SPECIAL REPORT:
The Workforce Investment Act in Georgia:
Recommendations for Improvement

CAPSTONE FINAL REPORT 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Georgia’s workforce development system is overly duplicative, fragmented and complex with opportunities for improvement, according to a thorough review of how the state implements the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998.

A partnership between the federal government, states and local governments, the national workforce development system is designed to “ensure that workforce development strategies align with the needs of employers and leverage the rich resources of collaborative partners available at the local, regional and state levels.”  

In Georgia, the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development (GOWD) started to manage this system in 2012, when the legislature moved federal funding for the effort from the state Department of Labor. Since taking over WIA, GOWD has documented their plans for delivering these services moving forward.

In this project, we reviewed the strategic plans in Georgia’s workforce investment system and compared their activities to other state systems to develop a set of recommendations for improvement. To accomplish this process we used information available publicly via the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development, regional workforce investment boards and best practice reviews of other states’ workforce investment systems. To compare Georgia’s regional workforce investment boards, we compiled a list of key WIA services and compared this list with each region’s strategic plans. In doing so, we gauged the strength of these plans using an evaluation matrix to simplify our findings.

We found duplication in the implementation of WIA since there is a pre-existing system within the Georgia Department of Labor career centers for service delivery. The system has a series of disjointed annual strategic plans and reports that are very dissimilar from region to region. The regional planning process to produce these strategic plans is too ambiguous, which makes planning for these critical services imprecise.

Comparing our findings to other states like Florida and Utah, we recommend that the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development take a stronger leadership approach in the planning and implementation process with the individual regional workforce investment boards to prevent the fragmentation apparent in regional strategic plans. We also recommend reviewing and correcting the duplication of services with the Georgia Department of Labor as well as other partner organizations that also provide workforce services.

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of Georgia’s workforce is critical to Georgia’s fiscal future and its ability to grow the economy. It is important to legislators working to improve the quality of life for Georgians, to prospective employers considering Georgia as a location in which to operate, and most importantly, to Georgians themselves for employment.

In FY2013, the State of Georgia spent $73,361,918 on workforce development through 20 regional workforce investment boards (WIBs) established under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. These boards serve to match a job seeker’s skills to employment opportunities in the state, especially those job seekers who have been dislocated or displaced from their previous lines of work.

Despite the importance of workforce development programs, there is little awareness among policymakers, workforce advocates and the public about what services WIBs offer to those in need of new skills, how WIBs deliver those services, and what those services cost the taxpayer.

The objectives of this project are to:

1. Describe how the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 has been implemented at the federal, state, and local levels;
2. Determine best practices for workforce development implementation; and,
3. Offer recommendations for improving Georgia’s workforce development system and identify areas in need of future research.

METHODOLOGY

We reviewed the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and other policy documents related to the implementation of WIA in Georgia. This research informed the team of the purpose of WIA, the guidelines for implementation and the key services delivered. Using documents available to the public, we reviewed the strategic plans for each regional workforce investment board in Georgia and compared the elements of each plan to WIA requirements. The local plans are the result of a survey issued by the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development that each regional WIB used to outline key people, partners and policies involved in their implementation of WIA. Furthermore, using the strategic plans we developed a matrix of key WIA service requirements and compared the delivery of these key requirements across all regions.

The team conducted a review of other states’ workforce systems and compared their successes to Georgia’s challenges. Other sources of information included the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau.

THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT OF 1998

FEDERAL GUIDELINES

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), signed into law in 1998, established a framework for a national workforce preparation and employment system. The WIA consolidates past workforce development programs from the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933, the Trade Act of 1974, the Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, the North American Free Trade Agreement of 1994 and various other adult education and literacy policies.3

The WIA has five core principles:

- **Local emphasis** - Local regions will be the driving force in designing and implementing employment and job training programs.
- **One-Stop model** - Access to job training programs, employment services, educational programs and information services should be provided in central locations at the local level.
- **Tailored services** - Persons accessing the programs should have control over what services and trainings are best suited for their career needs.
- **Transparency and information** - Persons seeking employment should be provided information on the success of employment and training programs.
- **Public-private collaboration** - Businesses will play an important leadership role in ensuring the success of this system.

In addition, the WIA requires each state to establish the following components:

- A state workforce investment board (SWIB)
- Regional workforce investment boards (WIBs), as determined by the governors of the different states
- Five-year strategic plans outlining the goals and strategies of each SWIB
- Youth councils for each regional WIB
- Comprehensive “One-Stop” service center locations in each WIB region through which services are delivered.

