

SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS' SKILL AND OCCUPATIONAL NEEDS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION FOR THE FINGER LAKES WIB

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Prepared for:
Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board

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February 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board (WIB) seeks to develop its regional workforce development strategic plan. The plan's primary goal is to align human potential with opportunities in the workplace in the four-county region of Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates.

As a preliminary step in the planning process, the WIB engaged CGR to complete a labor market information scan, conduct a survey of employers, and facilitate focus group discussions with the full Board. The labor market information scan results are reported under separate cover. This document presents the results of the employer survey, the results of the facilitated focus group sessions, and presents recommendations for action for the FLWIB.

Employer Survey

To gather sufficient data on the skill and occupational vacancies and needs of employers, CGR conducted an October 2002 survey of employers in the four-county area. Selected findings include the following.

- ❖ 40% of respondents had current job vacancies. Respondents reported 857 current vacancies at the time of the October 2002 survey; a much larger number of total vacancies likely exist since not all surveys were returned.
- ❖ Most employers use the newspaper for recruiting (73%), followed by in-house recruiting (68%), networking (38%), Department of Labor (33%), the Internet (30%), and others.

- ❖ Industries most likely to report vacancies were manufacturing (27 employers), health care or social assistance (11 employers), education (9 employers), construction (8 employers), and retail trade (8 employers).
- ❖ Employers find it “very difficult” to fill positions for nurses, dental hygienists, health aides, skilled trades, technical positions, and education positions, among others.
- ❖ The highest reported need for training is in “soft skills” areas including workplace ethics/honesty/integrity, responsibility for tasks, working as a team member, and service attitude.
- ❖ Employers primarily use in-house training (97%) as opposed to private training centers (18%), consultants (18%), BOCES/technical schools (14%), or others.
- ❖ Respondents feel that “workers lacking skills for available jobs” is the number one workforce development issue facing the community (56% of respondents).
- ❖ Respondents would prefer to use the U.S. mail (49%) or Email (43%) in order to submit information to the WIB on an annual basis.

Facilitated Focus Groups With Board

The labor market scan and the employer survey results helped the WIB Planning Committee to identify three important overarching “gaps” or problem areas in need of further attention through facilitated discussions, or focus groups, with WIB board members. Three break-out focus groups were held to address the overarching gaps. CGR recommendations including those generated in the focus group discussions are below. The body of the report includes FL WIB Planning Committee responses and assignments based on each recommendation.

A. Improved Employer Outreach and Services

1. Ensure WIB board members are sufficiently oriented to the FL Works system.
2. Develop a package of services that is clear and understandable to employers.
3. Develop a Task Force for employer outreach.
4. Establish a Speaker’s Bureau.

5. Utilize and publicize a comprehensive Finger Lakes Works website.
6. Define and target specific audiences of interest.
7. Plan and be prepared for growth.

B. Matching Vacancies and Job Seekers

8. Board members should list their vacancies with One-Stops.
9. Encourage employers to identify the types of vacancies for which One-Stops are most likely to be able to help provide matches.
10. Hold focus groups with employers to address the matching versus screening issue.
11. Improve the integration of existing databases.
12. Make a greater effort to identify job vacancies.
13. Follow-up with employer customers.
14. Challenge bureaucratic practices.

C. Setting Financial Priorities

15. Use WIB Board authority to improve scope and effectiveness of current training programs.
16. Promote awareness of “certification” track programs.
17. Encourage programs to use the certification approach.
18. Encourage a standard approach to work readiness at the state level.
19. Explore providing grant writing support for multiple firms.
20. Explore ability to seek grant funds and serve as a conduit to firms in need of training funds.
21. Approach DOL and encourage dramatically streamlining of the current application process.
22. Explore variable limits on funding for Individual Worker Training.
23. Consider a cost share with trainees.
24. Evaluate the demand occupations list.

-
25. The WIB Board should seek to expand the total quantity of training dollars through aggressive grantsmanship.

Strategic Implications

The labor market scan, employer survey, and focus groups with the Workforce Investment Board produced a series of findings central to the current and long-term mission of Finger Lakes Works.

The labor market scan revealed that unemployment remains relatively low in the region, and that there exists an ample workforce whose qualifications conform well to the labor market's economic base. At the same time, it found that there remain gaps in data central to the WIB's mission. The employer survey verified that employment opportunities exist in the region, but revealed that Finger Lakes Works resources are positioned as a secondary or tertiary resource in identifying qualified job candidates and sourcing specifically-skilled workers. The focus groups synergized these findings, and pointed to gaps in marketing, employer outreach, capitalization of the WIB's position in the region, data collection, and recognition of regional workforce needs as reasons for the underutilization of Finger Lakes Works' services in the region.

Contributing Staff

Joseph Stefko, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate

Kent Gardner, Ph.D., Director of Economic Analysis

Paul Priebe, Research Assistant

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Thanks also to the Planning Committee members for guidance on the survey effort and the facilitated sessions planning, and for developing specific actions to be taken on CGR recommendations.

Finally, all WIB Board members provided excellent input at the facilitated focus group sessions, and therefore all contributed greatly to the recommendations included in this report.

Staff Team

Joe Stefko conducted the labor market scan, participated in the facilitated sessions, and contributed to this final report.

Kent Gardner participated in the facilitated sessions and provided general guidance at numerous points in the project.

Paul Priebe completed data entry for the employer survey analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board (WIB) seeks to develop its regional workforce development strategic plan. The plan's primary goal is to meet the WIB's mission to **improve the economic well-being of job-seekers and employers in the region by aligning human potential with opportunities in the workplace** in the four-county region of Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates.

As a preliminary step in the planning process, the WIB engaged CGR to complete a labor market information scan, conduct a survey of employers, and facilitate focus group discussions with the full Board. The labor market information scan results are reported under separate cover. This document presents the results of the employer survey, the results of the facilitated focus group sessions, and presents recommendations for action for the FLWIB.

SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS' SKILL AND OCCUPATIONAL NEEDS

While some information gaps were identified through the labor market information scan, it was necessary to contact employers directly to gain a more thorough understanding of their skill and occupational needs. This process also provided a mechanism for the WIB to reach out to local businesses and remind them of the full Finger Lakes Works (FL Works) presence in the community. This section describes the survey methodology, findings, and selected best practices from workforce investment systems across the state.

Methodology

Employer addresses were gathered from local Department of Labor offices, Economic Development Agencies, Industrial Development Agencies, and County websites among the four counties served by the FLWIB. While firm size was not always available, FLWIB members worked with CGR to estimate firm size for all employers. All employers with 10 or more employees were included in the sample, a random sample of those with

between four and nine employees were included, and all employers with less than four employees were excluded.

