

**Indiana Strategic Skills Initiative:
An Independent Assessment
of the SSI Process**

January 2007

**Indiana Department of
Workforce Development**

**Prepared by
Workforce Development Associates**

Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared by Workforce Development Associates in partial fulfillment of a contract with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development to conduct an independent assessment of the Indiana Strategic Skills Initiative (SSI). A significant number of Indiana professionals at the state and local levels provided invaluable insight into the SSI process and their willingness to share their perceptions is most appreciated. One cannot help but to be impressed by the level of collaboration and involvement of individuals throughout the state engaged in the SSI process.

The findings and recommendations reflected herein are those of Workforce Development Associates and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development.

Questions regarding this report should be directed to Andrew Penca, Commissioner, Indiana Department of Workforce Development, 10 North Senate Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-2277.

Contents	Page
Executive Summary	3
Background and Context	5
Assessment Purpose and Methodology.....	7
Online Survey Findings.....	10
Site Visitation Results.....	17
Conclusions and Recommendations	20
Appendices	24
Appendix A - Online Survey Instrument	25
Appendix B – Site Visit Protocol	29
Appendix C – Survey Comments	31
Appendix D – References.....	34

Executive Summary

In June 2005 the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (Department) announced the \$23 million two-year Strategic Skills Initiative (SSI). This initiative was designed to identify occupational and skills shortages in high-wage industries, determine the root causes of those shortages, and design and implement competitively-funded solutions to address the shortages.

From July 2006 through January 2007 an independent assessment of the SSI process was conducted. The assessment included a document review of all reports generated by core agents and consortia in each of the eleven Economic Growth Regions (EGRs), an online survey to assess the perceptions of various groups involved in the SSI process, and focus groups/key interviews in each of the EGRs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations are derived from all sources in the independent assessment—focus group and key interviews, telephone interviews, online survey results, and extensive document reviews.

Conclusions

- The design and structure of the SSI process as employed in each of the eleven EGRs was both comprehensive and focused.
- The Department provided clear information about the SSI process and its purpose and useful methodological guidance to the regions relative to the conduct of SSI work in each region.
- The quantity and quality of data and workshops provided for the SSI Research and Identification Phase were provided in a timely manner, conveniently accessible to all regions, and clearly useful to individuals directly involved in the SSI process.
- The SSI process as implemented in each region appeared to be coherent in design, imagination, and innovation. The regions are to be complimented on their willingness and ability to carry out the SSI process in each region and for their level of involvement with the process.
- In most cases a significant amount of internal capacity has been built in the region to address future occupational and skill sets shortages. Aspects of the SSI process have been

institutionalized so that most regions now have the capacity to identify shortages, root causes, and possible solutions.

- There appeared to be regional buy-in from business, industry and labor that played a key role in the solutions identified to address the occupational and skills shortages. The SSI process has furthered regional thinking and in some cases broken down barriers to implementation of a demand-driven workforce investment system.
- The SSI process provided a framework for collaboration that supported the work involved in the selection of newly-established regional workforce boards and regional operators.
- While the SSI process was highly structured and time dependent, the Department showed a willingness to work with core agents and others to be responsive to the unique nature of each region.
- All of the states' regions, not a select few, benefited to varying degrees from their involvement in the SSI process. The process targeted solutions that represented shortages and skills gaps in existing and/or emerging occupations.

Recommendations

- Conduct an assessment of the SSI process midway through the first year of solutions funding to identify challenges associated with implementing solutions. Also, conduct a year-end assessment to determine if funded activities are reaching intended targets.
- Continue to support new workforce boards and regional operators to build on the internal capacity that has been generated to analyze occupational and skill sets shortages and assist them as they identify creative solutions to address shortages.
- Document and disseminate best practices associated with implementation of selected solutions in each EGR.
- Continue to foster regional buy-in to the importance of workforce development through the solicitation of input from an array of local groups and, where possible, encourage grass-roots decision-making at the regional level.

Background and Context

In June 2005 the Indiana Department of Workforce Development announced the \$23M two-year Strategic Skills Initiative. This initiative was designed to accomplish three primary objectives:

1. identify skill and occupational shortages in high-wage industries
2. determine the root causes of shortages
3. design and implement (competitively-funded) solutions to address shortages

The innovative SSI process was designed to make the Indiana Workforce Development System more of a demand-driven system and to:

- link regional workforce development and economic development
- enable the state to focus workforce resources on human capital bottlenecks to economic development
- stimulate regional thinking within eleven newly defined EGRs
- build local capacity for professionals to analyze workforce investment issues in the context of economic development.

