Fragmentation in Workforce Development and Efforts to Coordinate Regional Workforce Development Systems:

A Case Study of Challenges in Atlanta and Models for Regional Cooperation from across the Country

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Abstract: The importance of human capital in regional economic competitiveness is increasingly apparent. However, structural changes, fragmentation, the instability of funding, and other factors have led to challenges for workforce development providers as well as workforce development systems. This fragmentation has created a less coherent and coordinated workforce development system. Often, metropolitan areas have many programs and policies in place to train workers for jobs that require sub-baccalaureate credentials or skills. The lack of coordination in local training systems may limit the information available to job and training seekers, create duplication of services among providers, and discourage outcome measurement and program evaluation.

This paper examines many of these trends and discusses the current state of the workforce development system in the United States by using the Atlanta metropolitan area as a case study. A number of commissioned studies focused on the Atlanta metropolitan area's workforce development system are summarized as local examples of these trends, including recommendations for improving regional collaboration. Finally, lessons learned from successful regional workforce development models in Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Detroit provide guidance for forging a successful strategy for regional workforce development. These regional collaboratives suggest a way to improve information, programming, and alignment in local job training ecosystems.

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Human capital is a central part of a metropolitan economy's competitiveness in the 21st century. While human capital is often measured in terms of educational credentials, there are a number of jobs that require significant training and skill but not a four-year educational credential. Many of these types of jobs are served through the workforce development system, community college system, or locally run organizations or corporations that provide training for middle-skilled jobs. A growing number of private for-profit colleges provide career education to address skills gaps in the workforce. Their presence has led to the emergence of a workforce development "marketplace," which competes for one dominant funding source: more than $130.7 billion in student aid available under Title IV of the Higher Education Act (McCarthy, 2014). Title IV of the Higher Education Act provides student loans and Pell Grants to students. While the federal government's funding systems remain a key source of resources for workforce development programming, increasingly, the training offerings, educational programs, and overall job training systems are more fragmented than in the past. This fragmentation is the result of the entry of new players in the job training system, declining federal funding, and an increasingly diverse number of career-based training programs at traditional job training institutions like community colleges. These changes have made it difficult to coordinate broad efforts in workforce development and to align providers with local economic development initiatives and business needs in many metropolitan labor markets.

A number of regional coordinating initiatives have worked to create better alignment among workforce development providers and have shown promise. This paper starts by reviewing the literature on the importance of career-focused education and trends in the workforce development system. It then profiles many of the challenges that local communities face in creating a well-coordinated and aligned regional workforce development system from the perspective of a case study on the Atlanta metropolitan area. It also profiles several more mature efforts in regional workforce development coordination as examples of programs that can help to create efficient local workforce development systems.

The literature

More than ever, the quality of human capital and skills in the labor force plays a role in the economic growth, quality of life, and future prospects of communities and the nation (Glaeser and Saiz, 2003; Glaeser, 2005). Skills and educational attainment are becoming a greater determinant of economic growth in local economies; in a labor market, skill begets further skill (Berry and Glaeser, 2005; Mathur, 1999) and higher educational attainment drives metropolitan economic growth (Gottlieb and Fogarty, 2003). While skills and educational attainment are central to local economic competitiveness, there is little focus on skill development and job training for workers and positions that do not require a college degree. This type of job training is typically conducted at community colleges, through publicly funded training programs that are part of the workforce development system,[1] or through programs not attached to publicly funded education or labor efforts, which instead may be driven by philanthropy, labor, or public-private partnerships. This broad array of actors in job training often leaves a relatively

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[1] In this paper, the public workforce system should be read as the federally funded workforce development programs that come from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 and its predecessors, the Workforce Innovation Act of 1999, the Job Training and Partnership Act, and the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act.

scattered and uncoordinated local job training system. These uncoordinated efforts lead to inefficiencies, duplicative programs, and create a less than optimal training system.

These types of inefficiencies can be observed in many metropolitan regions, including Atlanta. What follows is an overview of the challenges and opportunities that exist with respect to workforce development systems in general, with a closer examination of findings from the Atlanta region.

The ascendance of human capital in 21st-century economic development

Human capital, including specialized skills and stocks of highly trained and educated workers, are increasingly a central part of metropolitan and regional economic competitiveness (Markusen, 2008). While physical capital and traditional factors of production, such as land and other natural resources, were once the central factors of a business's decision to locate in one community or another, over the past three decades, appropriately skilled labor has become a central determinant of a local economy's ability to attract businesses and grow (Gottlieb and Fogarty, 2003).

The economic development community is keenly aware of the increasingly important role that the quality of the labor market plays in developing and growing a local economy. Numerous professional and research reports have identified the importance of a skilled labor force from the economic development intermediary perspective (Brown and Parkins, 2014), from the business perspective (HR Policy Association, 2011), and from the governmental perspective (Reich, 1991; Clarke and Gaile, 1998; Bipartisan Policy Center, 2014). While there has been a growing appreciation for the importance of workforce development programming and human capital in local economic competitiveness, connections between economic development and workforce development are still being formed in many communities. These connections can improve programming for workforce development. Programs that have created strong connections to business have proven effective through rigorous program evaluations (Maguire, Freely, Conway, and Schwartz, 2010). Many communities are challenged in creating a cohesive training system for jobs that require significant technical training but do not require traditional bachelor's or associate's degrees—a significant area of job growth in the national economy and individual economic opportunity for U.S. workers.

The middle-skilled job training challenge

From 70 to 75 percent of jobs in the future will require postsecondary education, training, and credentials. Many communities across the country have focused on improving the number and proportion of their workforce that holds the highest educational credentials—a bachelor's degree and higher—but according to future job projections, this level of education will only be necessary for from 30 to 35 percent of jobs in the future (Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson, 2011)[2]. The majority of jobs that require postsecondary training will be sub-baccalaureate training programs, or middle-skilled jobs. These jobs will range in skill requirements from a short training program to a two-year associate's degree program. In fact, many of these sub-baccalaureate degrees will offer wages and earnings above those of the traditional bachelor's degree (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl, 2010). Middle-skilled jobs of the future will require a higher level of training, but workers who are prepared for these positions may be in

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[2] Some estimate that the national labor market may already be oversaturated with bachelor's and higher degrees.

short supply and earn high industry wage premiums, given the short supply of workers with their specialized training (Holzer, Lane, Rosenblum, and Andersson, 2011; Bartik, 2004).