WIA Funding

The service populations in each state and local region for adult, dislocated workers and youth determine the funding from the WIA. Eighty-five percent of adult and youth funds must be allocated to the WIBs for

services with the remainder allocated to the SWIB for administrative purposes. For dislocated workers, the Secretary of Labor reserves 20 percent of federal funding for national emergency grants, which are used for major layoffs or disasters, dislocated worker efforts and other technical assistance. Of the remaining 80 percent of funds for dislocated workers, 60 percent is mandated to local WIB programs, 15 percent to SWIB for administrative purposes and 25 percent is reserved for the state’s rapid response efforts for major layoffs and disasters. With approval from the governor, local WIBs may apply for a waiver from the SWIB and transfer up to 20 percent of funding between adult and dislocated worker funding streams.

**FIGURE 1. WIA FUNDING ALLOCATION FORMULA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Funding Recipient</th>
<th>Percentage of Target Population Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislocated</td>
<td>National emergency grants</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>State rapid response</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WIA Targeted Grants**

Since 2000, WIA has contributed between $750,000 and $3 million annually to state and local WIB programs for one or more of the three target populations in the form of grants. As a part of the granting process, the Secretary of Labor may award grants for projects such as public-private partnerships, demonstration and pilot projects programs related to WIA services in the states or local levels using a competitive bidding and peer review process.

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BOARD COMPOSITION AND GOVERNANCE

Each state and local WIB boards must have no less than 20 members. A majority of state WIB and WIB board members must be business representatives and also include education providers, labor organizations, community-based organizations (CBO), disabled veteran agencies, economic development agencies, one representative from each One-Stop center and other representatives as determined appropriate by local elected officials. In Georgia, we found that the state WIB is comprised of members from both public and private entities including the governor, the commissioners from the Department of Labor, Economic Development, Community Affairs, Juvenile Justice, Human Services and the Technical College Systems of Georgia as well as state senators and representatives and labor and youth leaders (see Appendix A).

WIBs are barred from directly providing services unless a waiver is obtained by the Governor based on the lack of availability of a local provider for One-Stop services. The SWIB can decertify a local WIB in cases of fiscal noncompliance with the WIA or failing to meet quarterly performance measures. Only two WIBs have developed their own One-Stop centers. In these rare cases, the WIBs use their own office space as the One-Stop center.

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STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS (SWIBS)

WIA mandates that every state create a workforce investment board (WIB) system divided by regions to deliver key services to select target populations. WIA also dedicates annual funding for these services according to the size of the individual state’s target population size. The states have great leeway in the execution and setup of their delivery system within a set of guidelines. In Georgia the SWIB and the WIB system is staffed by the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development (GOWD). All funding for the SWIB system and regional WIBs is federally funded.

The target populations for Workforce program delivery are:

- **Adults** - anyone 18 and over and may include specialized populations under this category such as veterans.
- **Dislocated Workers** - an individual who has been terminated or laid-off, is eligible for unemployment compensation, is unlikely to return to a previous occupation, has received notice that employment is terminating, was self-employed but as a result of economic conditions is no longer employed, or is a displaced homemaker
- **Youth** - separated into youth ages 14 to 18 years old and older youth 18 to 21 years old

REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS (WIBS)

In Georgia there are 20 WIB regions (See Appendix for map). Each WIB has a Chief Elected Official who is usually the highest ranking elected officer within the region who works with GOWD staff and the board in the strategic planning process outlined below.

Each WIB develops a board consisting of 20 members from the community of whom at least half must represent businesses. The board is divided into committees who work on a range of projects ranging from the One-Stop approval process to strategic planning to identification and approval of partner organizations for service delivery.

WIB STRATEGIC PLANNING

Georgia uses a five-year strategic planning process to assist its 20 regions in outlining service delivery, laying out a system for regional certification of One-Stop centers for service delivery and in detailing youth programs, services with partner organizations for education and certification programs and other contracted services. The GOWD provides the regional WIBs with a list of questions to answer in a strategic planning process as well as labor market information that shows general in-demand job categories according to the state Department of Labor. The plans we analyzed were from 2011 and 2012.
or the most current plan available as of January 2013. The regional WIBs submit strategic plans to DOL every five years for approval.