The SSI process included two phases: Phase I consisted of Research and Identification (Planning Phase) and Phase II consisted of Solutions Implementation (Training Phase). Each EGR was responsible for assembling a planning consortium to facilitate garnering multiple perspectives in the region. The consortiums were to be broadly representative of Local Workforce Investment Boards, economic development officials, regional employers, business and industry associations, educational institutions, Chamber of Commerce members, organized labor, and others as appropriate. Each EGR consortium was led by a core agent.

EGR consortiums were provided with extensive data and professional development to assist them in the SSI process. This included an extensive SSI Data Packet, an SSI How-To-Handbook, and SSI workshops. This *toolkit* was designed to assist in the identification of occupational and skill shortages, root causes of the shortages, and in the development of solutions tied directly to the root causes. These materials and professional development experiences were provided by the Indiana Business Research Center and Workforce Associates, Inc.

During the Planning Phase grants were made to each of the EGRs and awarded to each consortium that applied and met the requirements of a Request for Application distributed by the Department. For

the Training Phase, money was awarded on a competitive basis to consortia that submitted the best solutions to address critical skill shortages and the causes of these shortages. An aggressive time schedule was established offering regional consortia approximately two months each for submitting three reports for the Planning Phase as follows: an Occupational and Skill Shortage Report, an SSI Root Causes Report, and a Regional Solutions Report.

As a result of the EGR's work in developing Occupational and Skill Shortage Reports, fifteen high-wage industries and occupations were identified with significant shortages. These included shortages in agribusiness, advanced manufacturing, life sciences and health care, and scientific and technical professions. Critical skills needed for these industries and occupations included skills in science, mathematics, reading comprehension, critical thinking, judgment and decision making, active learning and writing, and system skills such as system analysis and evaluation. The Root Causes Reports from the EGRs identified supply and demand driven causes of shortages including education and training capacity, career awareness, and employer recruitment and retention practices.

For the Solutions Reports, EGRs proposed solutions and requests for funding totaling \$26,445,000 and identified 85 potential solutions to address occupational and skill shortages identified regionally. The Department funded approximately \$14,225,000 or 46 different solutions in the 11 EGRs.

Table 1 shown below indicates the amount of funding allocated by the Department for the Planning and Training Phases of the SSI process.

Table 1 - SSI Funding Allocated for Planning and Training Phases		
Economic Growth Regions (EGRs)	Research and Identification (Planning Phase) Allocation	Solutions (Training Phase) Allocation
1 \$31	1,122	\$1,511,580
2 270,	195	1,583,112
3 262,	477	1,768,246
4 221,	674	346,202
5 255,	375	778,241
6 263,	131	2,114,082
7 244,	346	691,203
8 251,	812	1,853,800
9 211,	541	975,576
10 144,	418	1,387,810
11 203,	383	1,215,829

It is estimated that solutions will result in the training of 6,300 Indiana residents, 3,650 Indiana residents will be credentialed or degreed, and 2,350 Indiana residents will fill shortage occupations. Using a variety of funding sources, skill shortages have been funded in advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, health care, entrepreneurship, and agribusiness.

Because of commonalities identified in the EGRs' reports, three key policy initiatives are being addressed at the state level to include:

1. emerging workers and their futures in advanced manufacturing
2. retaining registered nurses and how to stop the perpetuating shortage
3. immersing high school teachers in the practical application of theory

The Indiana SSI process was based in part on the Indiana Department of Workforce Development's determination to learn from the Illinois' Critical Skill Shortage Initiative and improve upon it. When contrasted with Illinois' process, the Indiana initiative was different in that it focused more on areas including: increasing economic development, building internal capacity of regional staff, and providing extensive data and coaching to individuals in the EGRs in a highly-compressed time schedule. It is important to note that at the same time the SSI process was taking place in Indiana, the regional administrative platform was restructured moving from fifteen Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIA) to eleven newly formed Economic Growth Regions. While the restructuring of the existing LWIA system in Indiana was not a part of this independent assessment, it did have an influence on SSI planning and development in several of the EGRs.

Assessment Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this project was to conduct an independent assessment of the Indiana Strategic Skills Initiative (SSI) process. It was not intended to examine the results or outcomes of the solutions funded in each of eleven Economic Growth Regions (EGRs). That assessment should be conducted at a later time after the EGRs have had opportunity to fully implement the solutions funded by the Department. Later, the State of Indiana can determine if the solutions funded as a part of the SSI process have created higher skills/high-wage jobs, whether the results have enhanced the competitiveness and the viability of regional businesses and organizations, and if the SSI process ultimately enhanced the economic development of each EGR.

