



WISE Plan:

**Workforce
Innovation for a
**Strong
Economy****

2016-2026



Contact: Dr. Lisa Herr
CEO
The 7 Rivers Alliance
lisa@7riversalliance.org
608.787.8777

I. Workforce Challenge

Within the 7 Rivers Region, the availability of a skilled workforce has emerged as a major challenge as businesses struggle to find talent to sustain and grow their operations. In the 2015 business survey conducted by the 7 Rivers Alliance, the lack of workers was cited as a top concern among 75% of respondents.

Many jobs to fill: Currently, there are over 246,000 jobs in the 14 county-7 Rivers Region labor shed. Over the next 10 years, the region will have the same number of job openings and a consistent annual decline in talent available to fill those positions. Population growth will not keep up with employment demand.

Tight local labor market: The workforce challenge is also impacted by a 3.5% unemployment rate throughout the region. In many counties, there is less than one job seeker for each job opening. There are not enough workers now nor an adequate number of workers entering the workforce over the next 10 years.

Growing skills gap: Employers across the region are already struggling to find the talent that they need. The limited pool of available workers does not have the skills that employers need.

Lack of coordinated strategy: There is no comprehensive labor study nor regional workforce strategy for addressing the workforce needs of key sectors within the 7 Rivers Region.

II. The 7 Rivers Alliance

The 7 Rivers Alliance is uniquely positioned to lead the development of a regional talent plan. We have 10+ years of experience building collaboration with economic and workforce development agencies across the region and we also have a deep understanding of the major business sectors. This knowledge and experience will enable us to effectively convene key stakeholders in a timely manner and lead the project to successful completion.

The large scope of this project necessitates strong collaboration with public and private organizations. By working together with our regional partners, we can successfully manage the project, and dedicate more resources towards implementation of initiatives. The communities in our region will benefit from this project as we build a blueprint for a strong talent pipeline and recruit human capital as new residents. As the plan is executed, organizations and higher education will be able to use the data analysis and recommendations to pursue grant opportunities to support the creation of new talent preparation programs. Businesses will be able to confidently plan for growth and expansion in the region and the global marketplace.

III. Creation of a Regional Talent Plan

The 7 Rivers Alliance will work with key stakeholders to develop workforce attraction and retention strategies for entry level to the C-Suite positions. The regional talent plan will provide a blueprint for developing and strengthening internal and external employee pipelines to support current and future employers in the 7 Rivers Region. The creation and implementation of a regional talent plan will help employers to fill jobs over the next 10 years. The plan will include the following elements:

- i. **Vision:** Creating a shared vision for the 7 Rivers Region provides direction for the numerous stakeholders who participate in and contribute to the workforce development systems in the 7 Rivers Region.
- ii. **Goals:** Working with stakeholders to identify the primary and supporting goals for the workforce strategy helps to support and clarify the scope of the project.
- iii. **Communications:** Unifying the work of numerous organizations into one master plan will require consistent and ongoing conversations and distribution of information.
- iv. **Assets:** Identifying and mapping regional assets is an important first step in developing a regional workforce strategy. Stakeholders explore what can be accomplished by working together and sharing resources.
- v. **Analysis:** Labor market analytics allow for projections about how key sectors will fare over time and provide gap projections for employment throughout the region.
- vi. **Framework:** The process by which the wide range of possibilities become focused strategies of the most promising practices to fill the gaps identified by the asset mapping and analysis. The framework will outline the focus, strategy and goals of the workforce plan.
- vii. **Initiatives:** Priority projects will be identified to support each strategy in the framework. They are clear, measurable and engage stakeholders in the implementation of short and long term solutions with completion dates.
- viii. **Policies:** The emerging themes and barriers to business growth will be identified through focused conversations with students, workers and employers. The information gathered will guide the formation of policy recommendations that will be shared with state and federal agencies and elected officials.

IV. Alignment of Workforce Development and Economic Development Efforts

Local workforce and economic development officials are best positioned to identify what businesses need and tailor appropriate investments and services. There is a natural overlap between local and regional economic and workforce development efforts. An effective workforce strategy will fully engage all key stakeholders in the planning process to optimize expertise and resources.

According to the Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative, there are four capacities needed to align economic development and workforce development. An effective regional talent plan will include partners who can assist with developing each capacity.

