

Workforce21

“The Power of Partnership”

The Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board and the Mid America Workforce Investment Board formed a partnership in 2002 to initiate a process to conduct a seven (7) county community audit/workforce strategic plan. The Southwestern Illinois counties examined in the study were Bond, Clinton, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington. Workforce Associates, Inc. was hired to complete the project. The initial work of the process was concluded in December 2003 with the completion of a 190 page document entitled “21st Century Workforce: Southwestern Illinois”. The audit examines the past, present and future of economic development in the seven counties. Throughout 2004, members and staff of the two Local Workforce Investment Boards were responsible for conducting numerous public meetings to share information pertaining to the findings and concluded the effort in September 2004 with a regional summit to announce plans for the implementation of the initiative.

Ten key findings and challenges for the Southwestern Illinois region were identified in the community audit that need to be examined in order to sustain regional economic growth. In addition to business opportunities, many of these findings identified challenges for educational institutions and the Workforce Boards have taken numerous important steps to address these issues. The most important step was to consolidate the ten key challenges into four (4) Task Forces that include “Supporting Economic Development”, “Connecting Business and Education”, “Preparing Youth for the Workforce”, and “Strengthening Career Guidance”. Seven individuals volunteered to “champion” the work of the Task Forces and have been taking steps to identify activity to implement the initiative. Since the issues were similar, the three Task Forces addressing educational issues have since been consolidated into one Task Force with sub-committees.

The “Connecting Business and Education” Task Force has engaged regional and local school superintendents in an effort to inventory the education/business partnerships in the seven county region. Once this data is collected, it will be a valuable resource and a reference available to businesses, students, teachers, and parents on a “Workforce 21” website. A consultant will be hired by the Workforce Boards to create the website. The inventory will also identify gaps in the business and education network that can be targeted for assistance and enhancement. The “Strengthening Career Guidance” sub-committee is planning to enhance the capabilities of career guidance staff at local Middle Schools and Secondary Schools by offering multiple training/workshop opportunities. Resources to arrange for these opportunities will be requested through this initiative and co-sponsored by local businesses. The “Preparing Youth for the Workforce” sub-committee is planning career fairs and other activities to be identified later.

The “Supporting Economic Development” Task Force is planning a series of events to promote entrepreneurship in Southwestern Illinois. The first event is an entrepreneurial summit scheduled to take place in October. The focus will be on an assessment of the area’s climate in regard to promoting entrepreneurship. A consultant has been hired to assist with a “self-assessment” of the area and to facilitate the event. All who are concerned with this initiative realize the importance of introducing a climate to promote entrepreneurs in Southwestern Illinois and concentrate on strengthening existing businesses. The Task Force is also concentrating on reducing regional “brain drain” and actively encouraging professionals to return to the area. In addition, the Task Force is concerned with addressing a growing shortage of healthcare professionals. The Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board and the Mid America Workforce Investment Board along with the Job Center Board are addressing this issue through activity under the “Critical Skill Shortages Initiative” (CSSI) funded by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and launched in September 2003 by Governor Rod Blagojevich. A primary goal of this initiative was to align regional workforce programs and identify occupations displaying a current and potentially future shortage of workers and skills needed to meet the needs of employers and job seekers in the region. The Southwestern Economic Development Region was created to address this project and includes the counties of Bond, Calhoun, Clinton, Jersey, Madison, Monroe, Randolph, St. Clair and Washington. Healthcare was identified through this process.

The Madison-Bond Workforce Investment Board and the Mid America Workforce Investment Board will continue their partnership to address the challenges faced by the local region and will continue to take steps to build the best possible now and in the future. We encourage everyone’s participation in this effort.