**YOUTH COUNCILS**

Each WIB is required to establish youth councils at the regional level to develop and assist areas of the local strategic plans targeting youth ages 14 to 21 years old. This includes identifying providers of youth services and coordinating local youth programs and services via the youth council. The youth councils work much like the WIB itself only with a service focus for youth rather than adults and dislocated workers. We found a couple of regions that did not have a youth council indicated in their plans: Region 10 and Region 12 (See Appendix B).

The youth councils we analyzed included partnerships with local school systems, local community colleges and vocational schools as well as local non-profit agencies and department of labor offices that offered youth programs for employment and education.

**ONE-STOP CENTERS**

Each WIB must certify One-Stop centers using a mutually agreed upon certification system with the GOWD and the SWIB. The purpose of One-Stop centers is to provide all WIA services to a customer in one location.

One-Stop centers may be located at existing state offices, non-profit service centers, or the offices of community-based organizations (CBOs), among others. In addition to their own services, One-Stop centers may include services and funding from other federal and state sources such as the Department of Labor, the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS), other state and local programs as well as related services provided by non-profit organizations. The operators of One-Stop centers are certified or selected by WIBs through a competitive process that includes at least three federal programs such as WIA, TANF and DOL services at the One-Stop location.

Each One-Stop Center provides services for adult workers, dislocated workers, and youth in addition to other services that the WIB may use such as service referral to partner organizations, self-services like internet job searching, fax machines and other similar services.

All WIBs we surveyed use Georgia Department of Labor Career Centers for at least one of their One-Stop centers in their respective regions. Though not all centrally located in each region, DOL Career Centers offer a range of services in addition to WIA services including alternative language media and training videos, Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and other state and federal programs.
ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS

WIA defines an adult as anyone aged 18 and over. It defines a dislocated worker as an individual who has been terminated or laid-off, is eligible for unemployment compensation, is unlikely to return to a previous occupation, has received notice that employment is terminating, was self-employed but as a result of economic conditions is no longer employed, or is a displaced homemaker.

Services for adults and dislocated customers provided at One-Stop centers are divided into three general categories, which reflect different types of customer need: self-services, core services and intensive services. The Georgia Department of Labor or the One-Stop staff using a variety of questionnaires, surveys and assessment tools evaluates customers on a case-by-case basis.

Self-Services
These services require very little staff involvement including internet access for customers to perform their own employment and training searches, access to employer and labor market information and information on education resources for job training.

Core Services
These services include an initial assessment of customer skills and needs usually via a survey, job counseling that utilizes labor market information such as current vacancies, in-demand skills, and local and national labor trends, guided job search and placement assistance and post-program evaluation to track in job retention and placement in an education program.

Intensive Services
Includes comprehensive skill and advanced needs assessments through in-depth interviews and surveys, individual and group career counseling, individual career management by a counselor, short-term pre-vocational services including simple training programs. The needs assessments includes veteran status determination, basic skill level assessments for reading and writing proficiency, and dislocated worker status. Individuals meeting any of these criteria and seeking assistance would qualify for intensive services. Customers who qualify for intensive services but are unsuccessful in locating employment may receive training services directly linked to local employers including occupational skills training, subsidized or unsubsidized on-the-job training, entrepreneurial training, skill upgrading, job readiness training, and adult education or literacy services, all of which are offered in conjunction with other programs. In WIB regions where funds are limited, services are prioritized for low-income customers and veterans.
**Individual Training Accounts**

Individual training accounts (ITA) are established for individuals needing monetary assistance for support items such as childcare, transportation, tuition, fees, and other work and training related expenses. The approval process for these ITAs varies from region to region but is part of the intake and assessment process for WIB adult and dislocated workers.

**YOUTH**

WIA defines youth as those 14 to 21 years old. It further breaks youth into two categories: younger youth 14 to 18 years old and older youth 19 to 21 years old.

One-Stop Centers provide services for youth. At least 95 percent must be low-income and at least 30 percent must not be currently in school when they enter the program.

To be eligible for these services, youth must meet at least one of the following criteria: dropped out of school, literacy deficient, runaways, homeless or foster children, pregnant or parenting, a criminal offender, or otherwise require help completing training and education programs.

Those between the ages of 14 and 18 are to be offered summer employment services, training in basic occupational skills, and courses in reading and comprehension. Those between the ages of 19 and 21 are eligible for vocational training, apprenticeship and other job-entry programs.