4 Capacities	Key Partners
1. Industry expertise and credibility	Industry Leaders Business Associations Chambers of Commerce Local Economic Development Agencies
2. Deep knowledge about the local labor pool	State Workforce Agencies Regional Planning Commissions Workforce Development Councils
3. Ability to conduct labor market research that is informed by both data and industry intelligence	State University Extension Researchers Regional Planning Commissions State Economic Development Agencies
4. Relationship building and maintenance	The 7 Rivers Alliance acts as “convener” to find common ground and spur collaboration among a wide variety of stakeholders

V. Phases of Regional Collaboration

Focused regional collaboration builds through three phases. Effective leadership teams become tighter as they evolve toward the high level of trust and commitment needed to innovate.



Phase 1

Leaders share interests in the region but have little history of working together on complex projects; pooling information starts the process of building an effective regional leadership team.



Phase 2

Leaders share information and through deeper conversation begin to develop shared mental models and shared strategic frameworks.



Phase 3

Leaders share goals of creating new solutions and become deeply committed to helping each other on specific projects; they share a common objective of regional transformation.

Drabenstott and Morrison (2005)

VI. Project Deliverables

This one-year project will culminate with the creation of a three-part regional talent attraction and retention plan that identifies regional and national best practices, and establishes a scope of work to adapt and implement those practices. The plan will also include recommendations for public policy.

Part I of the plan will be developed in collaboration with regional partners and will focus on three core areas. Each core area will have assigned regional leaders to drive the work, and also include accountability measures and timelines for implementation. Below is a preliminary list of key stakeholders for each core area. Additional partners will be added as the project launches and regional assets are identified.

Talent Preparation: K-12, Higher Education, Academies, Internships & Apprenticeships

Talent Recruitment: WDBs, Chambers of Commerce, Visitors Bureaus, EDOs & Media

Talent Retention: Employment Agencies, SHRM chapters, WDBs

Part II of the plan will address the region's capacity for implementing strategies that are essential to workforce retention: Housing, childcare and transportation. Part I and II of the talent plan are necessary for creating the talent pool needed and then ensuring that the region has the infrastructure and support services in place to retain the workforce.

Part III of the plan will focus on public policy recommendations to support the creation of new policies or the adjustment of existing policies that will support workforce attraction and retention in the region.