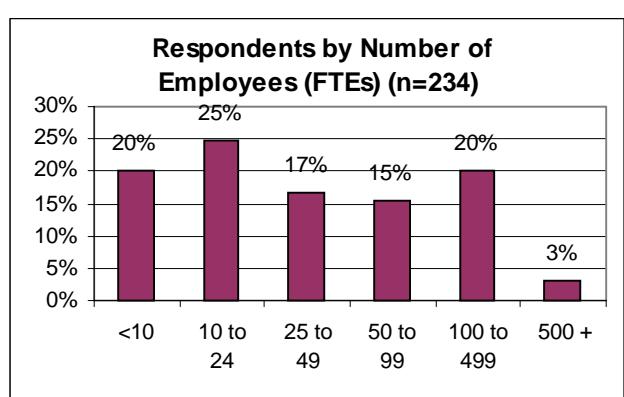
Surveys were mailed to 1,246 employers in the four-county area, with an overall response rate of 19.3%. Surveys mailed out and returned in the individual counties are shown in the table below.

Surveys Mailed and Return Rates, by County					See the Appendix for a copy of the survey instrument.
	Total	Ontario	Wayne	Yates	Seneca
Surveys Mailed	1,246	494	390	211	151
Surveys Returned	240	98	69	42	31
Response Rate	19.3%	19.8%	17.7%	19.9%	20.5%

Size of Employer

Most respondents indicated their firm size on the survey. To provide a sense of how well the respondents represent the entire employer community, the table below shows the total number of firms in the four-county area by firm size, along with the number of organizations that responded by size (full-time equivalents or FTEs).¹ Respondents to the survey represent approximately 3 percent of small firms with four to nine employees, 11.2% of medium firms with ten to 99 employees, and more than half (51.9%) of large firms with 100 or more employees. Overall, respondents represent an estimated 8.1% of all firms in the 4-county area.

*Source: Department of Labor

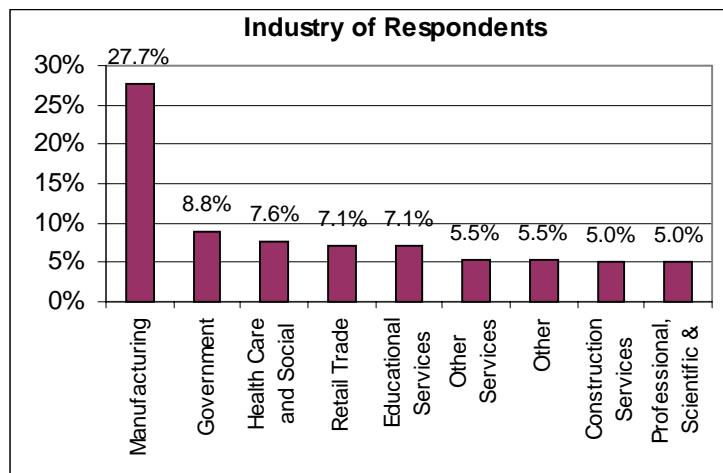


Respondents of all sizes responded to the survey. The chart at left shows that about 45% of respondents employ less than 25 employees, while 23% employ 100 or more.

¹ Survey respondents included some public (government, schools) respondents, in addition to business firms. Therefore, these comparisons are not directly comparable, but still provide a sense of representation.

Industry

Most respondents were from the manufacturing industry, which is expected given that industry's dominance in the four-county region.

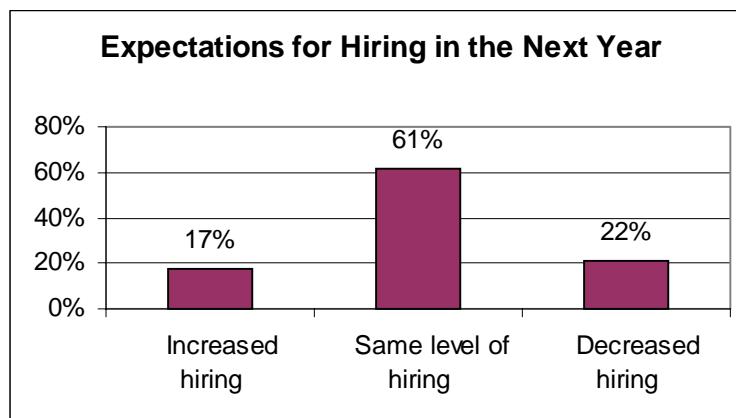


More than one-quarter of respondents (27.7%) were in manufacturing, while 8.8% were government entities, 7.6% were health care or social assistance organizations, and 7.1% each were retail trade or educational services.

Among respondents who provided information on full-time equivalents in January 2002 as well as at the time of the survey (October 2002), collectively they employed 21,660 FTEs in January, a number that increased slightly to 21,796 by October. Respondents had made 3,594 hires since January (indicating a turnover rate of approximately 16.5%), and had 857 current vacancies as of the October survey. Since this sample represents only about 19% of the surveys mailed, and since very small employers were excluded from the survey altogether, the true number of vacancies in the four-county region is surely much higher than the sample numbers indicate.

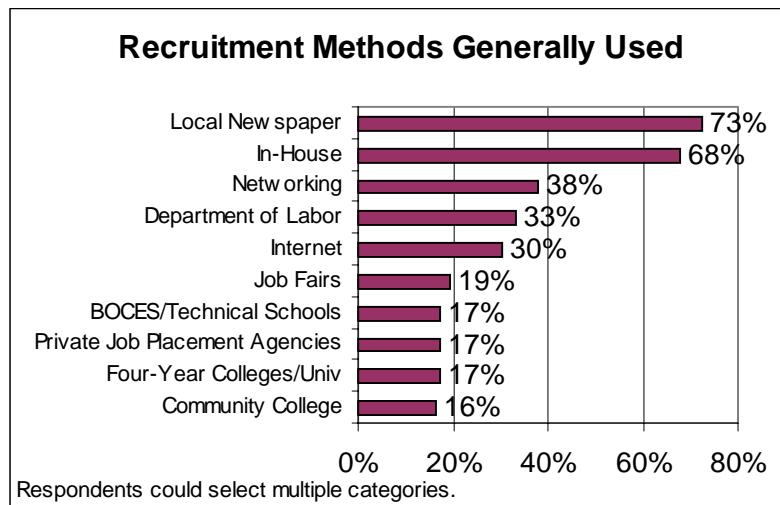
Hiring Expectations

Respondents expect to see the same or increased levels of hiring in the next year. Less than one-quarter (22%) of respondents expect to see a downturn in hiring.



Recruitment Methods

Employers rely heavily on the local newspaper and in-house recruiting to fill their vacancies.