Youth programs use survey assessments of skills and service needs, a service strategy for the youth to follow, preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities or unsubsidized employment, strong linkages between academic and occupational learning,.

At a minimum, programs for youth must include summer employment, basic tutoring, study skills training, mentoring, paid and unpaid work experiences, occupational skills training, opportunities to develop leadership skills and comprehensive guidance and counseling.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES**

In order to measure the effectiveness of the regional WIBs, federal WIA rules mandate setting goals of performance with the State WIB. Using the state Department of Labor information system, Georgia’s Governor’s Office of Workforce Development measures each WIB’s progress toward its quarterly negotiated performance goal. WIBs are expected to meet or exceed the performance goals as reported each quarter using nine mandated measures.
Not all nine WIA measures apply to each target population. Below are the measures and the population to which each is applicable.

- **Entered employment rate** – adults, dislocated workers and older youth who secured employment
- **Employment retention rate** – adults, dislocated workers, older youth and youth who are still employed for a time period after exiting the program
- **Average earnings** – adults and dislocated workers
- **Earnings change six months after exit from program** – older youth
- **Credential/diploma rate** – adults, dislocated workers, older and youth
- **Skill attainment rate** – younger youth
- **Placement in employment or education** – all youth
- **Attainment of degree or certificate** – all youth
- **Literacy or numeracy gains** – all youth

Each WIB is also responsible for tracking performance data such as customers who complete a WIA service and tracking customer employment retention and customers who enter an education program. GOWD staff enter all of this data into the state labor market information system maintained by the Georgia Department of Labor for performance measurement.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR GEORGIA TO BETTER IMPLEMENT THE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

After reviewing the 20 regional workforce investment board strategic plans in Georgia, we uncovered dramatic disparities between boards that met some of the WIA key requirements. These disparities are a likely result of the state deferring many of the decisions regarding the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act to the 20 regional WIBs. Because of the decision to defer to the regional level, Georgians are exposed to 20 different implementations of the act.

We believe that there is an opportunity for the state to assume a larger leadership role. After performing a best practices analysis, we see that policy set at the state level best achieves uniformity in implementation at the regional level. We believe that Georgia has the ability to improve its implementation of workforce development by:

- Providing more explicit state guidance in implementation;
- Coordinating between agencies; and,
- Interpreting labor market information.

Stronger leadership at the state level would resolve many of the issues with inconsistency among the different regional workforce investment boards. Interagency coordination at the state level will provide the regional level with the resources and the direction that would otherwise be out of the region’s reach. Analyzing and interpreting regional labor market information at the state level will help the regional WIBs target their strategic planning. Overall, themes of interagency coordination, leadership and consolidation run through states who have successfully administered the Workforce Investment Act. By implementing these recommendations, Georgia could offer similar quality of service to all Georgians, consolidate similar workforce development efforts, and collaborate more between agencies.

Stronger State Leadership

The Governor’s Office of Workforce Development (GOWD) provides administrative support to the state WIB. According to the GOWD website, the role of the Governor’s Office of Workforce Development is to:

“…improve the job training and the marketability of Georgia’s workforce and create future economic growth for the state. GOWD implements the Governor’s workforce development policy and serves as staff to the Georgia Workforce Investment Board. GOWD works with high-level

6 It is important to note that these best practices of WIBs across the United States were derived in part from a 2005 study performed by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, held at the request of the U.S. Department of Labor. Even though the study reflects a historical snapshot of the state’s implementation opposed to their current implementation, we believe that the juxtaposition of public administration articles with the Rockefeller’s best practices of state leadership, interagency coordination, and labor market information interpretation, will strengthen our analysis and recommendations.
workforce and employment issues to help Georgia be competitive economically. It focuses on soft-skill education for career success.”

By “implementing workforce development policy” and working with “high-level workforce and employment issues,” the GOWD has the potential to oversee greater opportunities in state-level leadership and implementation. Currently, the scope of the GOWD lies within approving plans that the individual area workforce investment boards create and overseeing the One Stop Shop certification process. By offering guidance through policies, process maps and standard operating procedures, GOWD has the opportunity to formally lead the regional WIBs. Currently, the regions vary in level of formality when it comes to utilizing process maps and standard operating procedures. For example, the Fulton County regional plan has a customer flow chart, in addition to a policy and procedures manual.