This type of career and job focused training often happens through workforce development training programs, community colleges, technical colleges, and for-profit educational institutions. The system is largely funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and its predecessors and through Pell Grants directly to learners (Holzer, 2008). Traditional federal funding for workforce development has been in decline (Holzer, 2008), but the decline has spurred increasing philanthropic and private activity in workforce development—many of the most successful job training programs operate outside of the federal workforce development system because of the challenges related to strict programmatic and funding requirements in the system (Wolf-Powers and Andreason, 2012). The disparate nature of funding (federal workforce investment funding, Pell Grants, philanthropy, and public-private partnerships) also predisposes the workforce development ecosystem to uncoordinated efforts, duplication, and an inefficient use of resources.

## The state of the federal workforce development system

The ascendance of human capital as a key determinant of national and individual economic success has not insulated the workforce development system from significant challenges in funding cuts. The federal workforce development system has been funded through a number of pieces of legislation dating back to the 1970s.[3] The current legislation, WIOA, is a general reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) with some programmatic changes. WIOA funds a similar workforce development system that WIA did with a significantly lower amount of money available to complete similar programming.

Federal workforce development funding has been in decline over the last decade. Aside from a significant boost in one-year funding in 2009 (which was a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act), WIA Title I funding has been in decline since 2001 when it stood at nearly $5 billion annually.[4] As a part of the 2011 Budget Control Act (the "sequester") negotiations, lawmakers seriously discussed the complete elimination of the $3.8 billion annual WIA funding. Instead, a compromised $1 billion was cut from the main federal workforce development funding mechanism as part of the penalty for not reaching a budget deal in 2011. In 2013, WIA funding dropped to just over $2.8 billion.

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[3] The pieces of legislation include the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
[4] Title I of WIA is the funding stream that provides money to states for Workforce Investment Boards and their associated trainings.

Figure 1. WIA/WIOA Title I Funding Levels, Data Source: Funding Levels Reported by National Skills Coalition

WIA Title I Funding
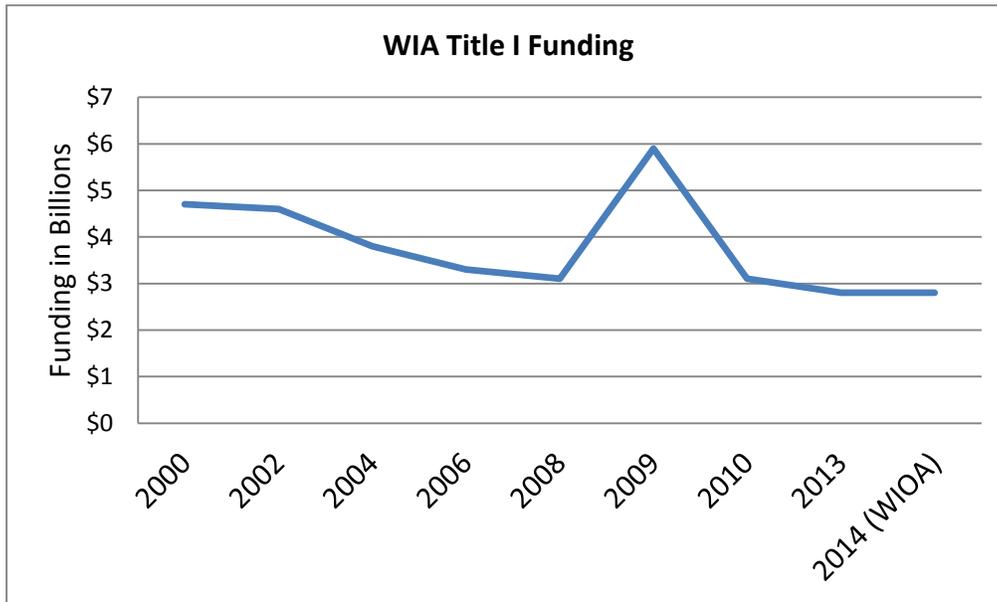
Source: National Skills Coalition

The new WIOA legislation did not increase funding to the federal workforce training system and the program awaits congressional appropriations to determine if it will receive full funding of $2.8 billion. The federal workforce development system also faces organizational challenges. Figure 1 shows the trend of declining funding. Workforce development agencies have not only been forced to think about how they can do more with less funding, but also must consider how they can combat the erosion of their budgets due to inflation and rising costs.[5] Coupled with funding from Title IV of the Higher Education Act, which allows students to choose the programs they are interested in, workforce development programs have fewer opportunities for communication and coordination about regional economic and labor market priorities.

Figure 2 maps out the funding flows of federal WIA funding. Often, the funding flow limits the use of federal funding for innovative ideas in workforce development. Innovative ideas are instead funded through philanthropy, grants from local government, public-private partnerships, and training contracts with businesses.

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[5] By 2003, only 40 percent of WIA dollars were used on job training—the remaining 60 percent was spent on job placement and administration (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2005).