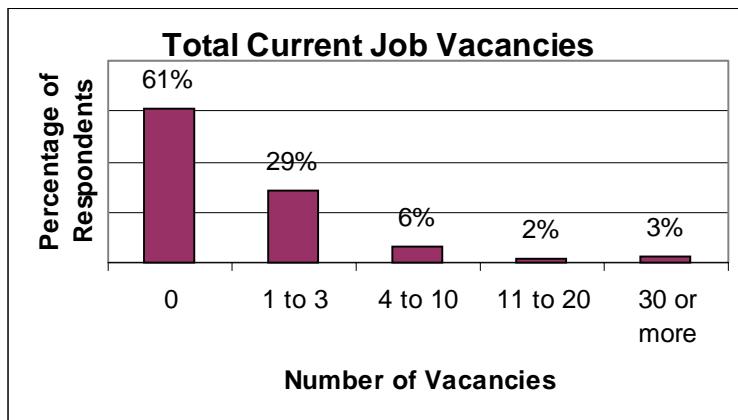


Networking, the Department of Labor and the Internet are also used by substantial proportions of respondents. The One-Stop was noted by only 5% of respondents as a recruitment method, however, since the One-Stop offices in some cases are located in the DOL office, respondents may have selected DOL instead of One-Stop.

Current Vacancies

Vacancies in Manufacturing, Health Care, Education, Construction, Retail Trade.

More than half of the respondents (61%) indicated that they currently have no job vacancies. However, 29% have one to three vacancies, and the remaining 11% have four or more. Of the 93 responding employers who indicated they have one or more current vacancies, 27 were in the manufacturing industry, 11 were in health care or social assistance, 9 were in education, 8 in construction, and 8 in retail trade.



Very Difficult to Fill Vacancies

Employers were asked about vacancies they traditionally find difficult to fill, even if they had no vacancies in these areas

currently. After listing the occupation that is difficult to fill, they were asked to indicate whether the position is slightly difficult, difficult, or very difficult. This section discusses very difficult to fill vacancies, but see the Appendix for a full list of difficult vacancies.

Health Care

The most prominent industry with “very difficult” to fill vacancies was health care. Twenty-three respondents had health care vacancies, including 11 employers with a need for nurses (56 current vacancies), three employers with difficulty filling dental assistant/hygienist positions, four employers with difficulty filling certified nurse assistant (CNA)/personal care assistant (PCA)/home health aide positions (43 current vacancies), and others.

**Best Practice:
Cattaraugus-Allegany
and Local College
Encourage Nursing
Careers.**

Cattaraugus-Allegany area health care agencies have partnered with Jamestown Community College to encourage health care and RN careers through a Health Care Worker and Registered Nurse Recruitment Project.

Skilled Trades

Skilled trades had a number of very difficult to fill occupations. Three employers had trouble filling welder positions, three had trouble filling electrician or electronic technician positions, and other employers had trouble filling fabricator, machinist, drafter, woodworker, skilled craftsperson and other similar occupations.

**Best Practice:
Herkimer, Madison
and Oneida Counties
Generate a Building
Trades Task Force.**

Herkimer, Madison and Oneida Counties’ workforce system developed a Building Trades Task Force to sustain an industry-feeding program for the local Community College. After a skills gap assessment in that community, the WIB recognized a need for skilled labor. A marketing program with schools and community organizations focused on enhancing the image of the trades, improving communication between BOCES and the Community College, recruiting PINS youth for training, and directing individuals who did not qualify for an apprenticeship into the Community College training program. Fifty-five students were recruited over a two semester period.

Technical Positions

Fifteen employers indicated that it is difficult to fill technical jobs, such as auto technician, control technician, installer, water/sewer operator, service technician, mixer, and others.

Education

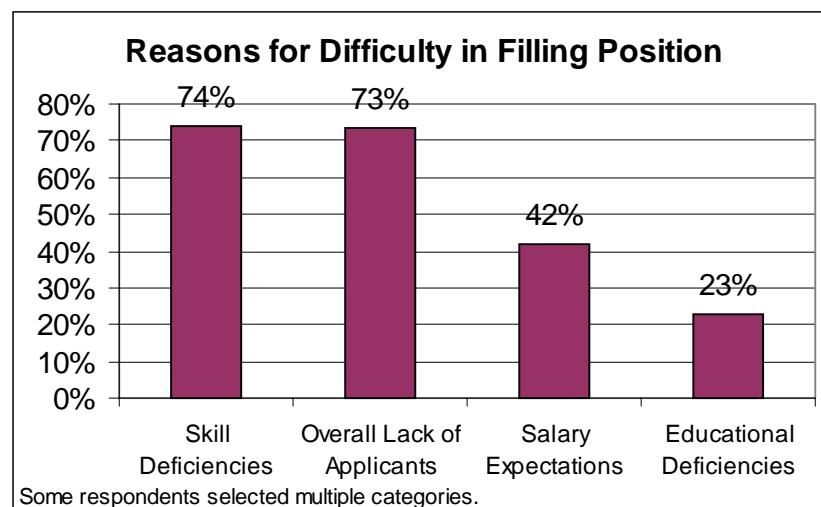
Finally, 13 employers indicated they have trouble filling vacancies in the education field. Three respondents have trouble filling special education vacancies, though only 2 current vacancies exist among these respondents. Two respondents find it very difficult to fill foreign language vacancies, two find it very difficult to fill science or math teacher vacancies, and others find it very difficult to fill speech therapist positions, home economics teacher positions, and others.

The Finger Lakes Works system could consider a role in helping individuals interested in teaching careers to identify alternative paths to certification. The WIB should work with BOCES to initiate a program that would help interested individuals to become state licensed to teach.

Reasons for Difficulty

When asked for the primary reason for the difficulty in filling positions, nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that skill deficiencies and an overall lack of applicants were the biggest problems.

**Skill Deficiencies
Make it Difficult to Fill Vacancies.**



Training Needs

Respondents were asked about their employees' level of need for training on a number of skills. They were asked to rank the need for training for each skill on a scale from "no need" to "extreme

need.” Skills most likely to be ranked “extreme” or “high” tended to be soft skills, such as workplace ethnics/honest/integrity, responsibility for tasks, working as a team member, and service attitude. Very few respondents indicated “no need” for training in these soft skill areas. More than one-half of respondents also indicated a high or extreme need for training for verbal skills (listening and speaking).

**In areas where you have trouble filling vacancies,
what is employees' level of need for training?**

	Total	No Need	Some Need	Moderate Need	High Need	Extreme Need
Problem solving/decision making	100%	6%	25%	30%	31%	7%
Workplace ethics, honesty, integrity	100%	13%	13%	15%	31%	27%
Responsibility for tasks	100%	8%	9%	25%	41%	17%
Verbal (listening and speaking)	100%	10%	14%	25%	39%	13%
Working as a team member	100%	8%	14%	23%	36%	19%
Management and supervisory	100%	29%	27%	24%	14%	6%
Computer	100%	28%	28%	22%	17%	6%
Technical	100%	25%	21%	22%	22%	10%
Writing	100%	24%	23%	35%	13%	6%
Reading	100%	24%	18%	31%	21%	5%
Basic math	100%	22%	18%	29%	22%	8%
Telephone skills	100%	30%	24%	23%	15%	9%
Service attitude	100%	11%	12%	21%	30%	26%
Organizational skills	100%	10%	15%	33%	32%	10%
Personal appearance	100%	19%	16%	33%	20%	12%
Social Skills	100%	13%	18%	31%	26%	13%

Training Methods

Respondents strongly prefer to use in-house training to train their workforce (97%), while private training academies (18%), consultants (18%), and BOCES/Technical Schools (14%) fall as distant seconds.