States like Florida and Utah serve as excellent examples of leadership through policy at the state level. As a state, Florida leads the regional WIBs by enforcing a very explicit council structure. On the other hand, Utah implements a very explicit service delivery structure.

A best in practice example of explicit policy set by the state and implemented by the region would be Florida’s council structure. Workforce Florida, Inc. (WFI) is a quasi-public and non-profit organization established by Florida as the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) to administer the Workforce Investment Act. Three councils make up the SWIB: First Jobs/First Wages Council – focused on youth education and work experience; Better Jobs/Better Wages Council – focused on families and welfare to work programs; and High Skills/High Wages Council – focused on attracting employees. Florida requires each of the local level WIBs to maintain all three councils. By creating policy that requires the regional board to create the same three boards, the state sets a policy that the regional level cannot misinterpret.

Utah delivers seamless service since the state’s Department of Workforce Services (DWS) administers nearly all workforce development and many related programs. In addition to having only one statewide workforce development effort, Utah has limited their span of control in the local level. In Utah, there are no local boards for administering WIA. Five regional planning councils provide input to key aspects of workforce policy. These regional planning councils are different from the regional WIBs in that the chair of the regional planning council also serves as a part of the state WIB. Including the regional planning chairs at the state WIB further promotes coordination and uniformity in implementation.

Utah’s staffing structure in the One-Stop career centers also reflects state leadership in implementation. State employees administer the One-Stop Career Centers, perform services and support activities like administration, eligibility determination, employment services and business services. According to one report, “The key to success appears to be how well the One-Stop Career Centers are managed and operated, not who operates them and their program orientation.” Customers in Utah can expect to visit an employment center or One-Stop shop and see services administered for the WIA, Wagner-Peyser Act, TANF, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and childcare.

With designated, specialized staff, Utah’s service delivery can provide quality business services with franchise-like consistency. This consistency is achieved through disciplined state management. The following service delivery flow chart shows how explicit Utah makes its vision of implementation. By providing process flow maps and standard operating procedures, Utah guarantees the same quality of service throughout all of its One Stop centers.

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INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

The Governor’s Office of Workforce Development is a separate legal entity from the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL). Historically, GDOL had administered the WIA funds. However, in 2012, the legislature moved federal WIA funds into the governor’s office, in order for GOWD to carry out the mission to “implement state workforce development policy as directed by the Governor and to serve as staff to the Georgia Workforce Investment Board.”

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While GOWD collaborates with GDOL, there appears to be some duplication between the agencies. For example, even though a job seeker may receive WIA services, a county like Dekalb will send people that wish to file for unemployment insurance to GDOL to file, only one out of the 13 available One-Stop centers in the region with the capability to do so.\(^\text{15}\)

The creation of a separate agency at the state level creates an opportunity for interagency coordination and a broader scope beyond only WIA but also Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds, unemployment insurance and other workforce related efforts. The GOWD could expand its interpretation of “high level coordination” and act as the center that reconciles all of the duplicative workforce development acts.\(^\text{16}\) The GOWD has the opportunity to lead the state and influence the regional boards by creating the relationships at the state level to be duplicated at the regional level, instead of leaving it to the regions.

Looking at the best practices within states, interagency coordination is best achieved through the interagency model, co-location, consolidation and memoranda of understanding (MOU). The interagency model is a coordination of “tasks by dozens of agencies at the federal, state and local level.”\(^\text{17}\) The use of the interagency model “depends on the strategic goals of the organization and on how those goals are adapted to meet the demands of the environment.”\(^\text{18}\) Workforce development requires this specialized strategic alignment to promote education, combat poverty and develop the economy.

Michigan best demonstrates an interagency model. Institutionalizing the interagency model can also be represented by co-location or consolidation. Workforce development implementation in Florida best illustrates these models of co-location, consolidation and the use of MOUs.

In Florida, the Governor coordinates workforce development efforts across agencies at the state level. According to one report, “states and local areas with more integrated workforce investment programs provide services more seamlessly with less fragmentation and duplication.”\(^\text{19}\) The Workforce Florida Act of 1996 encouraged the co-location of the offices that administer TANF services, Welfare-to-Work, and the Food Stamp Employment and Training services. Co-location is a solution for government agencies to break down silos, reduce silos, decrease cost structures and create a more connected government.\(^\text{20}\)

In addition to sharing space, workforce agencies share personnel. Representatives from the Florida SWIB sit on the State Economic Development Board. In turn, members of the State Economic Development Board sit on the SWIB.