Figure 2. WIA Funding Flow
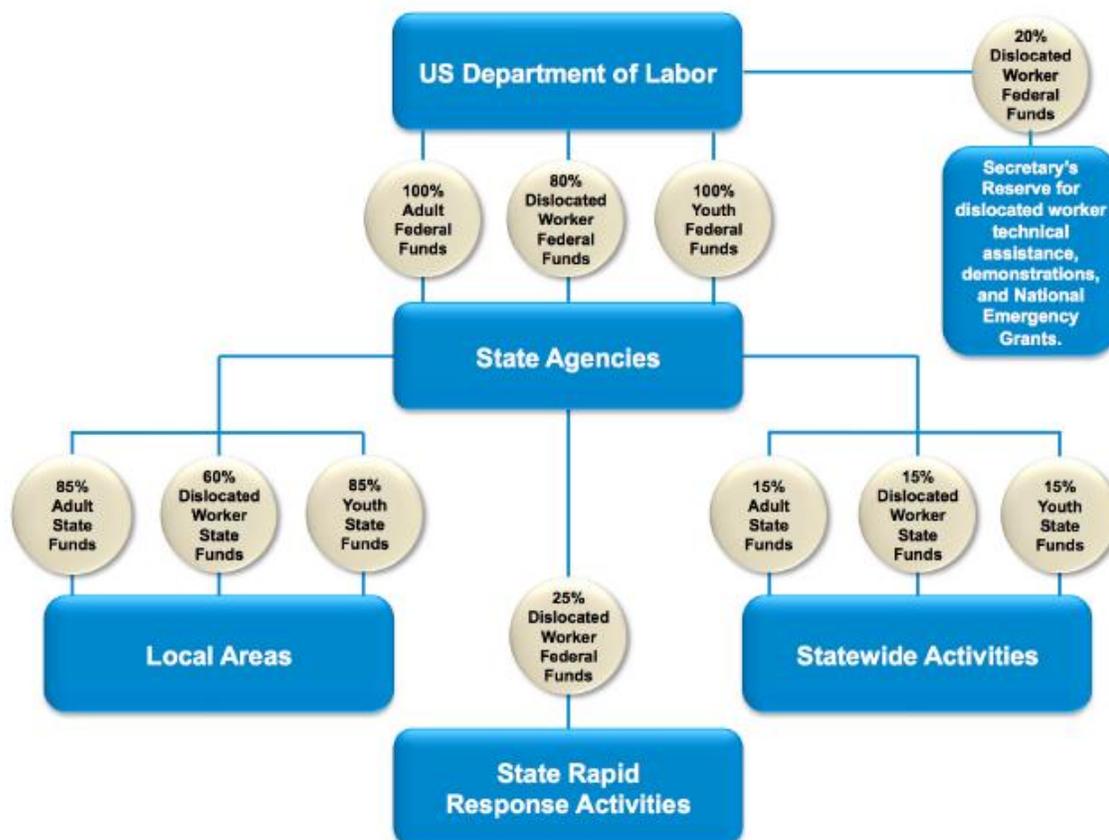
Source: National Skills Coalition

Many workforce development programs have had difficulty adapting their training to the reworked model of the federal funding system. The programmatic administration, reporting, tracking, and data collection necessary to receive WIA/WIOA funding is incredibly complex and challenging. As a result, many job training programs have simply passed on receiving a federal subsidy. This means many of the more innovative, niche, and early-stage workforce development programs have foregone funding from the federal WIA system (Wolf-Powers and Andreason, 2012).[6] While this allows programmatic flexibility, it presents scale issues. A major benefit of the WIOA/WIA system is that it provided steady, if declining, funding to workforce development and training providers, who were in turn able to provide training to a relatively broad number of people. Also, the diminishing role of the federal government in funding training limits its ability to coordinate the training that is offered.

The declining role of the federal government in job training has driven more localized and individual programmatic responses to workforce development programming that is not well coordinated, sometimes duplicative, and inefficient. This has played out in local and metropolitan economies and labor markets and has been particularly evident in metropolitan Atlanta. The following sections will provide an overview of the Atlanta workforce development system and outline several

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[6] For programs that are certified to be reimbursed for training, the cost of high-quality training that consistently leads to higher wages far outweighs the reimbursement from WIA/WIOA. For example, WIA vouchers cover only a small fraction of the cost of training at the high-performing Per Scholas (Leavitt, 2011).

promising initiatives in other metropolitan areas that aim to create stronger coordination in the local workforce development system.

The state of the metro Atlanta workforce development system

Metropolitan Atlanta is an agglomeration of dozens of city and county jurisdictions, with a membership of 10 counties and 70 cities in the metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC). The communities in the ARC area range from urban to suburban, with great socioeconomic and demographic diversity. However, the political boundaries that currently define workforce development have limited the ability to align workforce development services with employer needs. Many have argued that metro Atlanta's overall economic competitiveness and future prosperity are incumbent on a regional strategy.

In order to understand the challenges and opportunities in the 10-county ARC area, workforce-related reports and studies from the past 10 years are reviewed and summarized below.

Overview of reports on workforce development

Since 2005, a number of reports have been produced on workforce development. These include reports produced by or for state, metropolitan, and local government agencies and nonprofits. State reports have been generated by numerous state agencies that engage in workforce development–related activities, including the Governor's Office of Workforce Development (GOWD),[7] Georgia Department of Labor, Georgia Department of Corrections, Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, Georgia Division of Family and Children Services, Georgia Department of Human Services, Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia, and individual universities (Emory, Georgia State).

Metropolitan Atlanta reports have been generated by agencies such as the Metro Atlanta Chamber, Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta Regional Workforce Board (ARWB), and various metro area (county and municipal) Workforce Investment Act programs (WIAs). The city of Atlanta's Invest Atlanta and Atlanta Workforce Development Agency (AWDA) have reported on workforce development in the city limits.

The nonprofit Southern Growth Policies Board developed a report on the state of Georgia, and the United Way of Greater Atlanta, Goodwill of North Georgia, and Bobby Dodd Institute have reported on metro Atlanta. Many other nonprofits work in this space and have their own annual and strategic reports on workforce development.

Reports have focused on sectors that metro Atlanta has a competitive advantage in, are strategic areas for growth, and have the unskilled, low-wage occupations known as the "essential economy." Examples of sectors highlighted in various reports include information technology (IT), health IT, supply chain IT/software, software development, Internet security, health care, life sciences and biotechnology, logistics and distribution, mobility, financial transactions processing, creative industries (digital, media, and gaming), entrepreneurship, kitchen staff, janitors, landscape crews, farm workers, nursing aides, stock clerks and other nonmanagerial positions, and Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit

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[7] Now the Workforce Division of the Georgia Department of Economic Development.

Authority (MARTA) bus drivers. A list of industry sectors identified as high-growth sectors at the state, regional, and city level is shown below in Figure 3.

Figure 3. High-growth industries identified at the state, regional, and city level

INDUSTRY	Source of Industry Information		
	Governor's Office (Statewide)	Atlanta Regional Comm. (Atlanta Region)	Invest Atlanta (City-specific)
Aerospace	x	x	
Agribusiness	x	x	
Applied Computational Processing/Engineering			x
Bioscience	x	x	x
Construction	x		
Digital Arts/New Media		x	x
Energy	x	x	
Healthcare		x	
Logistics/Transportation	x	x	x
Manufacturing	x		
Professional & Management Services			x
Software Development		x	
Specialized Business Support Services		x	x
Telecommunications	x	x	
Tourism			x

Source: Maher & Maher, 2014

Summary of report findings

As noted, several smaller organizations and jurisdictions have conducted their own studies on workforce development in Atlanta. What follows is a summary of recent reports that are more generally focused on the metropolitan region or larger municipalities. While several of these reports serve to identify high-growth sectors, others offer more broad recommendations for information sharing and regional collaboration. Table 1 provides an overview of the reports discussed below.