This assessment was designed to provide information that could be used to guide the Departments' decisions concerning the adoption or modification of the SSI process in the future. It was intended to document involvement of individuals in the EGRs, to aid in administrative decision making, to facilitate possible corrective actions, and to increase the State's understanding of how best to support EGRs as they address an array of occupational and skills shortages.

Several key questions guided this inquiry that included:

- Did the Department provide clear information about SSI and its purpose?

- Did the Department provide clear methodological guidance to the regions relative to the conduct of the three phases of the SSI work?
- Was the quantity and quality of data needed for SSI research made available in a timely manner and was it conveniently accessible?
- Was the SSI process as implemented in each EGR coherent in design, imaginative, and innovative?
- Did the EGR consortiums and their core agents form competent SSI research teams to conduct the work or did they outsource it to outside consultants?
- Did the Department provide appropriate assistance and coaching to the EGR teams throughout the SSI process?
- Are the shortages and root causes identified in each EGR clearly linked to research showing critical occupations and skills shortages in each EGR?
- To what extent was the SSI process in each EGR broad in scope and how was it linked with regional and economic development?
- Has there been regional buy-in from business, industry and labor, and those expected to play a role in the solutions identified to address occupational and skills shortages.
- Has the region been able to leverage other funds and resources to support the SSI process and to what extent are the solutions identified sustainable in the long term?
- To what extent does the SSI process further regional thinking and break down barriers that exist to implementation of a demand-driven Workforce Investment System?
- Did the SSI process provide a framework for activity by the newly-established regional workforce boards?
- Did the SSI process develop a regional capacity for similar analysis and strategic thinking/planning at the regional level?
- Is there evidence that new types of public/private partnerships have been implemented as a part of the SSI process?
- To what extent can recommendations be made for further developing benchmarks for conducting a SSI in Indiana and in other states?

The independent assessment of the SSI process included three phases:

1. The first phase included a comprehensive document review of all Research and Identification Reports, Root Causes Reports, and Solutions Reports generated by consortia in each of the EGRs. This included a review and assessment of how those reports were produced. It also included a review of the initial and ongoing instructions given by the Department to the regions, the methodological guidance provided, data made available, the capacity building within the SSI teams, and the coaching provided by the Department to those teams. Information

obtained from the document review aided in conducting the next two phases of the assessment.

2. The second phase of the assessment involved an extensive online survey to assess the perceptions of various groups about the SSI process and to address a variety of questions associated with implementation of the process. E-mail addresses for the survey were obtained from the eleven SSI core agents or new regional operators. The online survey was developed in August-September 2006 and pilot tested with a group of six individuals from across the state.

The online survey instrument was designed to identify:

- where the respondent lived, their role in the SSI process, and their level of involvement with the SSI process
- activities associated with the research and identification phase of the SSI process
- activities associated with the root causes phase of the SSI process
- the extent to which the process affected the internal capacity of the region to address occupational and skill shortages
- the activities involved in the solutions phase of the SSI process
- the overall impact of SSI in each of the state's EGRs.

The survey instrument also offered the opportunity for individuals to make any additional comments about the SSI process. To support dissemination of the survey, two hundred fifty-eight online surveys were sent via e-mail from Commissioner Andrew Penca on November 30, 2006. Further, 2 subsequent follow-up communications were sent to increase the response. A copy of the online survey instrument appears in Appendix A of this report.

3. The third phase of the SSI assessment included visits by Dr. John S. Washburn and/or Ms. Kathy Lively with core agents and leadership teams in each of the EGRs. Those visits occurred from August 2006 through January 2007. A copy of the questions used during the visits appears in Appendix B of this report. A focus group methodology was used during the onsite visits. The methodology included a focus group with lead team and/or consortium members in each region and key interviews with staff and others more significantly involved in the SSI process. A visitation report was prepared for each of the EGRs.

Responses from the online survey and interviews/focus groups are detailed in the next section of this report. Survey data are reported for the 114 respondents to the online survey.

Dominant and recurrent themes that emerged from the onsite visits are clustered into strengths and challenges and also appear in the next section of this report.

Online Survey Findings

The online survey was disseminated to 258 verified e-mail addresses during November and early December 2006. Of that number, 114 individuals (44%) returned the surveys. A copy of the online survey instrument appears in Appendix A of this report. Table 2 shows the number of respondents by EGR.

Table 2 - Online Survey Distribution <i>Total Number of Respondents = 44%</i>		
Economic Growth Region (EGR)	Total Distributed	Percent Returned
1 5		4
2 24		21
3 11		9
4 10		8
5 15		13
6 21		18
7 5		4
8 13		11
9 5		4
10 2		1
11 3		2
n=114 Note: The percent return column represents the percentage of return by region for the total number of respondents. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.		