What Methods do you Typically Use to Train Your Workforce?

	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Total	239	100%
In-house	231	97%
Private training center/academy	43	18%
Consultants	42	18%
BOCES/Technical schools	33	14%
Community Colleges	32	13%
Four-year colleges/univ	25	10%
Other	23	10%
High School/GED	20	8%
Internet	18	8%
Union	8	3%
One Stop Center	4	2%

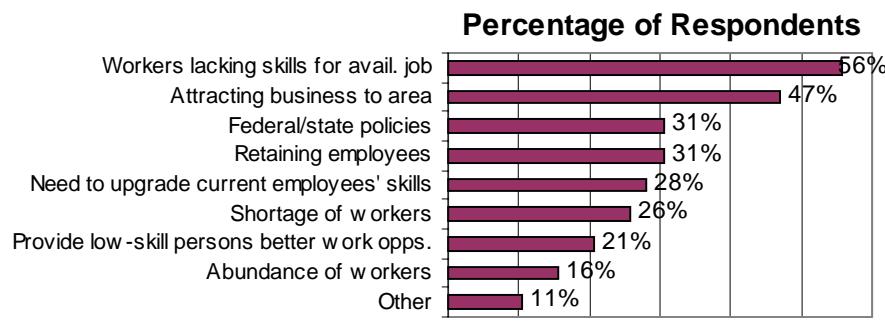
Note: Respondents could select multiple categories.

Top Workforce Development Issues

The top workforce development issue selected by respondents was “workers lacking skills for available jobs (56%).” Other concerns included attracting businesses to the area, federal and state policies, and retaining employees.

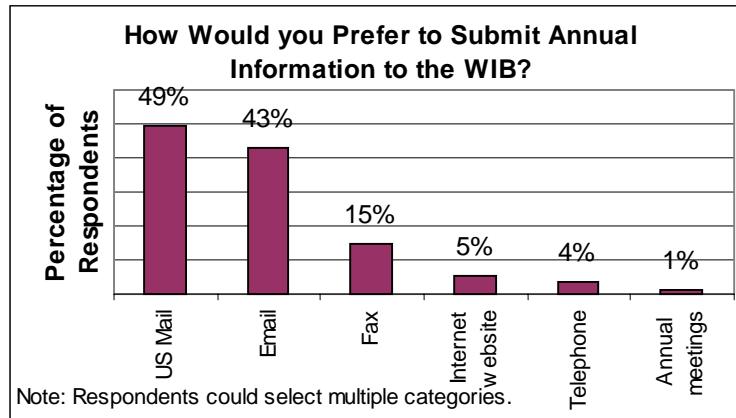
Concern About Worker Skills is Consistent Throughout Survey.

What Do You Consider to be the Top 3 Workforce Development Issues in Our Community?



Submission of Annual Information

Respondents strongly indicated they want to be able to submit annual information to the WIB either by U.S. Mail or by email. Any ongoing data collection system will need to consider mechanisms for both methods of submission.



Conclusion

Three primary concerns arise in the employer survey results, and drive the issues addressed in the facilitated WIB focus group sessions discussed in the next section.

- ❖ Employers utilize the newspaper and internal recruiting much more than the FL Works system.
- ❖ A number of vacancies exist, in many industrial sectors, and employers find some of them very difficult to fill due primarily to skill deficiencies.
- ❖ Employers have training needs and may be in need of funding to address these needs.

FACILITATED FOCUS GROUPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The labor market scan and the employer survey results helped the WIB planning committee to identify three important overarching “gaps” or problem-areas in need of further discussion through facilitated focus groups. The three gaps selected for further analysis and planning were:

1. A need for improved employer outreach and services;
2. A need to better match vacancies and job seekers; and

3. A need to set financial priorities for training and other needs.

In advance of the sessions, CGR identified the present state of each issue, and identified the desired future. Three break-out groups then worked to develop suggestions for the WIB and its committees on how to move from the present to the future desired state.

CGR's recommendations are presented at the end of each section, along with specific assignments to WIB Committees as made by the FL WIB Planning Committee. These assignments ensure that action will be taken in the coming months.

Improved Employer Outreach and Services

Current Gaps/Concerns

Present State: Many employers don't utilize FL Works resources.

Desired Future: All employers will see FL Works as the "place to go" to find qualified applicants with appropriate skill levels.

For a number of reasons, some employers are not aware of the Finger Lakes Works system, or are aware of it but choose not to use it. Most group participants agreed that the perception is that One-Stops serve the chronically unemployed and "unemployable" who lack even the most necessary skills. Employers, on the other hand, are typically looking to hire workers with demonstrated records of employment, responsibility and solid skill sets. From the view of most employers, those desired workers don't utilize the One-Stops. This *perception problem* exists with public workforce development systems nationwide, since this system historically served welfare clients and low-skilled workers. Generally speaking, a need to publicize the Finger Lakes Works system exists. Several communities throughout NYS have taken concrete steps to address the problem and are seeing success; some examples are highlighted in this section.

Negative perceptions, poor past experience

Some employers in the four county region have had bad experiences with FL Works services in the past. These experiences could have been recent, or in some cases years ago, but the perceptions remain.

Further, some employers, especially smaller employers, feel they lack the time and resources necessary to interact with and engage the services of Finger Lakes Works. Similarly, it is possible that

employers of all sizes have concerns about the amount of time it takes to navigate the perceived bureaucratic processes of the FL Works.

FL Works Staff and Services Must be On-Target

How FL Works Could Address Soft Skills Concerns

Some employers feel that the One-Stop experience is not consistent from location to location, and that One-Stops should be able to offer a consistent package of services. Staff should be high-quality and should understand an employer's needs, functions, and their industry. For example, employers are struggling with a lack of good soft skills from applicants and workers (ethics, customer service, etc.) and could use help from the One Stop in screening candidates for such skills, and training those who are not sufficient.

The group felt that the FL Works system could take steps to address the difficulties employers face with soft skills. Suggestions included the following:

- ❖ FL Works could begin to screen job seekers for soft skills, and if an applicant doesn't pass, send them to remedial training/help.
- ❖ FL Works could develop a "Work Values 101" program that could be customized for individual employers. The program could be provided in the One-Stops or at employer locations or both.
- ❖ FL Works could help job seekers to develop a profile of themselves, help them understand their role in the workplace, educate workers about what it's like to work for a certain type of employer or industry (12-hour shifts, punching a time clock, other corporate culture issues).
- ❖ FL Works could utilize current "Career Clubs" in Ontario and Seneca counties to address soft skills issues; should consider expanding Career Clubs to other counties.

More discussion on soft skills is included in the Financial Priorities section. See Recommendation 15.

