

FINDERS, KEEPERS:  
*Business Taking Action  
to Secure Skilled Workers*





*WINs is a national, multiyear initiative that helps chambers make the public workforce development system more market driven and responsive to the needs of both employers and workers.*



In a recent survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, nearly half of businesses surveyed (46%) indicated that connecting to one-stop career centers — entities located throughout the country to assist businesses with their human resource needs — is an important business strategy.\* In contrast, only 4% of businesses indicated that they obtain their workers from one-stops. For many business executives, turning to the public workforce system for help with their hiring and training needs may be daunting.

So what is stopping them? Some executives perceive the public system as slow to react and unable to serve their needs. Others feel that one-stops lack the ability to adequately screen applicants. Still others just don't know where to begin in navigating the perceived bureaucracy.

The solution: Look no farther than your local chamber of commerce. Although you may not think of the chamber as a source for your human resources needs, many chambers across the country are at the forefront of revolutionary public-private partnerships. Those at the vanguard are successfully filling the intermediary role and have helped make

the public workforce development system more employer focused, responsive, effective, and efficient for companies across the country.

The Center for Workforce Preparation (CWP) at the U.S. Chamber offers the following best practices drawn from its participation in the nationally acclaimed Workforce Innovation Networks (WINs) initiative. WINs is a national, multiyear initiative that helps chambers make the public workforce development system more market driven and responsive to the needs of both employers and workers.

These best practices, which are drawn from a series of case studies now available online, share the successes of five chambers of commerce (four local and one state) that were supported by WINs to develop innovative pilot programs in workforce development. CWP has also developed six specific how-to guides for chambers of commerce, workforce boards, and other economic and workforce organizations interested in emulating the successful practices highlighted in this booklet.

\* U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation, *Rising to the Challenge: Business Voices on the Public Workforce Development System*. Washington, D.C.:Spring 2003

## BROOKLYN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Providing HR Assistance for Brooklyn's

Staff at the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce are the self-proclaimed “HR department for Brooklyn’s small businesses.” It started in 1998 with Good Help, the chamber’s free staffing service.

Good Help resulted from the concerns of one member, a travel agency that expressed challenges over its access to reliable, skilled workers. Chamber staff realized that the problem wasn’t likely isolated, so they conducted a needs assessment survey to determine if such a service would be viable. When it became clear that the need was significant, the chamber worked to create a network of area nonprofit employment and training agencies. While the nonprofits had access to potential employees and job training capacities, the chamber had access to employers and an understanding of what skills were needed in the local market. Aligning the two would mean a more qualified workforce for area businesses and more opportunities for area workers. Since 1998, the service has placed 1,000 employees with local businesses.

The success of Good Help sparked the chamber’s interest in further developing its workforce initiatives. With funding from WINs, the Brooklyn Chamber commissioned a labor market study to understand

details of the borough’s economic trends and conditions. Surprisingly, most data collection efforts consider the borough part of—or of lesser importance than—Manhattan. The Brooklyn study identified the area’s emerging industries, as well as those on the decline, along with current and projected skills and hiring needs. The study uncovered obstacles specific to small businesses since nearly 90% of the community’s 36,000 companies employ fewer than 20 people.

In addition to the data collection issues, until 2002 Brooklyn and all of New York City’s public workforce services were handled by a single one-stop career center located in Queens. When Brooklyn’s Workforce 1 Career Center opened, New York City contracted out the management of services aimed directly at employers to assist them with hiring and training needs. The Brooklyn Chamber was a natural fit. The chamber won the \$1.2 million grant, and Good Help was immediately relocated to the Workforce 1 Career Center’s Business Solutions Center. The chamber’s small business product offerings were expanded to include training services; small business loans; microloans; and counsel on tax credits, wage subsidies, and training grants.

# Small Businesses

The chamber created a human resources specialist position designed to build awareness of the Workforce 1 Career Center's resources. The HR specialist spends more than half her time in the field, working directly with area businesses to identify the services they need most. A key area of emphasis is helping businesses take advantage of the state's and city's incumbent worker training funds—grants that support training for existing workers to develop specific skills needed by local businesses.