\(^{15}\) “Comprehensive WIA Local Plan.” (Dekalb Workforce Development, 2012) 18.


Board sit on the SWIB. While the local level leadership has the ability to lead in business engagement, it is the state leadership that can aid in interagency coordination. Florida’s strong state influence leads the local boards, in addition to the consolidation of workforce development with economic development.

Florida also consolidates other workforce development efforts into the administration of the WIA. In addition to controlling WIA funding, the state WIB also administers TANF and Wagner-Peyser funds, which are administered at the local level in the One Stop career center. Although TANF has a strong work first orientation opposed to the WIA's training first orientation, One Stop administrators immediately grant TANF recipients intensive services like comprehensive assessments and the development of an individual employment plan.

To demonstrate how partnerships are made at the state level, Florida issues a memorandum of understanding that allows the state to employ the career service employees and veteran’s representatives. Having the state pay for some of the employees is an extension of the state’s presence, resources, funding and direction. State funds pay for salaries and benefits, while funding for WIA, TANF and Wagner-Peyser trickles down to the regional WIBs. In Georgia, the regional WIBs are responsible for establishing relationships and creating their own MOUs. For instance, there is an MOU between the GDOL and the Dekalb County WIB. Through this MOU, the GDOL agrees to provide the Dekalb County WIB with services under the Wagner-Peyser Act at the One-Stop center.

Michigan’s workforce investment board is housed within the Department of Career Development, alongside TANF, food stamps, unemployment insurance and rehabilitation services. The Michigan WIB strengthened itself with the inclusion of performance information in their workforce programs. The Michigan’s Office of Labor Market Information (OLMI) helps job seekers, businesses and policymakers make informed choices about education and training. The OLMI collects data and analyzes trends on labor force characteristics. At the regional level, the OLMI works closely with the local boards and state planners.

Michigan’s demand-driven workforce development strategy uses an interagency model informed with labor market information to tackle the trauma of a “new threat environment” when the economy collapsed. The interagency model fit the harsh economic climate that Michigan faced since no single agency could recover the automobile industry. Combining labor market information, career development and economic planning has helped Michigan attract new industries and retrain a workforce.

**LABOR MARKET ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

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A disconnect exists between the state WIB and the regional WIBs because the state generates and communicates a large amount of labor market information to the regional WIBs, but offers little interpretation. Georgia could make better use of labor market information through further analysis and application to economic development. Instead of requiring regions to perform their own analysis of the labor market information to determine their work plans and their region’s needs for economic development, the state should use their resources and reach to perform this function for the regions. Currently, the state WIB sends a compact disc with labor market information alongside the questionnaire for strategic planning that regional WIBs are required to answer in order to formulate their strategic plans. The state has the opportunity to provide more direction.

Looking at the local plans, many regions did not include a clear answer to the following portion of the WIB work plans. The question that prompts the WIBs to indicate their needs reads as follows:

“Using the CD containing the most recent labor market information for your area and the results of your strategic planning activities, please describe the demand (current and projected employment and skill needs of businesses) and supply (availability of skilled workers) aspects of your local labor market. List data sources used in your analysis. Review ETA’s National Strategic Directions (TEGL 13-06), and incorporate as appropriate. All of the tables were updated with the most recent information. NOTE: DT3: Customized LMI Planning Data for Local WIA Areas CDs, developed by GDOL Workforce Information and Analysis, were distributed during the last planning cycle.”

Within the South Georgia Area/Region 18 plan, we see that the response indicated in the local WIB plan does not make the connection between the industry mix within the region and the skills offered. There is a disconnect between the skills training the regional WIB is capable of providing and the industry jobs that are available. Or, there are some instances like Region 20, who contracted with a third party in 2005 to help determine their labor market information, but then decided to reuse their analysis because their needs “seem(ed) to remain relatively unchanged at this time.”

On the other hand, there are other regions like Region 4 – Cobb County, who provide links on the front page of their website to additional “labor market data.” Moreover, within Region 13, we see that the addition of Plant Vogtle would require a nuclear skills set, and “the nuclear skills trade occupation will also be in high demand.” Some WIBs are more active and competent at interpreting the local labor market information than others.

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22 “Local WIA Workforce Development Plan Guidance, Updated for PY 2011.” (South Georgia Workforce Investment Area Service Delivery Region 11, Area 18) 19.