Best Practice: Broome-Tioga Takes on Soft Skills Training

The Broome-Tioga workforce investment system responded to the demands of business to develop a Regional Soft Skills Program. The program is in a testing phase with TANF recipients and strives to be credentialed by Spring 2003.

What Can FL Works Do for Employers? Participants felt that the FL Works system needs to help employers understand what the system can do for them. The group identified the following objectives.

- ❖ Identify current satisfied employer customers, and gather testimonials to use in brochures and other marketing materials.
- ❖ Identify unsatisfied customers, gain a sense of what types of bad experiences employers have had and why.
- ❖ Demonstrate to employers and potential customers that the FL Works staff understands various industries, employer needs, and vacancies.
- ❖ Get the word out to employers about other non-placement services offered by FL Works, such as training, help with development of employee handbooks, etc. Several employers in this breakout group were unaware of the range of services available to them through FL Works.
- ❖ FL Works staff need to be of highest quality—currently there is variation in quality of staff.
- ❖ Demonstrate to employers that the FL Works system can cut down on the bureaucracy and the time it takes to navigate the process.
- ❖ Work to bring all four counties into a consistent set of services and approaches, and develop consistent marketing materials, while still allowing each county to tailor its services.
- ❖ Ensure that Economic Development in all counties works in partnership with FL Works.

Recommendations for Next Steps

The following recommendations are from the focus group discussions as well as CGR's analysis of all components of this project. The FLWIB Planning Committee provided a response/assignment/call to action for each recommendation below.

1. Recommendation: Ensure that WIB board members have a full orientation to the FL Works system.

The orientation should include a description of all services provided by the FL Works system to all clients (employers, job-seekers, and others), and should include an on-site visit to a One-

Stop center. Not all persons in this break-out focus group had been to a One-Stop, and that makes it difficult for them to serve as true spokespeople for these programs. The Governance and Membership committee is likely best for this task.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Governance and Membership for incorporation into new member orientation, and ensure all current members schedule an appointment with closest One-Stop site.

2. Recommendation: Develop a “package” of services that is clear and understandable to employers.

Employers are not aware of the full spectrum of services offered through FL Works. And with inconsistent services offered at the various One-Stop sites, it is not surprising that employers do not perceive a single package of services. Further, employers desire a single-point-of-entry to the system of services. Employers should not have to make multiple phone calls to receive different types of FL Works services.

Any advertisement strategy should note that the DOL is the One-Stop in the region. People tend not to realize that and, as a result, the group questioned the validity of the employer survey results showing 33 percent of employers used DOL but only 3 percent used the One-Stops.

The Fulton-Montgomery-Schoharie local workforce investment system developed a Business Services Consortium to help coordinate the array of services offered by workforce development partners to area businesses. Also, a collaborative marketing package is under development with a goal of increasing market penetration.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Marketing Committee and Business Services Team to develop FL Works Folder with appropriate materials. Should be approved by Marketing Committee prior to implementation to assure the materials meet employer needs. Use Finger Lakes Works with Workforce New York logo on all materials.



Best Practice: Fulton-Montgomery-Schoharie Works
Towards a Collaborative Marketing Package and a Coordinated Array of Services.

Best Practice: Broome-Tioga System-Wide Marketing Materials.

The Broome-Tioga Workforce Development System developed system-wide outreach and marketing materials. The WDS developed a shared system business folder with preprinted sheets with areas of interest to employers, hiring incentive programs, a job order form, contacts, and marketing tools. The folder is handed out at job fairs and other events attended by employers.

3. Recommendation: Develop a Task Force for Employer Outreach.

The WIB/FLW should develop a special Task Force with individuals representing different industries. Task Force representatives will visit employers as “Agents of the WIB” to meet with employers, gather good/bad experience stories, learn about industries/vacancies, and serve as a marketing call as well.

This outreach could include a combination of one-on-one visits between Task Force members and employers, along with a bi-monthly breakfast with a different industry represented at each breakfast. Breakfasts could be structured like focus groups, in which the WIB can both educate attendees on current services, and also co-opt them as future customers. The WIB should focus on those industries that employ the most people in the four counties, and start with larger organizations.

Best Practice: Business Outreach in the GLOW Region.

The GLOW (Genesee, Livingston, Ontario, Wyoming) workforce investment system created a Business Marketing Team to help coordinate and promote business services. The Team’s outreach resulted in 437 business visits in 2001.

Best Practice: Tompkins Workforce NY Business Response Team and Business Solutions Team.

Tompkins Workforce New York developed a Business Response Team (BRT) to work with CEOs, and to refer selected companies to the Business Solutions Team (BST). The Business Solutions Team works with human resources managers on workforce issues such as recruitment, hiring, retention, training, and downsizing. Tompkins Workforce NY has a 23% market penetration rate, and they believe that employers’ perception of the workforce investment system has improved.

Best Practice: Broome-Tioga Business Services Team.

The Broome-Tioga Business Services Team aims to improve the quality and quantity of workforce services to businesses in the two counties. As part of their objective, the Team uses the One-Stop Operating System (OSOS) as the main database to collect and analyze business information. In 2001, the Team identified 202 more new employer registrations than in 2000, 535 new business visits, and 3,537 new job orders.

Planning Committee Response: Empower the current Business Services Team, coordinated by WIB staff, to develop this task force, and include WIB business members. Benchmark with the Best Practices noted.

4. Recommendation: Develop a “Speaker’s Bureau.”

FLW should engage WIB members to speak at service agency meetings, schools, etc. about FL Works to get the word out about the FLW system, to begin to change perceptions, and to educate. The Board is diverse in its membership, and a Speaker’s Bureau could capitalize on this diversity.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Marketing Committee for follow up as this is in the original plan and charge to the committee. Engage WIB members to participate.

5. Recommendation: Utilize and publicize a unified FL Works website.

The Finger Lakes Workforce Investment website provides some information about the system, including the location of individual One-Stops, and has selected information about training and education. However, it is not a comprehensive location for a prospective client, either an employer or job-seeker, to gather all the information they likely seek. The Ulster County workforce investment system has developed a website that serves as a major source of workforce development information for employers and job-seekers. Among other things, it provides a database of job-seekers by occupation, education, and desired salary. It also provides a searchable database of all training and course offerings in the area. (<http://www.workforcenewyork.org/ulster>).

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Marketing Committee for appropriate review and follow up. May have

Best Practice: Ulster County Workforce Investment System Website.

to commit additional funding for web developer and implementation.

6. Recommendation: Define and target specific audiences of interest.

First and foremost, the WIB and FL Works serve local employers and job seekers. But other secondary target audiences exist, such as organizations that serve potential job seekers. The WIB and FL Works should develop marketing strategies that target a number of audiences, including:

- Employers;
- Recruiters;
- Job seekers;
- Economic Development Agencies;
- Colleges/ High School Superintendents, Career Counselors; and
- Service clubs/Chambers of Commerce.

Other stakeholders are listed in the Finger Lakes Workforce Development Strategic Plan document.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Marketing Committee and One Stop Consortium to develop a written marketing plan with specific timelines and assignments.