To maximize funding opportunities, the chamber worked to identify employers that would qualify for the skills grants. It targeted specific industry sectors that were projected to grow, businesses that would not otherwise expend training dollars, and entry-level jobs that could expand with increased skills. Once companies were identified, the HR specialist called the company to explain the opportunity and then conducted a site visit to brief company leadership. A dozen businesses then attended a follow-up workshop designed to help companies apply for the grants. In 2005 alone, the chamber has helped secure more than \$85,000 in funding for local businesses.

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## ARLINGTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Constructing and Sustaining Public/

**R**esearch by the Arlington (Texas) Chamber of Commerce in 2001 showed that approximately \$1 billion in public funds is spent each year on programs to create, mold, and shape the local workforce. In a community where the unemployment rate is historically lower than the national average, employers indicated a clear interest in learning about local programs that could help them access qualified workers. For that reason, the chamber asked its employer members if they would like to influence how this money would be used.

Fostering the development of industry clusters as a means of increasing the region's competitive advantage was a major component of the chamber's approach. The chamber aligns a range of factors that support a cluster's development including infrastructure, access to capital and technology, public policy, and the local workforce. The WINs grant provided the chamber with an opportunity to develop a critical-needs industry cluster that aligned the needs of the workforce system, the

educational system, and the business community within a sustainable replicable model.

As in many cities, one critical-needs industry in Arlington is health care. Under the WINs grant, the Arlington Chamber leveraged its membership to form the Health Care Industry Cluster, which consists of health care provider CEOs, health care deans of nearby colleges, local school district officials, and the Workforce Development Board. WINs funded a series of studies to assess the nursing shortage and to increase the knowledge of educational programs needed to train a future health care workforce.

The Health Care Industry Cluster agreed on a three-pronged approach to address the nursing shortage. First, it focused on increasing nurses at the instructional level. The cluster engaged students from the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) Graduate Business School to develop a business plan highlighting the need and the benefit of having the private sector fund additional instructors. Second, it established articulation agreements among educational institutions. One innovative effort has focused on a pre-RN track at the high school level. Officials agreed to develop a Licensed Vocational



# Private Partnerships

Nursing (LVN) program that would allow Arlington's high school juniors and seniors, who are ready to pursue college level curricula, to earn dual credit LVN course work in high school, sit for the LVN state exam at the end of their senior year, and then transition into the Tarrant Community College Registered Nursing program. Third, the Health Care Industry Cluster's strategy supports a nursing mentoring program focused on increasing the retention rate of nursing students.

The chamber also established a partnership with the local Workforce Investment Board—Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County. An outgrowth of that relationship was the development of the Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CCEWD). The 64,000-square-foot facility houses the collaborative partnership among 15 workforce service providers — now operating as a single unit focused on meeting employer and employee needs.

The chamber spearheaded the development of the CCEWD and the council's employer members meet monthly to provide the center's administration with feedback and information related to the needs of the employer community. The results speak for themselves:

Between September 2004 and September 2005, the center's market share nearly doubled (from 6.96% to 13.5%).

Because of its success in engaging employer users, the Arlington Chamber has received a \$175,000 grant from Workforce Solutions to serve businesses using WorkInTexas.com, a Web-based job matching service, and the local one-stop career centers.

The chamber's efforts have met with great success. According to Marian Buehler, Six Flags Over Texas' Director HR/Administration, "Six Flags Over Texas utilizes multiple chamber initiatives and resources to help maintain the large workforce needed to staff the park both seasonally and full-time. We have benefited immensely by participating in the employer interface with the workforce development system."

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# Marketing to Increase Brand Awareness



In 2004, the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber ran its own job posting and resume-matching business called Super Jobs. When the chamber elected to transition out of the job placement business, it thought that a valuable partnership could be formed between the chamber and the Southwest Ohio Regional Workforce Investment Board (WIB). The chamber would provide a reputable customer service-driven brand, Super Jobs, and the area's new one-stop would provide much-needed placement services.