Table 1. Atlanta Area Reports

Agency	Year	Jurisdiction	Recommendations include greater regional collaboration	Other recommendations
Invest Atlanta/ AWDA	2014	City of Atlanta	x	Strategic planning and visioning, focus on growth sectors, career pathways, intelligence gathering

ARC (prepared by Market Street Services)	2013	10-county ARC region	x	Educating workforce, growing entrepreneurship, developing livable communities
ARWB	2014	Seven counties in metro Atlanta (excludes Fulton, DeKalb, and Cobb)		Realignment of workforce development with current sector-based employment trends
DeKalb WIA	2012	DeKalb County		Sector-based recommendations
Fulton WIA	2011	Fulton County		Sector-based recommendations
Workforce Development Task Force, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta (prepared by Emory University)	2002	Metro Atlanta	x	Supporting those with barriers to employment, increasing postemployment services
GOWD (prepared by IBM)	2012	State of Georgia	x	Statewide consolidation of WIAs

Source: Table created by authors

The recent report *Workforce Strategy Project: Final Report and Implementation Plan* (Maher & Maher, 2014) was commissioned by the city to reform and improve the AWDA. However, among the findings and recommendations, this report revealed the need to work regionally as job markets and the labor shed cross political jurisdictions. The duplication, competition, and lack of information sharing among WIAs was found to be distasteful to the business community, discouraging employers from accessing the workforce system. The report also found that Atlanta's Workforce Investment Board (WIB) and the AWDA operate in ways that are in direct contrast with best practices. Noted best practices include developing an integrated, demand-driven workforce system; providing policy guidance; fostering strategic thinking for the city's workforce system, including a strategic vision and a foundational service philosophy or principles; administering programs in a responsive mode, and moving toward regionalization. Recommendations in the report include adopting a formal vision and strategic plan to drive implementation of the recommendations; reorganizing the Atlanta WIB and AWDA; focusing on targeted growth sectors in the regional economy; embracing a focus on career pathways; regionalizing business services; and providing for the efficient, ongoing provision of comprehensive regional labor market intelligence.

The ARC's *Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy,* prepared by Market Street Services (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2013), also stresses regional collaboration. The strategy, targeted at the 10-county metro Atlanta region, was developed with input from 3,500 local stakeholders, including residents and employers. The report recommended fostering and maintaining a well-educated workforce, supporting and growing businesses and entrepreneurs, and developing livable communities to increase regional competitiveness and meet local economic development objectives.

The ARWB's comprehensive WIA Plan (Atlanta Regional Workforce Board, 2014) for the counties of Cherokee, Clayton, Douglas, Fayette, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale highlights the existing collaborations between the ARWB, ARC, Metro Atlanta Chamber, GOWD, and others. The report details

a plan for the region to align workforce-related economic development with current employment trends. The plan reports an increase in employment in many sectors and relocation of firms to Atlanta. Sectors targeted include digital entertainment and media, supply chain and logistics, advanced manufacturing, health care IT, life sciences (bioscience technology), and IT.

The report *Workforce Development in the Atlanta Metropolitan Region: Findings from a Survey of Provider Organizations* (Rich, 2002) was undertaken to better understand the range and geographical dispersion across metro Atlanta of agencies that assist with workforce development and their respective range of services. Data were collected from 86 organizations and 153 sites. Recommendations based on the findings included strengthening collaboration; enhancing support for populations facing multiple barriers to employment such as the homeless, ex-felons, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients; and increasing postemployment services to promote job retention and wage progression.

Based on a 2012 independent assessment conducted by IBM for the Governor's Office of Workforce Development (Georgia Governor's Office of Workforce Development, 2012), it was recommended that WIAs be consolidated statewide to regional commission jurisdictions to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of workforce development services being delivered by the state. Operational recommendations included a revamped service delivery model, improved accessibility to services through the use of technology, consistent branding, accountability through better financial management and reporting, reinvigorated partnerships and essential partners, advanced employment services tools, and leveraging of bright spots in youth programs.

Challenges for Atlanta

Together these reports create a cacophony of suggestions and directions for job training and workforce development in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Conflicting messages may confuse job seekers and students about what occupations and industries are truly ascendant. The multiple reports with multiple conclusions also lead to situations where different entities are pursuing different goals and training initiatives that are sometimes at odds with other jurisdictions. These crossed and conflicting efforts are a disservice to local workers, businesses, and the metropolitan economy alike, a situation that is found in many other regions. There is a clear need for a better coordinated regional workforce development system, potentially led by a backbone or umbrella organization. Many efforts are duplicated, contributing to inefficiencies, confusion, and competition. This has also been seen as detracting from employers' desire to access workforce development resources. Furthermore, reports point to disconnects between economic development strategies and workforce development systems. Given these findings, for the metro Atlanta workforce development system to be successful and competitive, it is necessary to convene stakeholders, set a vision and strategy, focus efforts on career pathways and growth sectors, and regionalize services.

Opportunities for stronger coordination at the regional level

Regional coordination of workforce development has numerous advantages over state and national policies, such as developing new products and processes, identifying and accessing new markets, facilitating technology and information transfer, training workers, and gaining access to specialized materials, equipment, suppliers, and services (Carlson, Holm, and Uhalde, 2011). This is due in part to

more effective collaboration among firms, economic development organizations, investors, training providers, educators, research institutions, and governmental agencies.

There is a very well-established literature on the importance of interpersonal social networks in acquiring employment (Corcoran, Datcher, and Duncan, 1980; Granovetter, 1995; Lin, Ensel, and Vaughn, 1981; Mier and Giloth, 1983). Given the importance of interpersonal ties at the individual and community levels, naturally ties between community organizations similarly confer benefits to the workforce. In general, there are four reasons competitive advantage can be found in interorganizational cooperation: investment in mutually beneficial assets, knowledge-sharing routines and joint knowledge, complementary resources and capabilities, and lower transaction costs and effective governance (Dyer and Singh, 1998).