7. Recommendation: Plan for and be prepared for growth.

As changes in marketing and increases in employer outreach are considered, the WIB and FL Works should also be wary not to grow so fast as to outstrip capacity. If employers begin to knock at the door, and can't be served adequately, all of the outreach and public relations and marketing could be for naught! Staff and the board should consider ongoing staffing constraints (e.g., county hiring freezes, etc.) that could impact the system's ability to absorb increased inquiries.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Performance and Evaluation committee to develop specific requirements for staffing capabilities that must be met to achieve Board goals and certification. Enlist more assistance from partner

agencies to provide services if host agency (county, state) cannot meet expectations. WIB may need to consider alternative options for delivery of service.

Matching Vacancies and Job-Seekers

Present State: Vacancies exist, job seekers exist, but we don't know how well the current system matches the two.

Desired Future: A well-functioning system that matches vacancies to job-seekers quickly and successfully.

This group agreed that the One Stop's role is a difficult one, given the sheer diversity of background, skill and training among customers. However, these challenges make collection and usage of reliable, comprehensive data all the more important. The group agreed that the WIB needs to be greatly attentive to a) who is collecting data on job seekers and vacancies and b) what is being done with those data.

Current Data Collection

The primary source of data collection used by the One-Stops is "OSOS," the One-Stop Operating System. Developed by America's Job Bank under a grant from the US Department of Labor, OSOS produces all of the reports required by the federal DOL and is fully integrated with the Workforce Investment Network System (WINS). The system tracks job seeker characteristics upon intake at the One-Stops, noting titles, qualifications and skill/training background information in a job seeker's file. One drawback of this system is its focus on *individuals*, though most agreed that the integrated nature of the network (connecting the One-Stops with the NY and America's Job Banks) was a distinct advantage.

Current Data Gaps

Lack of reports on the placement process itself, particularly reports on placements that failed, is one current data gap. Such information would provide valuable feedback to the One-Stops and direct process improvements that would benefit job seekers and employers alike.

Participants see a "lack of shared information among partners" in the process. While data are available in several forms, databases are not linked and accessible to everyone.

Existing vacancies are going unfilled. At present, the One-Stops have neither a) a comprehensive listing of vacancies nor b) an

inventory of vacancies going unfilled. Particularly where there are unfilled vacancies (*e.g.* a need for 400 individuals with nursing skills, when only 200 in the labor market have those skills), there are labor market gaps that FL Works could be working to fill. Without information on these gaps, however, that need is difficult to identify and respond to.

Need for Screening of Candidates

Several participants mentioned that the use of newspapers and for-fee temporary placement agencies yields better candidates than the One-Stops can. It was repeatedly noted that the One-Stops “match” job seekers to vacancies, whereas employers are more interested in a “screening” of potential workers. As a result, employers tend to keep their hiring practices in-house (*i.e.* advertise vacancies in the newspapers) or pay temp agencies to handle screening and reduce employer cost (*i.e.* eliminate concerns about retaining poor workers long-term or lawsuits in the wake of terminating poor employees hired by in-house methods).

If the One-Stops made a greater commitment to screening job seekers, it was agreed, employers would have fewer reservations about utilizing them for placement purposes. While a commitment to screening applicants through the One-Stops would require more money, some in the group believed that employers would be willing to fund part of this task – particularly those firms already paying temp agencies to perform the same task.

Regarding the perceived gap between what the One-Stops do (matching) and what employers actually want (screening), some questioned the level of communication between the One-Stops and employers in the region, especially those firms that have vacancies. Are employers telling the One-Stops what they want in terms of screening? Similarly, are the One-Stops reaching out to employers to determine how their processes conform to producing the type of worker employers are looking to hire? Only once this communication gap between One-Stops and employers is bridged can the processes of “matching” and “screening” be brought into better alignment.

Recommendations for Next Steps

Participants generated specific recommendations the Finger Lakes Works partners can use to attain the objective of improved matching of vacancies to job seekers. The Performance and

Evaluation Committee, or perhaps an ad-hoc committee might be the best lead for recommendations in this section.

8. Recommendation: Begin With Board Members.

The group agreed that WIB members should be encouraged to start listing their vacancies with the One-Stops.

Planning Committee Response: Within three months, all WIB members will visit a One-Stop center and utilize their respective services and provide feedback to the Center manager and the WIB staff.

9. Recommendation: Encourage employers to identify the types of vacancies One-Stops are most likely to be helpful with, and work with employers to develop a working model for screening and matching.

The WIB should actively encourage employers to identify the types of vacancies for which the One-Stops can help screen and match. In Oswego County, the Career Connection Center in Fulton has been assisting a local employer, Huhtamaki with their hiring process by prescreening resumes based on the company's qualifications, and testing and interviewing applicants.

**Best Practice:
Successful Screening
by Workforce
Investment System in
Oswego and
Tompkins Counties.**

Tompkins County local workforce investment system (Workforce NY of Tompkins County) worked with Emerson Power Transmission to conduct initial evaluations of applications as well as preliminary interviews. The employer indicated that they were "overwhelmed with how well qualified the workers being sent to [them] were." Emerson Power Transmission felt that the Workforce NY office worked quickly and efficiently.

Planning Committee Response: See #8 and also enlist support of satisfied employer users to develop a better screening model. One-Stops should determine levels of screening and services that can be offered. Track specific outcomes.

10. Recommendation: Hold focus group with employers to address the screening issue.

The WIB needs to gather information from employers on what they would like to see in a prospective employee screening process. Then necessary changes to the One-Stops' current practices can be made. Focus groups with employers, led by the One-Stops, would be an effective way to accomplish this.

Planning Committee Response. See #8 & 9. Coordinated by WIB staff and One-Stop Consortium.

11. Recommendation: Improve the integration of existing databases.

An existing gap in the integration of such databases involves the Job Bank networks. **Both** Job seekers and **employers** can enter their own information on background ,career objectives **as well as job leads** into either the NY Job Bank or America's Job Bank. If they enter it into the NY Job Bank, their information is automatically copied into America's Job Bank. However, those who enter their information via America's Job Bank do not have their information copied into the NY Job Bank.

Planning Committee Response: Continue to work with NYS Task Force, NYSDOL and refer to Marketing to get the word out. Planning Committee may have a role in future development.

12. Recommendation: Make a greater effort to identify job vacancies.

Participants pointed out that the employer survey identified 857 job openings among respondents *only* – translating into several thousand for the entire region, most likely. Still, the DOL and One-Stops most likely don't have those vacancies in their databases and have no way to gauge what their skill requirements are.

Planning Committee Response: Business Services and Account Rep staff need to continually market this service and listen to the needs of employers. Follow up is key.

**Best Practice: DOL
Following Up With
Employers in All 4
Counties With Current
Vacancies.**

The state DOL office serving Wayne County asked CGR for (and received) a list of employers in all counties with contact information who indicated they have current vacancies. The DOL has contacted these employers to attempt to fill their vacancies, and follow up continues.