The two organizations established an administrative services agreement to locate the WIB staff's office in the chamber's facility. By co-locating, the new one-stop, Super Jobs Center, is able to efficiently leverage the chamber's established overhead costs and tap into the chamber's marketing expertise. The WIB would also be fully tuned into the business needs and demands for hiring and training workers. The chamber agreed to develop campaign materials for the launch of the new Super Jobs Center including radio, billboard, and print ads, a pamphlet, and a grand opening event.

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training and placement. Based on an emerging industry report by the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, the WIB decided that the Super Jobs Center would focus on the following high-growth industries in the area: health care, construction, customer service for banking and retail, security, environmental abatement, and technology.

Within the new Business Services Unit at the Super Jobs Center, the goal is for each individual business services associate to become an industry-specific expert. Associates get up to speed on their industry by joining local industry associations to learn more about industry trends and workforce needs, identifying 10 key local employers of all sizes within their industry cluster, and spending time on the job site of each of these employers to learn a job for which placements are being sought. Further, associates are required to embed themselves in at least one business within their industry cluster to learn what it really takes to perform the job in question. Equipped with this deep knowledge, associates are paired with Super Jobs career coaches and are thus better able to serve Cincinnati businesses.



TULSA METRO CHAMBER

# Establishing a Single Point of Contact

When Tulsa businesses were asked how the local workforce development system could better meet their needs, the response was resounding: They asked for a single point of contact system — a central place where employers could make one contact to address their hiring and training needs.

The Tulsa Metro Chamber knew exactly where to go: Workforce Tulsa. Workforce Tulsa is the Workforce Investment Board for the region and was co-located at the chamber until recently. With funding from WINs, the chamber tapped into Workforce Tulsa to launch a single point of contact system: WINs ... *Workforce Solutions for Business*. Workforce Tulsa was able to effectively merge a seemingly disparate group of business, educational, and service provider organizations that shared a common goal: to meet the needs of local

businesses and ensure their readiness to compete in a global economy.

Under the WINs initiative, this newly formed group identified three goals: (1) create a single point of contact system for employers to find help in hiring and training workers, (2) promote the brand of that new single point of contact system for employers, and (3) increase employer use of Workforce Tulsa's Business Services — the newly created strategic employer services arm of the WIB.

*WINs ... Workforce Solutions* allows access to a variety of human resources and training services through a single Web site ([www.599wins.com](http://www.599wins.com)) and telephone number (599-WINs.) A company simply expresses its need, and in seconds training providers within the Tulsa region are notified. They have 24 hours to respond to the employer's request.

*WINs ... Workforce Solutions* provides three lines of services to businesses. Hiring services include online job postings and resume retrieval, customized recruitment and skills evaluations, application distribution and collection, interviewing facilities, and linkages to training programs. Training services include access to short-term training

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to meet changing industry demands and classroom training to develop a more stable, skilled workforce. Finally, *WINs ... Workforce Solutions* human resources services include provision of labor market information, counsel on employment law, seminars, retention services, and assistance with regulatory compliance.

In addition, Workforce Tulsa oversees a large rural area outside the city of Tulsa. Providing one solution for these different and dynamic communities has been a challenge. In response, Workforce Tulsa hired a Rural Business Outreach Specialist who travels to small communities outside of the metropolitan area to meet with local chambers of commerce and small business members face-to-face to market the business services that Workforce Tulsa provides.

Success to date has been considerable. From the inception of *WINs ... Workforce Solutions*, the number of employers registered for services increased 137% between 2003 and 2004, the total jobs posted increased 46%, and the total job openings increased 90%. The organization has worked extensively with major employers such as Wal-Mart and The Home Depot on staffing services. They also partnered with a local manufacturing company to prescreen applicants for 100 new jobs, saving the company more than \$50,000 in hiring costs.



## SOUTH CAROLINA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Building a Coalition for Systemic Change

**B**ecause of its unique statewide perspective, the South Carolina Chamber was selected to test the WINs cross-sector collaboration model at the state level. With reach that extends to both metropolitan and rural areas, the South Carolina Chamber provided an opportunity to build a cross-sector coalition to address systemic improvements in workforce development. Specifically, the chamber sought to create a more effective, efficient, accessible, employer-driven, and advancement-focused state workforce system.