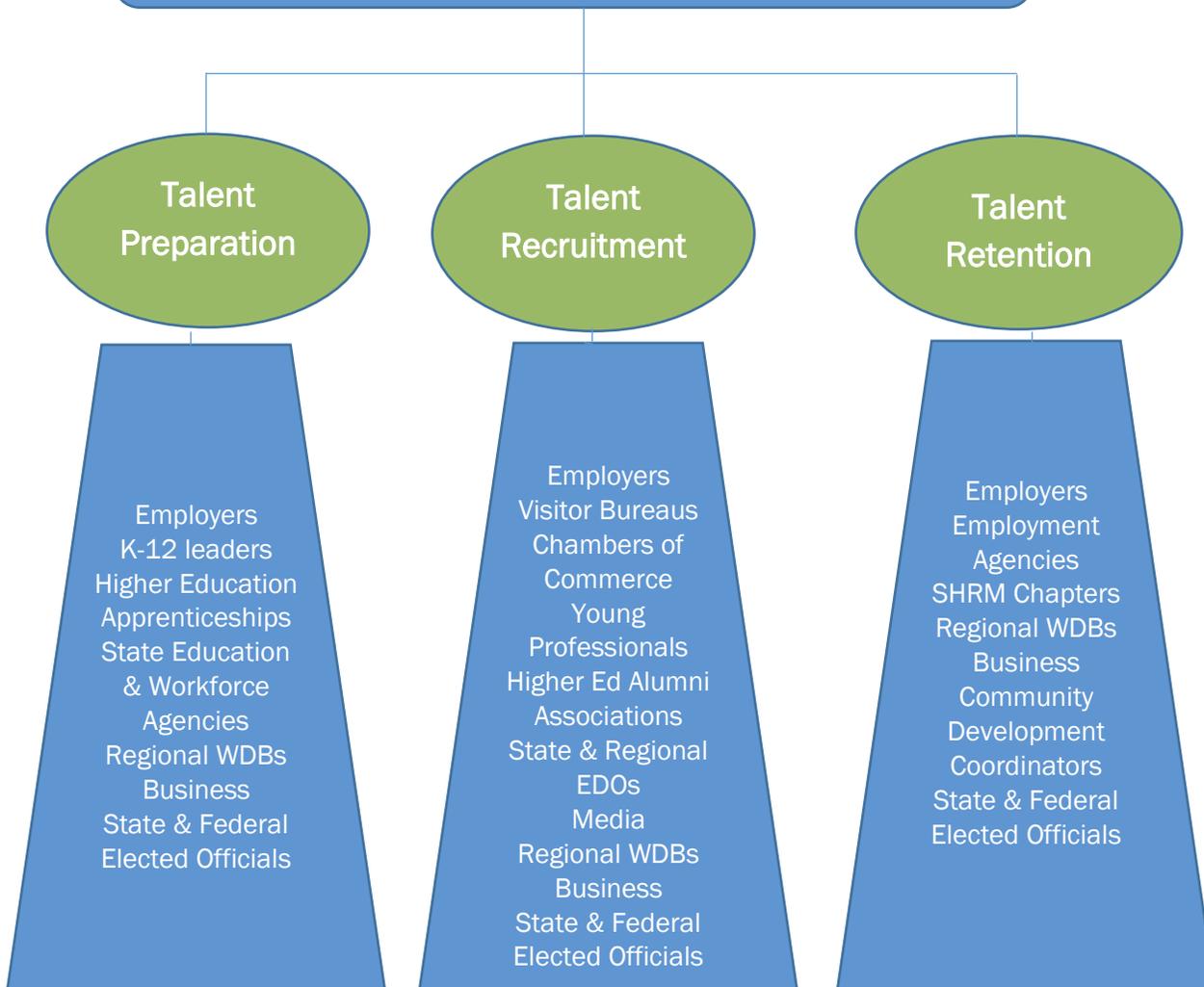
VII. WISE Project Deployment

A network of regional partners will be recruited to actively participate in shaping the implementation of this project. Regional leaders from business sectors, economic development organizations, business associations, workforce investment opportunity boards, higher education institutions and community action agencies will be recruited and assigned to advise and oversee the work of each core area.

Team leaders will be responsible for providing written monthly updates that will be distributed throughout the region. WISE Team leaders will provide updates on their progress at the quarterly meetings of The Board of Directors for The 7 Rivers Alliance.

Regional Executive Partners will advise project rollout and achievement of target outcomes. The Talent Preparation, Talent Recruitment and Talent Retention teams will guide development of the framework, initiatives and public policy recommendations.

Regional Executive Steering Committee



VIII. Timeline

The WISE Planning Process will launch on October 1, 2016 and will culminate on or before September 30, 2017 with a written outline that details the promising practices, strategies and priority projects to be implemented in the short term (1-3 years) and long term (7 -10 years).

IX. Products

- i. Creation of a 10-year workforce attraction and retention plan for regional leaders.
- ii. Public policy recommendations to address barriers to business growth as well obstacles that hinder workforce mobility in the region.

- iii. A matrix of identified public and private funding sources to support grant partners in pursuing funds for the execution of the promising practices and strategies outlined in the WISE plan.

X. WISE Plan Execution

The completed WISE Plan for Workforce Attraction and Retention will be the foundation for applying to state and federal grant funding sources in Fall of 2017. The 7 Rivers Alliance will work with regional partners to support their grant proposals to access funds that will enable them to implement the plan recommendations in 2017-2018.

XI. Project Cost

The large scope of this project requires dedicated staff to ensure all project deliverables are achieved. The 7 Rivers Alliance CEO will be the project director, guide the work, and regularly convene and communicate with key partners, stakeholders and leaders. A .50 office manager and .25 support staff will be hired to support the project implementation.

Consultants	\$108,500
Staffing	\$73,500
Office Supplies	\$2,500
Travel	\$3,000
Administrative	\$12,500
<hr/>	
Total:	\$200,000

XII. Funding

Collaborative funding has been pursued to offset the costs of this project. Key stakeholders, public and private organizations, as well as companies that would benefit from the development of a regional talent plan, will be invited to contribute to the \$200,000 project costs.

EDA	\$100,000
The 7 Rivers Alliance & Regional Partners	\$50,000
WEDC	\$50,000
<hr/>	
Total:	\$200,000