Despite the fact that building partnerships is time-intensive and requires dedicated staff, strategic networking among many different types of agents will result in a stronger workforce development system.

Several models exist with respect to regional coordination of workforce development. To understand how collaboration could be strengthened at the regional level, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's community and economic development program conducted background research on several regional workforce development efforts that are potentially instructive to a similar effort in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

The four organizations selected for interviews were:

1. Boston SkillWorks

2. Chicago Jobs Council

3. Cincinnati Partners for a Competitive Workforce

4. Detroit Jobs Alliance

These organizations represent a variety of funding levels, years of experience, funding sources, and areas of interest. Three are located in the Midwest and one in the Northeast. Three of the four had some type of searchable database of workforce development resources, although these differed in type of data and audience. The management, leadership, and partnership or membership structure differed in each, in response to the organization goals and funding sources.

Table 2. Case study workforce development organizations

	Boston SkillWorks	Chicago Jobs Council	Cincinnati Partners for a Competitive Workforce	Detroit Jobs Alliance
Year founded	2003	1981	2008	2012
Jurisdiction	Within the Route 128 loop (central Boston MSA)	Illinois (statewide)	Cincinnati MSA (eight counties directly served)	Cities of Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park
Annual budget	$1.3M–$2.7M	$1.7M–$2.9M	$1M	$475K
Funders	Pooled funds housed at the Boston Foundation from 15–20 public and private entities	Private and corporate foundations (about 20 total)	Public and private funders (about 20 total)	Pooled funds from about 13 funders that comprise the Detroit Regional Workforce Fund
Issue areas	Opportunities for low-income populations (entry level and career ladder jobs)	Populations in poverty, hard to serve, long-term unemployed	Industry sectors of health care, manufacturing, construction, and IT	Small business, job creation, data, and foundational skills
Online portal	None	WIRE (directory of 280 providers, data, and reports) http://wire.cjc.net/	Employers First Training Portal (database of postsecondary programs for employers) http://swor.emsicareercoach.com/completers/; reporting and tracking database	GRID (directory of more than 40 providers) designed for use by frontline staff http://grid.detroitjobsalliance.org/
Lead or a managing organization	Independently managed, with backbone organization the Boston Foundation	Independently managed, led by board of directors	Independently managed, with backbone organization United Way of Greater Cincinnati	Independently managed, led by steering committee
Organization structure	Informally governed by a funders group with several subcommittees	20-member board of directors with working groups open to members and other interested parties	Advised by a 40-member Partners Council with sector-based and issue-specific working groups	25-member steering committee with four operating groups and two advisory committees
Partners or members	Grantees include employers, nonprofits, educational institutions, labor unions, and government (57 lead agencies and partners)	Members include community-based organizations, civic groups, businesses, and individuals (110–120 members)	Partners include employers, WIBs, educational institutions, service providers, and funders (more than 150 total)	Partners include nonprofits, quasi-governmental agencies, community-based organizations, faith-based groups (76 total)
Staff and volunteers	Two employees, consultants as needed	11–13 employees, paid and unpaid interns	Four or five employees	One employee, three AmeriCorps VISTA interns

Source: Table created by authors

Boston SkillWorks was founded in 2003 after two years of planning in response to the bursting of the tech bubble and the effects of WIA reauthorization on Boston area workforce development providers. SkillWorks serves communities within the Route 128 loop, with a focus on businesses in the city of Boston. The initiative provides policy advocacy and policy implementation, fosters collaboration, and funds research and data analysis. It does not provide an online portal, registry, or exchange of

workforce development resources, in part because others such as the local nonprofit Jobs Training Alliance and the city of Boston provide this information for the Boston area. It is not a 501(c)(3) organization but is housed at the nonprofit Boston Foundation, which is its backbone organization. The initiative is governed by its funders group, comprised of representatives of funding groups that give to a pooled fund held at the Boston Foundation. There have been a number of committees during SkillWorks' tenure, including an executive committee, public policy committee, and workforce partnerships committee. Ad hoc working groups around governance, evaluation, and communications have also been convened. Working groups are comprised of funders as well as community partners and other stakeholders.

The Chicago Jobs Council (CJC) is the most mature of the case study initiatives. Founded in 1981, the CJC began in response to a greater number of public service and capital projects in Chicago around that time and an underutilization of Chicago-area labor in those positions. It began with 18 members and expanded to about 120 in 2014. Membership is solidified through an application and a dues structure based on each member's budget. The geographical reach of the CJC has spread from the city to the state of Illinois, with several local spin-offs in cities such as Springfield, Rockford, Aurora, and Decatur. The CJC provides policy advocacy, policy implementation, and job development training; fosters collaboration; performs some research and data analysis; and has a robust provider registry in the Workforce Information and Resource Exchange (WIRE) (http://wire.cjc.net/). The WIRE portal also catalogs workforce development funding, publications, and related data on its public interface, with more tools and links planned. The CJC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, independently managed, with a board of directors chosen from its member organizations. Several working groups convene regularly around training for frontline staff, job development, and other interest areas.

The Cincinnati Partners for a Competitive Workforce (PCW) was established in 2008 as a response to income and employment disparities that fueled a spate of civil unrest in 2001. It was also a 2008 National Fund for Workforce Solutions funding opportunity. The initiative works in the greater Cincinnati, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana tristate area, and directly works in eight of the 26 Cincinnati metropolitan statistical area (MSA) counties. PCW provides policy advocacy and implementation, fosters collaboration, engages in research and data analysis, and manages a training registry, the Employers First Regional Workforce Network Training Portal (http://swor.emsicareercoach.com/completers/) and a database of provider information. The database tracks participants in training programs by provider, including what services they received, whether they found and retained a job, and their wages, among other metrics. PCW is not a 501(c)(3) but is independently managed and advised by its Partners Council, a 40-member, employer-led group responsible for strategic development and review. In addition, the initiative has three working groups and a strategy cabinet that acts as a steering committee to guide its activities. The three working groups are the Employers First Regional Workforce Network, the Career Pathways Partnership Teams, and the Work Readiness Collaborative.

