers through a career pathways campaign, materials and resources. Its industry knowledge and CEO relationships give it access to the most relevant information for the campaign, including industry reports, videos, company testimonials, company links spotlights, educator lesson plans and grading rubrics.

The JAXUSA Partnership has strong relationships with investors who participate in the Talent Advancement Network (TAN), its Talent Advancement Partnership (TAP) and Earn Up Steering Committee. The TAN is a group of high-level human resource or operations personnel who represent target industries throughout Northeast Florida. This group meets quarterly and provides guidance and feedback on talent pipeline work.

The TAP consists of the region’s career and technical education directors, representatives from state colleges and workforce board CareerSource NE Florida who share best practices, troubleshoot system-wide issues, and learn about industry needs. The Earn Up Steering Committee convenes educators and other career pathways partners. JAXUSA staff works seamlessly with these groups to ensure curriculum alignment for pipeline development.

Lehigh Valley's programs were a response to recommendations from its 2018 workforce study. Its career pipeline program, Hot Career Guides, gives middle school and high school students, teachers, and guidance counselors clear, data-driven information on in-demand careers locally, their educational requirements and earnings expectations. The Internship Summit, Toolkit, and Directory were created to provide employers with "how-to" guides for creating, building, and maintaining robust internship programs that tap into the talent available at the region's 11 colleges and universities.



After a year of labor system analysis led by the county EDOs and a third-party consultant, Firelands Forward was formed expressly to fill multiple gaps in the region's workforce ecosystem. It identified several relevant projects it could take on, including running an Employer Resource Network, efforts to build childcare capacity and offering career pathways awareness in the region's school systems. Director David White sees the organization's structure as a distinct advantage in terms of the flexibility it offers to address a wide range of issues.

In Norfolk, following a \$24 million, 119-job expansion at Lyon Shipyard, local leaders were determined to ensure that the adjacent community, which past economic growth had largely bypassed, would see tangible benefits. Norfolk Works partnered with Tidewater Community College and Lyon Shipyard to bridge the skills gap between nearby residents and the incoming jobs. The mobile welding lab concept WeldNOW brought the training within walking distance of the community, facilitating access to these newly created positions and to additional local employers in advanced manufacturing, shipbuilding and repair.

The Memphis chamber, in addition to its involvement in other workforce development programs, is leveraging multiple partners and avenues to establish a system that will offer rapid credentialing in 20-22 weeks, including career coaching, job placement services, and wraparound supports.

Recommendations/potential roles for EDOs:

Learn about the existing talent development and training system, and consult data and stakeholders before choosing a role(s) for the EDO. Seek to strengthen and augment what exists, plugging holes and filling gaps using the EDO's unique strengths.

Program sustainability matters as well. "If you are going to create a resource, keep it up to date. It can't be 'one and done,'" said JAXUSA's Anna Lebesch. "To have community impact, it has to be a commitment."

CONCLUSION

As the case studies show, EDOs are finding multiple ways to address talent pipeline and training needs in their communities. For many, getting involved in workforce development was all but imperative.

“Every company is concerned about getting the talent they need for the future, so this work came at a time that is extremely relevant,” said JAXUSA’s Lebesch. “Our companies recognize that it’s things like this that are going to be important. You need [talent] to learn about you earlier on so that they’re thinking about going to work for you when they graduate high school, when they graduate college, because the competition is fierce out there.”

For EDOs that have formed workforce development partnerships, the benefits are clear. “When the [business recruitment] team talks to prospects, they talk about how they can integrate into the postsecondary system,” said LVEDC’s Gelinas.

To create a workforce initiative under an EDO, it’s critical to recognize all the different stakeholders’ viewpoints and be able speak their language “in a way in which you can build a coalition to ultimately achieve economic growth that is going to benefit everybody,” said Norfolk’s Paris. “Like any other initiative, you have to understand what your internal and external stakeholders value, align initiatives with those values and really understand the temperature in the room for what the community seeks to achieve.”

The importance of regular, open communication can’t overstated. Most of those interviewed commented that the value of their work needed to be “sold” constantly, both within their organizations and in the community. That sometimes includes economic developers with a more traditional outlook who think “our job is to get it announced and then we’re done,” said Paris. “And what we’re saying is, the work isn’t done at the announcement.”



APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Mapping a community's workforce development ecosystem

The world of workforce development involves numerous partners. Due to the number of organizations and the varying types of support each provides, communities may find it useful to map their workforce development ecosystem to understand who the participants are, what each does and how they fit together. If this exercise has not already been conducted in a community, it is one EDOs can undertake to identify gaps in the system, potential partners or funders, and where the EDO can play an impactful role.

A common way to map a community's workforce landscape is to identify the various functions of the ecosystem and then group organizations accordingly. Below are broad categories of organizations that are commonly involved in a local workforce development ecosystem:

- Higher education institutions
- K-12 school systems
- Workforce investment boards
- Industry sector partnerships, major employers
- Direct job training providers
- Apprenticeship programs
- Providers of social and wraparound services
- Workforce advocacy groups
- Organized labor
- Other economic development organizations
- State and regional groups

Examples of workforce ecosystem maps

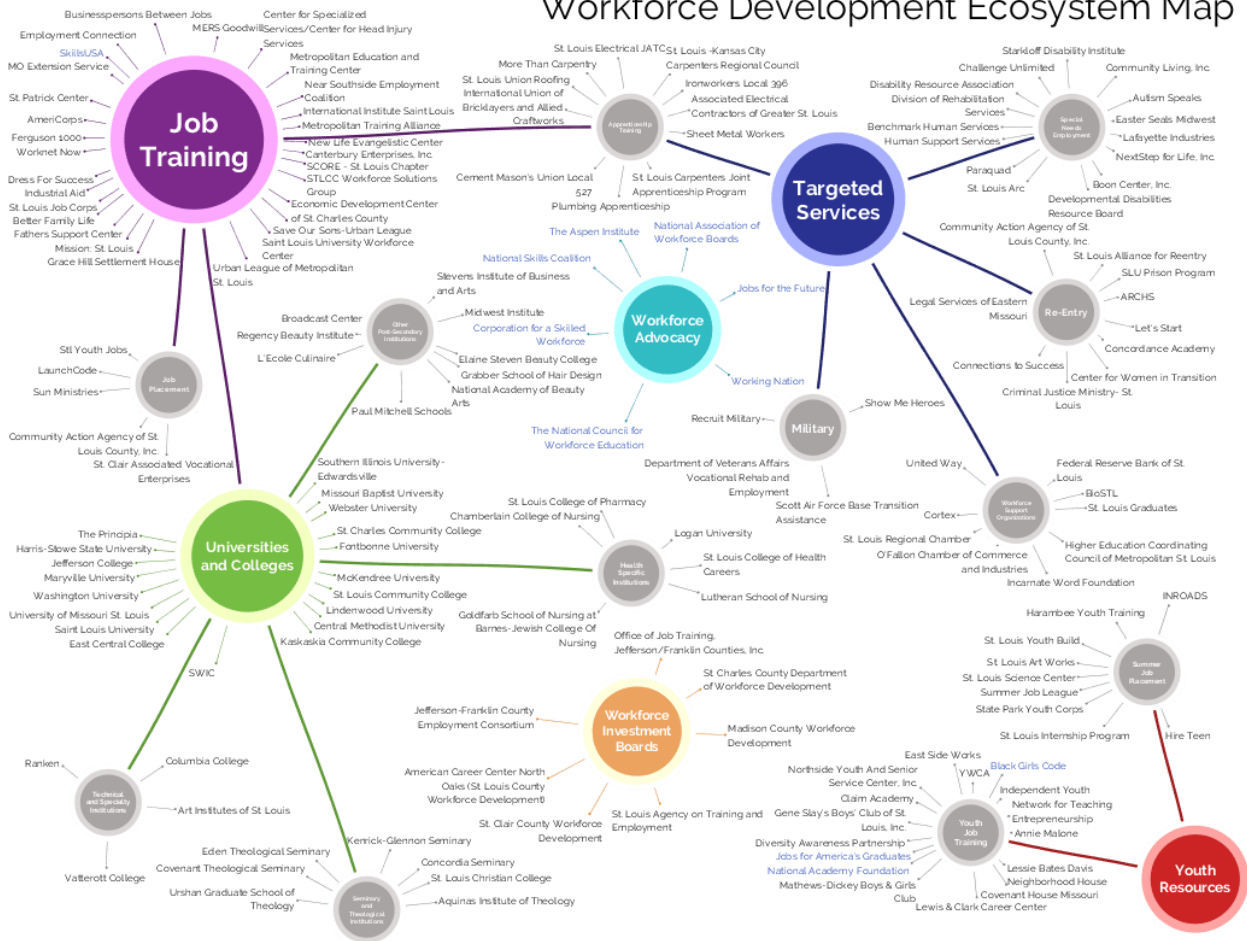
PIERCE COUNTY'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