13. Recommendation: Follow-Up With Employer Customers.

The One-Stops should begin to obtain feedback from employers who have hired through the One-Stop, to assess employer satisfaction with workers and One-Stop processes. The most recent Finger Lakes Works newsletter (December 2002) has almost no data collected on employer satisfaction for the Geneva and Ontario Centers, or for the Wayne County Newark or Lyons Offices. Some data were presented for Seneca County, but the report does not indicate the number of responses.

**Best Practice:
Cattaraugus-Allegany
WIB Survey Business
Representatives When
They Register for
Services.**

The Cattaraugus-Allegany WIB obtains input from businesses in two ways. Business representatives complete a survey when they register for Cattaraugus-Allegany WIB Business Services, and business customers are asked to provide continuous feedback on the quality of services they have received. The objective is for the WIB to continuously obtain information on occupational skills shortages and services that need to be addressed. The WIB found that businesses that receive direct WIB services remain engaged in an ongoing relationship, but those who do not tend to disengage.

**Best Practice: Oswego
County Customer
Comment Cards.**

The Oswego County workforce investment system has customer comment cards located at each center. Cards are collected and data are analyzed monthly. Each site receives a monthly report and uses the information for continuous improvement.

Planning Committee Response: One Stop staff should distribute survey upon completion of Business Service. Protocol developed by consortium should be followed by all staff. Current survey to be reviewed to address occupational skill shortages and services that need to be addressed. Action reported to Performance and Evaluation Committee.

14. Recommendation: Challenge bureaucratic practices.

It was agreed that in order for the One-Stops to compete with other methods of sourcing workers, its processes must have maximum efficiency and quick response.

Setting Financial Priorities

Present State: No prioritization for use of available funding resources.

Desired Future: Clear set of priorities for how to use funding, e.g., for employed vs. unemployed, types of training to be funded, level of intensity of service provided to various employers, work first vs. training first, etc.

Participants generated specific recommendations the Finger Lakes Works partners can use to move towards a more explicit set of financial priorities and actions. The Finance and Budget committee is likely the best lead for many of the recommendations in this section.

Addressing Soft Skills

Recognizing that the employer survey revealed significant interest in an increasing focus on “soft skills” (e.g. work readiness, ethics, etc), the group discussed the role of the WIB in promoting work readiness among the FL workforce through existing and new programs.

15. Recommendation: The WIB board should use its authority and influence to improve the scope and effectiveness of existing programs that address soft skills and others, e.g. encouraging secondary schools to follow the lead of Marcus Whitman.

A number of local programs already exist and are funded, including the following.

- FLCC Business Institute program leading to designation as a “certified production employee.” Same approach has been applied to sectors other than manufacturing, such as hospitality and office.
- Marcus Whitman HS has a program in workforce readiness.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Youth Council, Marketing and Consortium for follow up.

One Stop staff need to promote the existing Work Values 101 program to employers and job seekers. One Stops need to

schedule this workshop in their monthly schedule and be available for customizing it for employers on site. If staffing prohibits this, the WIB needs to engage the services of partner agencies to provide.

A Certification Approach to Training

16. Recommendation: Promote awareness of “certification” track programs.

The quality assurance characteristics of a “certification” track are desirable, but firms are unaware of the programs. Until firms recognize the value of “certified production/hospitality/etc employee” designation, workers won’t seek the training. The WIB board should promote awareness of these designations among business firms in the region.

Planning Committee Response: Refer to Marketing for awareness campaign and One Stop consortium for support and recruitment of potential workers. Coordinate with training partners for implementation.

17. Recommendation: Encourage programs to use certification approach.

Programs receiving funding over which the WIB exercises some stewardship should be strongly encouraged to use a certification approach, building on models in development at the state and national levels.

Planning Committee Response: See #16 with emphasis on Account Reps for marketing the availability of the program(s).

18. Recommendation: Encourage standard approach to work readiness at the state level.

In addition to increasing the use of the certification approach, the WIB should encourage the State WIB Board to move toward a standardized, disciplined approach to work readiness training.

Planning Committee Response: TBD

Grant Writing Assistance

Board members discussed the high administrative cost of applying for DOL and federal workforce development funding. Only large firms seeking substantial sums would be able to absorb the administrative cost burden of seeking these funds.

19. Recommendation: The WIB should explore providing grant writing support for multiple firms (perhaps to be supported by an administrative fee).

20. Recommendation: The WIB should explore its ability to seek grant funds and serve as a conduit to FL firms in need of training dollars.

21. Recommendation: The WIB should approach DOL and encourage that the current application process be dramatically streamlined.

The WIB also recognizes that its ability to influence applications developed by private firms is limited (3 questions only) and that a more effective oversight role is probably desirable.

Planning Committee Response: For 19, 20, 21—refer to Executive and Finance and Budget Committee for policy development. These are critical areas that need to be addressed to meet employer needs.

Discretionary Training Funds

The WIB currently has no explicit policy for ranking discretionary training funds. Funds can be used for three purposes:

1. To congregate training organized by the WIB for participation by multiple firms,
2. For employer-initiated training at employer sites, or
3. For individual worker training through approved training providers.

As the WIB does not currently sponsor congregate training or market firm-initiated training, all funds flow to individual worker training.

Individual Worker Training

Individual worker training dollars are constrained only two ways: (1) Each individual worker is limited to a total of \$3,000, and (2) training must be provided by approved training programs offering training on the demand occupations list. This is not a strategic use of funds, as low skill, low cost training and high skill, high cost training are treated equally. A training course in some aspect of cosmetology, for example, could be fully paid while a worker enrolling in a degree program at FLCC would receive only a small fraction of the total cost. While no firm recommendations were reached, participants agreed to explore the following alternatives:

22. Recommendation: Explore variable limits on funding for different types of Individual Worker Training.

The individual training allowance might be variable, depending on the nature of the training. Higher skill training would have a higher limit and lower skill training would have a lower limit. HEGIS-like classifications might be used to make these distinctions.

Planning Committee Response: Review existing cap and policy and develop tiered/targeted approach. Review policy quarterly for relationship to demand occupations list.

23. Recommendation: Consider a cost share with trainee.

The concept of a cost share with the person receiving training was favorably received by group participants. The individual training allowance limit might be augmented with a provision stating that public support would pay for no more than 25% or 50% of the total cost.

Planning Committee Response: Planning Committee supports this and recommends it be implemented into the revised policy.

24. Recommendation: Evaluate the demand occupations list—too broad currently?

Consider a HEGIS-like system. Alternatively, the demand occupations list might be constrained by applying the self-sufficiency level of \$16/hour. Finally, performance standards, such as pre-training versus post-training earnings might be applied to the selection of demand occupations.

Planning Committee Response: WIB staff, Labor Market Analyst and Planning Committee to review and recommend revised list.