23 “Comprehensive Local WIA Plan, Updated for PY 2011.” (Coastal Workforce Services, 2011) 17.


25 “Comprehensive Local WIA Plan PY 2011 - 2012.” (Richmond/Burke Counties Workforce Investment Area) 14.
Like Region 13, Michigan employs its labor market information in a way that strengthens the effectiveness of its workforce system. Michigan’s transformation of the auto labor industry represents the power found in collaboration coupled with the interpretation and implementation of labor market information. Defense-related jobs require a high-tech, skilled workforce, which Michigan already had in its auto industry. Local community colleges had developed special programs to transition laid-off auto workers and small businesses to the defense sector. Transportation equipment manufacturing (military armored vehicles, light tanks and tank components) comprised 75.5 percent of defense dollars awarded in 2011. According to the 2011 report of Michigan Economic and Workforce Indicators, defense spending was a major contributor to the economic strength of the economy – ranking fourth among Great Lakes states in dollar value of defense contracts awarded.  

In some regions, the scope of work and skills are basic: literacy, writing and arithmetic. The job seekers that would use these job-training services are deficient in basic skills and require remedial services. The state has articulated one direction – training the next generation of workers – but in some regions – WIBs find they need to train people how to read and write. This fact reveals a high need for education at the basic level and long-term case management, especially for people that lose manufacturing jobs.

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CONCLUSION

Georgia faces many challenges – an expansive geographical area to service, a segregated service delivery system between workforce programs offered by GOWD and the GDOL, and a higher-than-the-national-average unemployment rate. Yet, with these major obstacles, GOWD has managed to implement a statewide strategy for workforce development via supporting the state workforce investment board.

Our research set out to discover what work the state and regional boards undertake, what their main priorities in service are, and what work exists towards accomplishing these goals. We evaluated the WIBs based upon the initial criteria set forth in the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998. We used state and local annual plans and reports and state labor market information to summarize and evaluate key WIB services in the three service delivery categories: adults, dislocated workers and youth, in addition to three levels of service including self-services, core service and intensive services.

Our research showed that Georgia’s hands off approach with local WIBs in implementation of services left many local WIBs without proper plans to deliver the three key service categories. Local plans can be severely limited in their approach to service delivery, relying mainly on more “cut and paste” ideas from the state office. A few WIBs have taken a more rounded approach to service delivery by completing their own strategic assessments for service delivery and utilized local employment information in designing their career services. These mostly volunteer WIBs should be commended for professionally designing a localized program for service delivery using local labor market information beyond the basic information provided by the state.

Overall, we believe that there are tremendous opportunities for the state to implement best practices in workforce development. The best practices of explicit state policies in the form of standards, process maps and other implementation guidelines create an impression of seamless service delivery, even among different workforce development programs from different departments or agencies. Taking a step further from explicitly outlining state policies would be to coordinate multiple agencies at the state level to set the example for the regional level. Interagency coordination alleviates duplicative efforts and creates a customer experience that is less fragmented.

We believe that the GOWD should create memoranda of understanding at the state level and eventually move toward co-location and consolidation. Interagency coordination would also require a close relationship with the agency that generates labor market information. In this case, the GOWD would have to go beyond its current relationship with the GDOL. We propose that the GOWD work with the GDOL to interpret the labor market information for each region so that the regional WIBs create informed and focused strategic plans. We believe that these recommendations to improve service delivery will alleviate the duplication of services, ambiguous implementation guidelines and uninformed strategic planning.
### APPENDIX A: LOCAL PLAN EVALUATION MATRIX

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APPENDIX B: MAP OF GEORGIA WIBS

Workforce Investment Areas

Area 1 = Northwest Georgia
Area 2 = Georgia Mountains
Area 3 = City of Atlanta
Area 4 = Cobb
Area 5 = DeKalb
Area 6 = Fulton County
Area 7 = Atlanta Regional
Area 8 = West Central Georgia
Area 9 = Northeast Georgia
Area 10 = Macon-Bibb
Area 11 = Middle Georgia
Area 12 = Richmond-Burke
Area 13 = East Central Georgia
Area 14 = Lower Chattahoochee
Area 15 = Middle Flint
Area 16 = Heart of Georgia Altamaha
Area 17 = Southwest Georgia
Area 18 = South Georgia
Area 19 = Southeast Georgia
Area 20 = Coastal