The largest number of responses was from Regions 2, 6, 5, and 8 respectively. The lowest number of responses was from Regions 10 and 11.

Table 3 below reports the role of respondents in the SSI process. Individuals were given the opportunity to identify the various roles that they may have served as part of the SSI process ranging from core agent, fiscal agent, economic development professional, business/industry representative, K-12 educational institution representative, higher education institution representative, organized labor representative, Chamber of Commerce representative, community or faith-based organization representative, service provider representative, or some other role.

Table 3 - Respondents' Role in SSI		
Role	n	%
Business/Industry Representative	18	12
Chamber Representative	7	5
Community- or Faith-based Representative	6	4
Core Agent	22	15
Economic Development Professional	26	15
Fiscal Agent for SSI	8	5
Higher Education Representative	8	5
K-12 Representative	6	4
Labor Representative	5	3
Service Provider	17	12
Others	17	12
n=114		
Note: Individuals may have served in more than one capacity and responses may be duplicated. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.		

The largest number of roles identified by survey respondents was from those serving as core agent representatives or economic development professionals. This was followed by individuals serving as business/industry representatives, service providers, or others. Others included individuals who may have been involved as consultants working on the SSI process, local government officials, or EGR board members.

Tables 4 through 9 below show the responses of participants in various areas. The tables outline the respondents' perceptions of representation in the SSI process, activity in the Research and Identification phase of the SSI process, activity in the Root Causes phase of the SSI process, the extent to which internal capacity in the region was effected by the SSI process, activity in the Solutions phase of the SSI process, and the overall impact of SSI.

Table 4 - Survey Respondents' Perceptions of SSI Representation and Involvement in the SSI Process						
SSI Involvement	S/A n%	M/A n%	M/D n%	S/D n%	N/A n%	Overall Mean
Consortium assembled	77(83)	17(13)	4(2) 6(2) 1(1)			3.6
Consortium included private sector representative	65(73)	25(21)	7(4) 8(2) 2(2)			3.5
Executive team assembled	82(88)	11(9)	3(2) 6(2) 3(3)			3.7
Consortium represented by a variety of groups	73(78)	21(7)	6(3) 6(2) 2(2)			3.5
n=114						
Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Averages computed on a scale of 4 for (Strongly Agree (S/A), 3 for Moderately Agree (M/A), 2 for Moderately Disagree (M/D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (S/D). The N/A responses in Table 4 and Tables 5-9 signified that a response was not applicable given the respondent's role in the SSI process.						

- A significant number of respondents (96%) either strongly agreed or moderately agreed that a consortium had been assembled to represent the EGRs in the SSI process.
- The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that the consortium was comprised of private sector representatives (94%) who could assist in identifying and verifying occupational shortages and skills gaps, that an executive team had been assembled (97%) to provide leadership for the regions' SSI efforts, and finally that the consortium was broadly representative (85%) of local economic development officials, community-based organizations, Chambers of Commerce, business/industry, education, labor, and service provider representatives.
- Average responses for the group in all areas associated with SSI representation ranged from 3.5 to 3.7.

Table 5 - Activity in the Research and Identification Phase						
This table shows activity that occurred in the Research and Identification phase of the SSI process. There were 5 questions in the online survey related to this phase of the process.						
Research and Identification Phase	S/A n%	M/A n%	M/D n%	S/D n%	N/A n%	Overall Mean
SSI toolkit use	39(58)	33(37)	5(4)	3(1)	27(25)	3.4
Coherent methodology employed	63(75)	28(22)	4(2)	3(1)	9(8)	3.5
Primary/secondary data used	59(70)	27(24)	7(4)	4(1)	9(8)	3.5
Short- and long-term shortages identified	48(61)	32(30)	10(6)	7(2)	8(8)	3.2
Location of short- and long-term shortages identified	47(60)	32(30)	13(8)	5(2)	7(7)	3.2
n=114						
Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Averages computed on a scale of 4 for (Strongly Agree (S/A), 3 for Moderately Agree (M/A), 2 for Moderately Disagree (M/D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (S/D)						

- A substantial majority of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (95%) that the SSI *toolkit* provided to the EGRs was useful to assist them in identifying occupational and skill shortages.
- A significant majority of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (97%) that their region had used a coherent methodology to identify industries or clusters of industries within the EGR that were critical to the economy of the region.
- Almost all of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (94%) that consortium representatives made use of primary and secondary sources of data to identify industries or clusters of industries critical to the economy of the region. More than 90% of the respondents

strongly or moderately agreed that regional representatives were able to identify the size of short- and long-term occupational shortages in the region. Also, 90% of regional representatives believe they identified the location of short- and long-range occupational shortages in the region.