Incumbent Worker Training

The discussion of improving incumbent worker training ranged widely. Again, it was agreed that discretionary WIB dollars should be directed toward “hard” skills and that improved training in the area of soft skills could come from a more effective use of programs already in place and funded.

25. Recommendation: The WIB board should seek to expand the total quantity of training dollars through aggressive grantsmanship.

Planning Committee Response: Reinstate incumbent worker training funds and policy and hire grant writer.

There was general agreement that criteria to allocate funding dollars both within the three categories (congregate training, employer-initiated training and individual worker training) and across the categories should be a high priority for the WIB board.

One participant cautioned against removing all support for workers seeking entry-level positions as this is a major component of welfare-to-work initiatives. The general sentiment of participants appeared to favor emphasis of higher level skills, however.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR FINGER LAKES WORKS

The labor market scan, employer survey, and focus groups with the Workforce Investment Board produced a series of findings central to the current and long-term mission of Finger Lakes Works.

The labor market scan revealed that unemployment remains relatively low in the region, and that there exists an ample workforce whose qualifications conform well to the labor market's economic base. At the same time, it found that there remain gaps in data central to the WIB's mission. The employer survey verified that employment opportunities exist in the region, but revealed that Finger Lakes Works is positioned as a secondary or tertiary resource in identifying qualified job candidates and sourcing specifically-skilled workers. The focus groups synergized these findings, and pointed to gaps in data gathering, employer outreach, and unrealized opportunities as major reasons for the underutilization of Finger Lakes Works' services in the region.

Building on these findings, this section outlines a series of strategic priorities designed to maximize Finger Lakes Works' effectiveness at linking job seekers with employers.

Marketing More Effectively to Confront the “Perception Problem”

Perhaps the most pointed challenge faced by the WIB in the short term is dealing with the “perception problem.” Focus groups indicated that most employers in the region view the One-Stops as working to place “the unemployable,” or those with only the most minimal skills. At the same time, One-Stops also struggle with the image that their services are not available to under-employed or displaced, but otherwise skilled, workers.

To counter both employers’ and potential job seekers’ misperceptions about the WIB and One-Stops, the WIB must outline a strategy to market itself more effectively. Working with employers to develop a package of services that they require (particularly regarding screening of job seekers) is a first step. Producing an Internet website that unifies all of the services and data provided by the WIB and its One-Stops is another. Marketing its services to targeted audiences, especially displaced job seekers and industries that have particularly time-sensitive needs, is another.

Establishing a Plan for Proactive Employer Outreach

One of the most consistent recommendations in the focus groups was the need to establish a strategy of proactively reaching out to employers in the region. A variety of methods were proposed (*e.g.* task force; speaker’s bureau; focus groups; and “orienting” employers to Finger Lakes Works’ services), all with the primary objective of increasing employers’ awareness of the WIB and providing a conduit for feedback on how effectively the One-Stops are performing.

The advantages of establishing formal communication with employers in the region are numerous, and each of them significant to the WIB and its mission. At the front end of the process, employers can offer assistance on refining intake processes to classify skill sets; provide sufficient screening mechanisms for job seekers; and identify “niche” vacancy types that One-Stops can most effectively work to fill.

At the back end, employers can provide valuable feedback on the performance of One-Stops that the WIB can use as part of its

commitment to continuous improvement. The long-term result will be the development of a package of services that employers demand, understand, and are increasingly willing to use in filling vacancies.

Capitalizing on the WIB's Position as the Region's Workforce Development Leader

The WIB represents a leadership position regarding the quality and responsiveness of the region's labor market, and in that role it can leverage a series of important issues.

In a general sense, the WIB should use its leadership position to improve the scope and focus of existing programs in the community. More than any other organization, it represents the center of workforce development efforts in the four-county region. In that role, and building on issues raised in the focus groups, there are a number of specific actions it can encourage and/or establish, including:

- ❖ Streamlining the current intake and placement processes through the region's One-Stops and DOL;
- ❖ Creating a standard approach for screening work readiness at the regional (and state) level;
- ❖ Promoting awareness and use of certification training programs to meet specific needs of employers in the region;
- ❖ Implementing an aggressive search for grant monies to support workplace and vocational skills training for job seekers and incumbent workers in the region; and
- ❖ Developing a long-term strategic plan for One-Stops in the region that recognizes the impacts economic and demographic changes will have on its workforce.

Revising Information Collection Processes

The labor market information scan and the board focus groups both identified a need to reevaluate the manner in which Finger Lakes Works and the One-Stops collect information, as well as the type(s) of data most important to its mission.

First, readily accessible public information on the labor market provides the WIB with a relatively clear picture of the region's economy and workforce. Still, the age of some data; absence of metropolitan-level figures for the four-county region; and lack of detail on some industry and workforce data of particular interest to Finger Lakes Works suggests room for improvement. The WIB

should consider what market data is of particular importance to its mission (*e.g.* labor force skills data by industry; workforce growth patterns by industry) and work to develop protocols for collecting those data on a regular basis. By virtue of its reputation and developing relationships with firms in the region, the WIB could potentially bridge data gaps that exist in Census or Labor Department information.

At the same time, the WIB should revisit the processes for collection of information on current job vacancies *and* individuals seeking employment. The focus groups identified a need to coordinate – and make more comprehensive – the identification of job vacancies in the region. Current databases of vacancies and job seekers are not necessarily linked in a manner that facilitates matching of workers in the most effective and efficient way possible. The WIB should strive for a central clearinghouse that links job openings to job seekers region-wide, and work to bridge existing gaps in the multiple databases presently used (*e.g.* NY Job Bank, America's Job Bank, OSOS).

Assessing Conformance of the WIB's Objectives to Regional Workforce Needs

Revealed in the focus groups – and supported by the employer survey – was the idea that the WIB should assess how its focus conforms to the needs of the regional labor market.

“Soft skills” dominate what employers say are the most lacking skills in the current workforce. Problem solving, responsibility and workplace ethics are in greatest demand among those vacancies that are most difficult to fill. Similarly, skill deficiencies were cited significantly more often than educational deficiencies as the reason for difficulty in filling existing vacancies. The implication is important for the WIB – basic workplace skills are at least as important of a need as vocational capabilities in the region's current labor market. The focus of training efforts should be reconsidered in light of this finding.

Similarly, Finger Lakes Works needs to be more attentive to its screening models in order to suit employer needs. The focus groups identified employer dissatisfaction with screening practices as one of the major reasons (next to rapidity of response) for the underutilization of One-Stops. Many employers view the One-Stops' approach as favoring “matching” of workers to vacancies, rather than “screening” of workers for placement. Employers will

be less likely to patronize One-Stops if they lack confidence in their ability to screen and evaluate prospective workers effectively. The WIB should confront this concern directly with employers in the region – both those who do *and* do not currently use One-Stops to fill vacancies. Instilling confidence among employers in the processes used at the One-Stops is a first step to increasing their reliance on Finger Lakes Works for sourcing workers and filling vacancies.

APPENDIX