The diagram shows 1) the four primary facets of the local workforce system 2) workforce system partnership key roles and intersectionality 3) intended outcomes and 4) areas of impact. To learn more, visit workforce-central.org/workforce-system



WorkForce Central, an organization tasked with coordinating the workforce development system in Pierce County, Washington, portrays its [workforce development ecosystem](#) by the four primary functions of the system: education and training, employer services, community resources, and career services. As seen in the diagram, each organization in the ecosystem fits in one of the groups, with the intersections between the groups showing their shared roles: career readiness, talent pipeline, recruitment and placement, and access to resources.

St. Louis Region Workforce Development Ecosystem Map



© 2016 The Clark-Fox Family Foundation

Blue Denotes National Programs

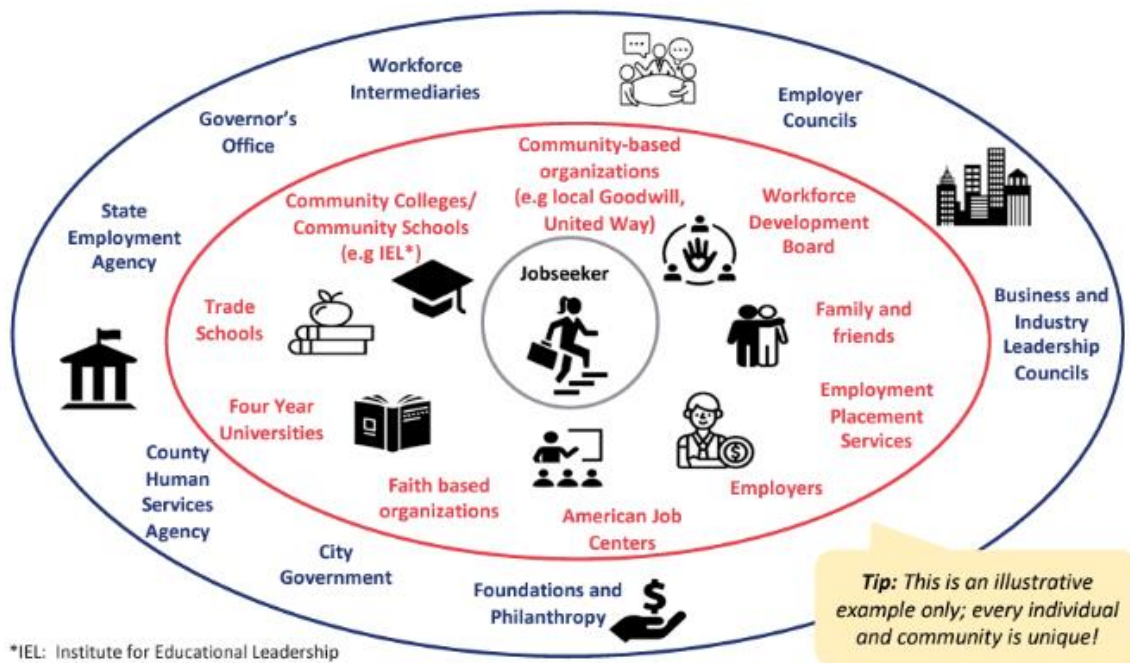
The Clark-Fox Family Foundation created an interactive [workforce development ecosystem map](#) for the St. Louis region. The map categorizes all the organizations in the region's workforce development landscape in a spoke-and-hub diagram. The main hubs are job training, targeted services, workforce advocacy, universities and colleges, workforce investment boards, and youth resources.

From these hubs, the diagram extends spokes that show the relevant organizations, as well as spokes to smaller hubs that further categorize the type of organizations. For example, 'targeted services' is further categorized into hubs specifically for organizations that focus on re-entry, military, or special needs employment.