The Detroit Jobs Alliance (DJA) was founded in 2012 in the wake of Detroit's bankruptcy filing and as a response to the systemic problems and ongoing unsustainability of Detroit's finances. The DJA serves the city of Detroit as well as the two small municipalities that are within Detroit's borders, Hamtramck and Highland Park. DJA engages in policy advocacy and policy implementation, fosters collaboration, has a robust map-based online registry, the GRID (http://grid.detroitjobsalliance.org/), and is getting into the field of data analysis. The organization is led by a steering committee of about 25 individuals from nonprofit, quasi-governmental, community-based organization, workforce

development, and faith-based groups. There are four specific committees called DJA operating groups based on small business, job creation, data, and foundational skills.

Annual budgets for the organizations ranged from $475,000 to almost $3 million and varied by year for most agencies based on funding levels. In general, grants and other sources of funding have tapered off in recent years. Numbers of staff also varied from one (Detroit Jobs Alliance) to 13 full-time employees (Chicago Jobs Council), with some duties absorbed by interns and consultants for greater flexibility. All organizations reported that partners and members aid with in-kind support by attending meetings and engaging in outreach, event planning, and other activities. While Boston SkillWorks had grantees rather than members, two of the other organizations reported that membership was not formalized. Only the CJC requires an application, payment of dues, and a signed agreement. Issue areas identified by the interviewees included specific populations (low-income, households in poverty, hard-to-serve populations, and the long-term unemployed), industry sectors (health care, manufacturing, construction, and IT), and system change (small business development, job creation, data collection, and foundation skills). For the more established organizations, these issue areas have changed over time; for example, green jobs were an area of interest for SkillWorks during a period when funding was strong in that area, but funding and organizational interest have dropped off recently. During the planning and inception stages, organizations used as models included the Strive partnership, a collective impact project to improve K–12 education programs in urban areas, the National Fund, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connection sites. Due to its longevity, the CJC was also cited as a model by the other organizations.

Use of online portals

Three of the organizations interviewed have online databases or registries of workforce development resources, although these varied significantly in scope. Online databases are maintained by CJC, PCW, and DJA. The CJC's portal contains the most varied data, including funding resources, publications, and data as well as a workforce development provider registry. The provider registry is a directory of employment training and service providers in the metro Chicago region designed for frontline staff, although it is useful for other groups, such as job seekers and businesses. A map-based format allows users to search for job training and education programs provided by approximately 280 listed organizations using filters (services provided, populations served, ZIP code, community areas, organization types) or by clicking directly on the map. An example of search results returned through a filtered search is shown in Figure 4. The data for the WIRE provider registry are collected through the CJC's network of partners. Providers that participate gain benefits in exposure and relationship building. In its first three years, the number of users has expanded and the feedback has been positive. CJC has taken advantage of interns with strong technological skills to build and expand the WIRE tools.

Figure 4. Example of WIRE provider registry search results
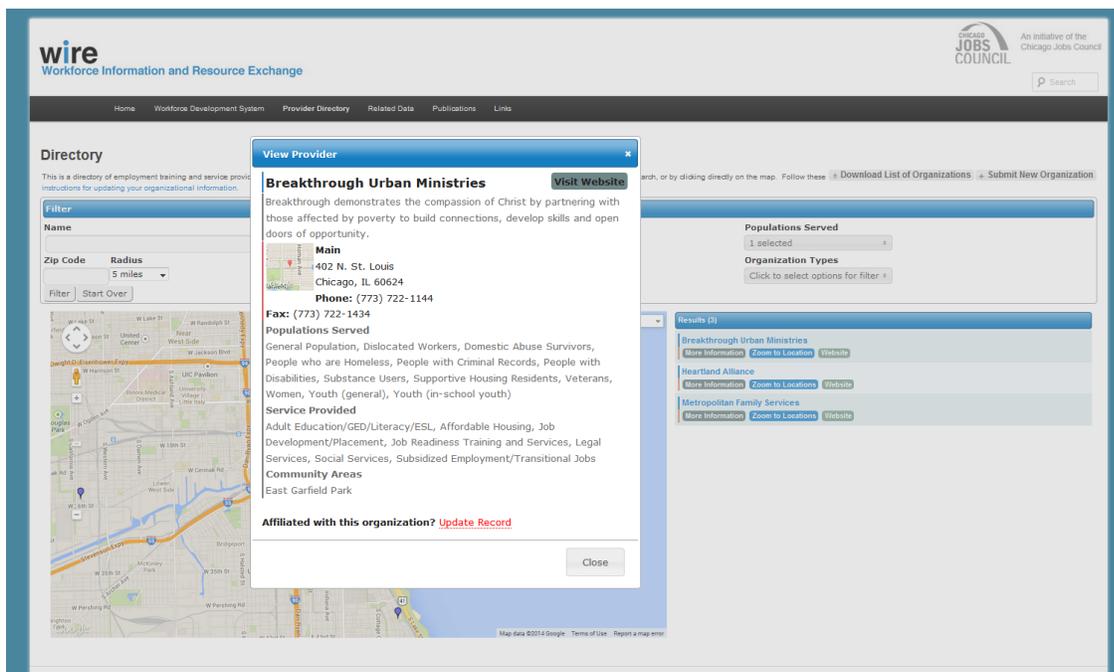
Source: Chicago Jobs Council

The PCW's Employers First Regional Workforce Network portal is designed for employers seeking specific skills for existing employees or new hires. On the Employers First Regional Workforce Network, users are able to search educational data for the area, including which institutions offer certain types of training and how many individuals have recently graduated. An example of results returned through a filtered search is shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** The PCW also maintains a participant database, which includes data on every person served by one of the initiative's partners. A working group of the PCW also completed an asset map of workforce-related organizations. The data for the Employers First Regional Workforce Network are populated by Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System while data for the participant database are entered by providers. PCW is currently improving the quality of the participant database by reviewing the completeness and accuracy of each agency's input. Many providers lack staff and are asked for the data from multiple entities, therefore, the reporting request has been onerous for some workforce development training providers. The participant database has been extremely valuable for data analysis, including employment outcomes such as retention and estimating the value of credentials.