In 2003, the South Carolina Chamber assembled a WINs task force of approximately 20 high-profile representatives from the public and private sectors. The team included senior executives from a broad cross-section of high-growth industries and businesses, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to smaller firms. In contrast, the chamber was also able to engage the participation of senior leadership from

several of the state's largest agencies including the South Carolina Department of Social Services, the Employment Security Commission, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Education, the Commission on Higher Education, the State Board for Comprehensive and Technical Education, and the office of the Governor. Representation from the South Carolina Technical College system rounded out stakeholder participation.

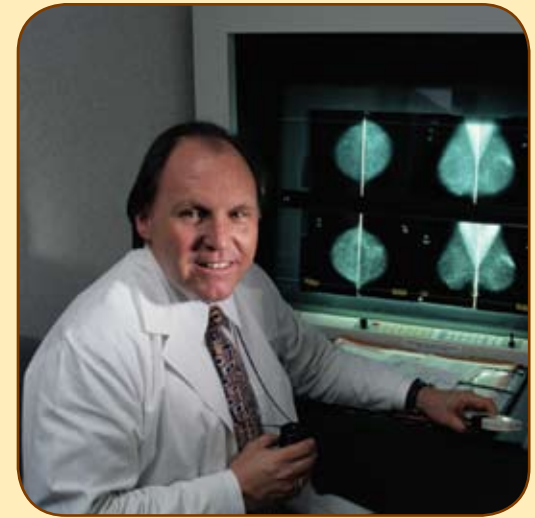
Participants from all sectors identify the chamber's reach and instant credibility as the key to securing representation from such high-profile organizations. From the public service side, state officials were quick to point out that the chamber brings both the credibility to get businesses to the table and the all important end-user perspective. For all team members, the chamber's nonpartisan position and the fact that it was not viewed as a political entity was crucial to engaging with executives from heavily regulated industries such as health care. It was, therefore, well positioned to be a consensus builder.

In April 2005, Gov. Mark Sanford issued an Executive Order reassigning Workforce Investment Act funding

from the Employment Security Commission to the Department of Commerce. The governor tapped seven WINs team members to be part of the 10-member transition group that provided recommendations for the successful transfer of WIA programs and funding. The practical and perceptual significance of this system change cannot be underestimated. The WINs team supported the move and believes that it will lead to a more strategic investment of WIA money and, ultimately, enhance implementation of the WINs team's long-term plan for tightening coordination between workforce training and economic development.

In addition to affecting fundamental, long-term systemic change on the adult workforce situation, WINs team members have also made a difference in education initiatives that coincide with the overall alignment strategy. For example, business members of the WINs team were instrumental in the state's passage of comprehensive state legislation that focuses around career clusters, enhances professional development for educators, revitalizes guidance and counseling services, and establishes alternatives for students at risk of dropping out.

The WINs team has strategically aligned itself with other high-profile statewide workforce-related task forces to ensure that the principles, strategies, and work from WINs are sustained through the ongoing development and implementation of a five-year plan. The plan sets forth a strategy to establish a single coordinating body — with public and private sector representation — empowered to create a statewide strategy and annual goals for workforce development. If given the appropriate authority, the South Carolina Department of Commerce will staff the body and ensure that all state Cabinet agencies involved in workforce development establish joint annual goals and share research, data, and best practices.



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*“The traditional way of operating a WIB was to view the job seeker as the client. Today, the employer should be the primary client. Understanding and responding to the needs of business and the evolving skills required by industries helps us to develop a pool of qualified workers.”*

**Dick Williamson**  
Chairman of Workforce Tulsa and  
CEO of T.D. Williamson, Inc.

## Connecting to Your Local Chamber

**W**hether it is the acquisition of state and local training funds for incumbent workers, outsourcing some or all of your human resources recruitment and screening to the local one-stop, integrating the industry-specific training needs of your business into local curricula, or making your voice heard among nonpartisan coalitions that can effect policy change, connecting with your local chamber of commerce is the first step. Chambers can guide you on how to make the most of a potential workforce development partnership. For more information about WINs, the full case studies, or the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Center for Workforce Preparation, visit [www.uschamber.com/cwp](http://www.uschamber.com/cwp).

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