[Example] Cross-Sector Stakeholder Map

A

Explanation: To answer the question “Who are the key players for workforce development in my community?”, use the stakeholder map below. Stakeholder maps lay out groups and organizations that could influence a jobseeker’s success, expanding outward from those with most direct influence in the center. Organizations can use these maps to visualize existing or potential opportunities for partnership.



*IEL: Institute for Educational Leadership



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Another approach to mapping workforce ecosystems is to organize groups by their proximity to the job seeker, as seen in Third Sector Capital Partners and Skilling America’s [Workforce Ecosystem Mapping Guide](#). Organizations that interact directly with job seekers to join the workforce, such as universities, job centers, or employers, are in the innermost circle. Outward, the next circle includes organizations that don’t directly serve the job seeker but interact with the organizations in the inner circle. These include business leader councils, foundations, or the state employment agency, for example.

Appendix 2: Additional case study resources

Memphis

About People-Powered Prosperity collective impact initiative – dashboard and benchmarks

<https://memphischamber.com/people-powered-prosperity/>

Announcement of \$21.5 EDA Good Jobs Grant for Memphis Region

<http://blog.memphischamber.com/workforce-mid-south-wins-21.5m-good-jobs-grant-for-memphis-region>

Firelands Forward

About the Firelands Forward Initiative

<https://firelandsforward.com/>

About Firelands Forward's Employer Resource Network

<https://firelandsforward.com/ern/>

Norfolk Works

About Norfolk Works

<https://norfolkdevelopment.com/norfolkworks/>

Economic Development Journal article on Norfolk Works programs

[Supporting Inclusive Growth in Norfolk: Aligning Economic & Workforce Development Strategies](#)

JAXUSA Partnership

Portal for JAXUSA's career pathways initiatives

<https://earnup.org/>

Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation

Overview of LVEDC's Talent Supply Initiative

<https://lehighvalley.org/grow-here/talent-retentionworkforce-resources>

LVEDC's 2018 Talent and Education Supply Report

https://www.slideshare.net/Lehigh_Valley

WIOA

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act performance indicators

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/performance-indicators>

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PARTNERS

Albuquerque Regional Economic Alliance
Ames Chamber of Commerce
Ann Arbor SPARK
Baltimore Development Corporation
Baton Rouge Area Chamber
Birmingham Business Alliance
Blount Partnership
CDC Small Business Finance Corporation
Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce
City of Austin Economic Development Dept.
City of Avondale
City of Cedar Hill - Economic Development
City of Columbus - Department of
Development
City of Dallas Office of Economic Development
City of El Paso Dept. of Economic Development
City of Fort Collins
City of Surprise
Delaware Prosperity Partnership
Detroit Regional Partnership
Frisco Economic Development Corporation
Gilbert, AZ Office of Economic Development
GO Topeka Economic Partnership
Great Falls Development Authority, Inc.
Greater Des Moines Partnership
Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance
Greater Houston Partnership
Greater Memphis Chamber
GREATER MSP
Greater Oklahoma City Chamber
Greater Phoenix Economic Council
Greater Richmond Partnership, Inc.
Greater Sacramento Economic Council
Greater Seattle Partners
Greater St. Louis Inc.
Greater Yuma Economic Development Corp.

Hampton Roads Economic Development
Alliance
Hillsborough County Economic Development
Invest Atlanta
Invest Buffalo Niagara
Invest Puerto Rico, Inc.
JAXUSA Partnership
Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance
Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce
Louisiana Dept. of Economic Development
Lubbock Economic Development Alliance
McKinney Economic Development Corporation
Michigan Economic Development Corporation
Minn. Dept. of Employment and Economic
Development
New Braunfels Economic Development
New Orleans Business Alliance
One Columbus
Port San Antonio
Rutgers Center for Urban Entrepreneurship
Saginaw Future Inc.
Salt Lake City Corporation
St. Louis Economic Development Partnership
St. Tammany Corporation
Strada Education Network
Tampa Bay EDC
Team NEO
Texas Economic Development Corporation
The Economic Dev't Alliance for Jefferson Co.
The Right Place, Inc.
Tulsa Regional Chamber
Tyler Economic Development Corporation
Upstate Colorado Economic Development
Virginia Economic Development Partnership
Virginia's Gateway Region

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