Figure 5. Example of Employers First Regional Workforce Network search results
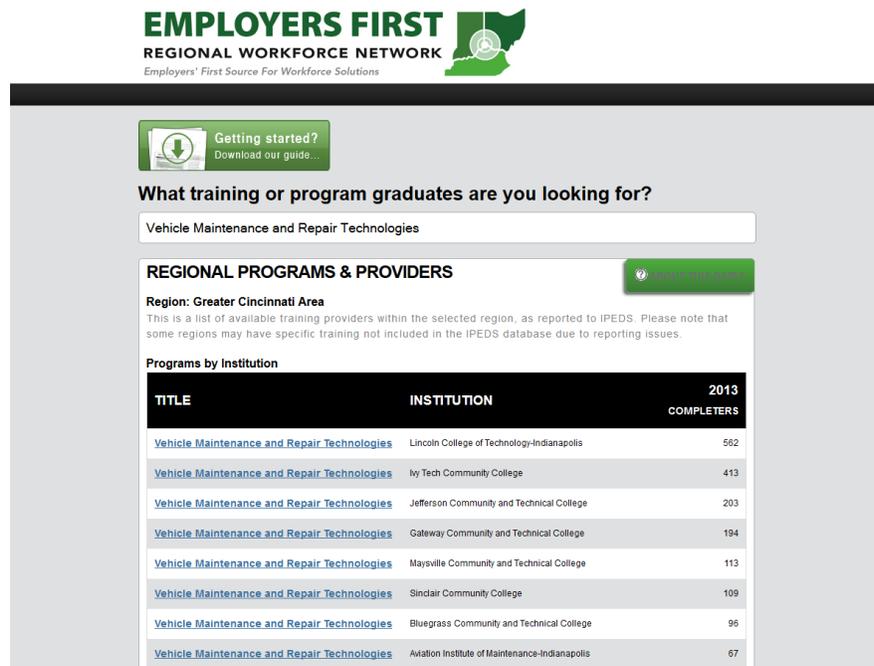
Source: Cincinnati Partners for a Competitive Workforce

The DJA's GRID, like the CJC's WIRE, offers a map-based provider directory of employment training and service providers in the Detroit area. It is also designed for frontline staff, with an easy-to-use interface that is accessible to the general public. Users can browse by service type (further broken down by services for organizations, businesses, people, and the public good) as well as ZIP code and keyword. Search results return a map location, a short description of the organization, address, contact, phone number, website, organization category, services, industry, skills, service area, locational specialty, target population, resident eligibility, funding type, and major funders. An example search result from the GRID is shown in Figure 6. Approximately 40 providers from the DJA membership populated their own data in the registry. The DJA has had to contact some providers to complete their information fully, specifically focusing on organizations such as literacy programs. Through the GRID interface, organizations can view their account information and suggest other organizations to be included in the directory.

Figure 6. Example of GRID provider registry search results
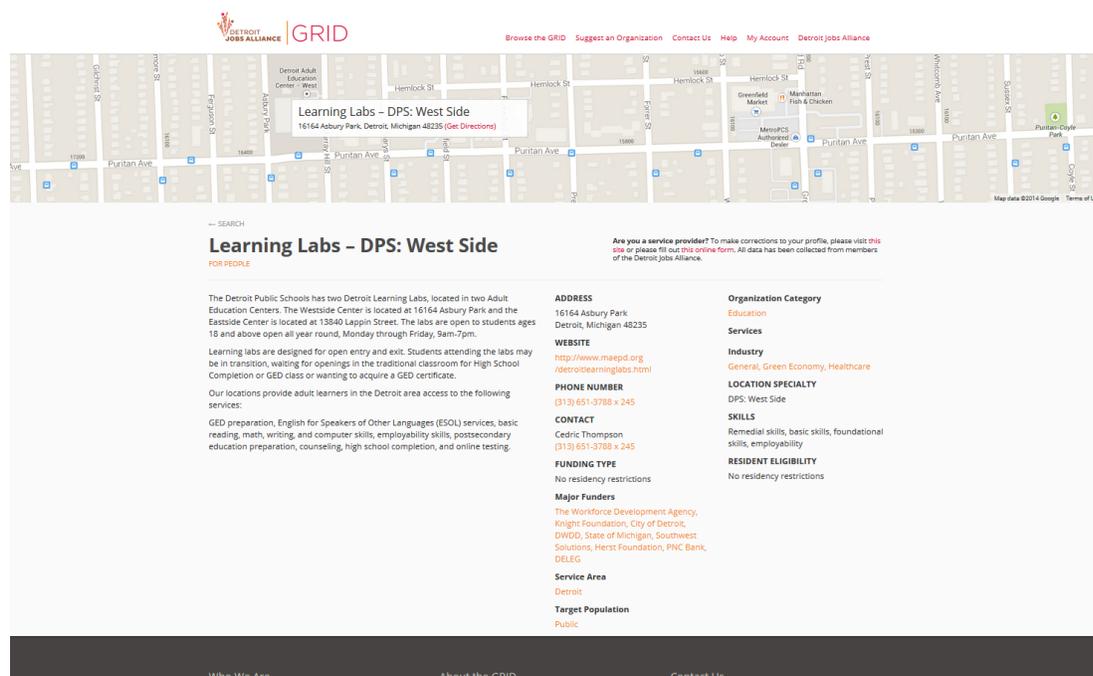
Source: Detroit Jobs Alliance

Boston SkillWorks does not manage an online portal or directory of providers. According to the organization, others in the area, including the city of Boston and the Boston-area nonprofit Job Training Alliance, have compiled a directory of programs, contacts, start dates, requirements, and other information. SkillWorks has noted the need for greater information about program reviews and real-time information and has considered using Yelp or a similar method of data collection. However, the best method for obtaining information about training programs in Boston tends to be visiting a career center and accessing its directories.

During data collection, other workforce development directories and tools were identified, such as the Department of Labor and Employment and Training Administration's Workforce3One (https://www.workforce3one.org/), an online interactive communications and learning platform designed to build the capacity of the workforce investment system. Members include the public workforce system and its strategic partners, such as employers, federal agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, and educators. Another project in development is the Workforce Benchmarking Network (http://benchmarking.skilledwork.org/), which provides tools for workforce development programs to evaluate and improve their results. It includes an online survey and produces confidential reports that allow organizations to compare their job placement and retention outcomes with those of similar programs.

In general, interviewees felt that the portal tools were useful for the intended audiences, with strong positive feedback from users. However, data gaps tended to exist due to providers' lack of capacity. Many providers are asked for data from multiple sources, including their own funders, and may either forget or deprioritize participation in these efforts. Additional work was often required to obtain data from these nonrespondents. The DJA's GRID is relatively new while the CJC's WIRE tool has

demonstrated strong growth and traction within the workforce development community over its first three years.

Lessons learned

Many lessons learned reported by interviewees were related to forging partnerships and creating a viable structure for leadership and decision making to support the creation of a more collaborative and aligned regional workforce development system. Important partners identified included postsecondary education, particularly community colleges (especially in rural areas where they are a major workforce development player), the business community, and, not surprisingly, funders. It was considered important to identify a lead or backbone organization (in the terminology of collective impact) with the input and buy-in of all stakeholders, to engage actors in leadership roles in order to sustain the program, and to create a structured advisory council. Several interviewees mentioned the collective impact approach. In contrast to other types of formal and informal partnerships and networks, collective impact initiatives consist of five necessary conditions for true alignment: a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a backbone support organization (Kania and Kramer, 2011).

Related to partnerships, the initial phase of understanding and managing conflicts, such as turf issues, is critical in relationship building. Identifying the appropriate partners and involving them early was also important. A formal advisory council was one recommended way of doing this. After the initial thrust, the business community and funders should be engaged in leadership positions and in decision making and encouraged to take ownership in the effort.

Many obstacles encountered were also related to consensus and partnership building. Collaboration was always difficult, as it requires great effort to establish and maintain. Identifying and involving marginalized populations, such as minority racial and ethnic groups, was found to be difficult. Aligning data systems among members was also difficult, particularly since organizations are currently underfunded and understaffed. However, shared measurement was seen as a powerful lever for change and worth the effort. Funding and political issues were also encountered.

The type of collaborative, referral-based workforce development system sought by the interviewees has actually been held back by the competition inherent in the WIA funding system. Although entities can be more effective in client services by cross-referrals and outsourcing to groups with more resources in certain areas, many organizations have become performance-driven and internally focused to the point of myopia. In contrast, the CJC shared the successful example of the 741 Collaborative Partnership (http://www.741partners.org/) in Chicago, where seven organizations within blocks of one another in four predominantly African-American communities came together and after four years have been able to provide a more complete range of employment services through cross-referrals.

Promotion was considered an area of great importance that was somewhat lacking, particularly for collecting data and ensuring that user groups are aware of data resources. More events where the media is present could address this shortcoming. Local residents are the ultimate customer, if not the end-user of data resources such as portals. Increased resident awareness and engagement was suggested to increase effectiveness.

Interviews with the four peer organizations revealed a number of considerations for establishing a workforce development partnership in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Securing significant funding is perhaps most important, followed by identifying and engaging various types of stakeholders from the beginning, and encouraging the involvement of these stakeholders to maintain positive momentum from within. Inclusion of community colleges and employers was highlighted multiple times. Policy advocacy was another important area of work for several of the peer organizations. Finally, in addition to policy change, effecting administrative change generally entails fewer political obstacles than legislative change and should not be discounted.

Conclusions

For a number of reasons documented in this paper, local workforce development systems are challenged for coordination. Federal workforce development funding has been in decline while WIA/WIOA reporting and programmatic requirements have increased. Because of these two trends, many training programs have opted out, forming new organizations that finance and fund themselves outside of the "traditional" workforce development system. This has allowed for significant innovation and entrepreneurialism in local job training programming, but it has created a significant challenge for local workforce development communities.

Local workforce development systems—both attached and detached from WIA/WIOA—have room to define goals better. While there have been significant shifts to be aligned better with local industrial and occupational trends, the disparate nature of coordinating agencies and their potential inability to act as coordinators of a workforce development system that supports a metropolitan labor market limits the overall effectiveness of workforce services in many labor markets. As we show, there are conclusions from multiple different organizations about the way forward in job training and workforce development in Atlanta. In fact, there are so many different conclusions about the appropriate way forward in Atlanta that when looking at the body of recommendations for metro Atlanta job training, it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions. Additionally, the fragmentation of efforts does not represent the way that businesses, workers, or job seekers experience the local labor market. While workers and businesses appreciate proximity to their places of business and customers, they operate beyond the schism of county lines. Supporting stronger job training and placement should also operate at the level of a metropolitan labor market, usually represented by the metropolitan statistical area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Several models from across the country suggest potential solutions to fragmented job training and workforce development systems. The solutions from Boston, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Chicago suggest that an important point of entry into creating a more cohesive workforce development system starts with creating a stronger foundation for information sharing—both labor market data as well as information on workforce development programs. Three of the four organizations discussed developed online information-sharing platforms largely to help improve the information about where training organizations were, the type of training they provided, and the populations that they served. These efforts suggest that workforce development and job training programs have little time to deal with marketing efforts and getting the word out about the work that they do. A second-order benefit of information sharing and mapping platforms for workforce development programs is increasing the awareness of workforce development programs with job seekers. Ultimately, it is incumbent upon workforce development organizations to ensure that they market their programs effectively and display

their effectiveness to businesses and job seekers, or they may be left behind. The information-sharing platforms can be an initial step in this effort. These types of information-sharing platforms can also serve as a way to promote partnerships with businesses and employers that have needs for special training or skilled workers.

A group of stakeholders in the Atlanta metropolitan area have started efforts toward forming a similar coordinating organization. The Metro Atlanta eXchange for Workforce Solutions (MAX, for short) launched an online portal that maps job training provider organizations in the metro area. The group has five aspirations for the organization:

1. Provide opportunities for a dynamic exchange within the workforce development community to explore and address current and emerging issues.

2. Foster greater alignment among providers, employers, policymakers, and funders.

3. Be one voice to advocate for policies that will enhance workforce development in the region.

4. Create opportunities for continuous learning.

5. Help foster greater effectiveness among providers through data, information, and tools.

The organizations profiled in this paper show significant promise with some of these goals, particularly the goals related to addressing emerging issues, fostering dialogue and partnerships among providers, and through creating partnerships to share and collect data. While a more in-depth analysis would be needed to dissect and identify the causal effect of these organizations on the level of coordination of a metropolitan workforce development system, these early efforts provide a clear way forward and model for metro Atlanta. These organizations represent a promising and effective way to identify and adapt to emerging labor and industrial trends in a local economy. They also represent a promising way to market the efforts of job training providers. The groups pull together stakeholders who can discuss and potentially collaborate to solve challenges in the labor market, create new ways to fund training programs, and create stronger partnerships between both training providers and employers.

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