- With respect to questions regarding research and identification, the overall average of respondents ranged from 3.2 to 3.5.

Table 6 - Activity in the Root Causes Phase						
Respondents were asked a series of questions associated with their perceptions of activities involved in the Root Causes phase of the SSI process. Table 6 shows the responses to those questions.						
Root Causes Phase	S/A n%	M/A n%	M/D n%	S/D n%	N/A n%	Overall Mean
Web-based workshop support	22(47)	23(37)	13(14)	5(3)	42(40)	3.0
Consortium identified key industries/employers experiencing shortages	71(78)	22(18)	5(3)	4(1)	3(3)	3.6
Shortages represented strong employment demand	55(65)	36(32)	1(1)	10(3)	2(2)	3.3
Shortages critical to industry competitiveness	64(72)	31(26)	0(0)	8(2)	2(2)	3.5
Addressing shortages will expand worker benefits/earnings	65(71)	31(26)	4(2)	3(1)	1(1)	3.5
Root causes identified	42(52)	38(36)	16(10)	7(2)	3(3)	3.2
n=114						
Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Averages computed on a scale of 4 for (Strongly Agree (S/A), 3 for Moderately Agree (M/A), 2 for Moderately Disagree (M/D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (S/D)						

- Respondents were asked to identify their perceptions of the Web-based SSI workshops and the extent to which they helped in the development of the SSI analysis and report writing. As one might have expected, a number of survey respondents did not participate in the SSI workshops and were not able to address this question. However, of those responding, 84% indicated that the SSI workshops did aid in the development of the SSI analysis and report writing.
- Almost all of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (96%) that the consortium identified the key industries and employers in each region that are experiencing or are projecting to experience shortages in critical occupations and skills.
- The overwhelming majority of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (97%) that the occupations and skill sets shortages identified by the region represented strong employment demand.

- A significant number of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (98%) that specific occupation and skill sets shortages identified for their region were critical to industry competitiveness.
- Almost all of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (97%) that addressing the specific occupations and skill sets shortages identified for their region could provide good earnings and benefits for the workers.
- Finally, the majority of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (88%) that regional representatives were able to identify the root causes of the critical occupations and skill sets shortages in their region.
- Average responses in all areas associated with root causes ranged from 3.0 to 3.6.

Table 7 - Impact on Internal Capacity						
Respondents were asked a series of questions associated with the impact of the SSI process on the internal capacity of the EGR. Six questions were identified to assess the issue of internal capacity.						
Internal Capacity	S/A n%	M/A n%	M/D n%	S/D n%	N/A n%	Overall Mean
Existing resources will be used to leverage solutions	44(54)	41(38)	11(7)	4(1)	3(3)	3.3
Local staff employed to institutionalize the process	45(64)	22(23)	16(11)	3(1)	14(4)	3.3
Staff hired to perform research and analysis	53(68)	27(26)	8(5)	2(1)	9(9)	3.5
Level of in-house expertise of staff increased	30(50)	33(38)	13(10)	4(2)	21(21)	3.1
Consultants hired to perform research and analysis	43(61)	27(29)	9(6)	12(4)	10(10)	3.1
Consultants used extensively	24(40)	30(38)	20(17)	13(5)	14(14)	2.8
n=114 Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Averages computed on a scale of 4 for (Strongly Agree (S/A), 3 for Moderately Agree (M/A), 2 for Moderately Disagree (M/D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (S/D)						

- Most of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (92%) that to the extent possible, existing resources in the public and private sector will be leveraged to address the solutions identified to address occupational and skill shortages in the EGRs.
- More than 85% of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed that EGRs were able to employ additional local staff to help institutionalize the SSI process.
- Almost all of the respondents (94%) strongly or moderately agreed that core agents and/or consortiums had hired or allocated staff to perform the SSI research and analysis. Further, 88% of the respondents noted that the level of expertise of in-house staff to analyze labor

market information had been increased as a result of SSI training supported by Department. The majority of the respondents (90%) indicated that core agents or consortiums hired consultants to perform SSI research and analysis.

- Only 78% of respondents strongly or moderately agreed that consultants had been used extensively in helping the region to identify occupational shortages, root causes, and possible solutions.
- Average responses in all areas associated with internal capacity ranged from 2.8 to 3.5.

Table 8 - Activity in the Solutions Phase						
The next section of the online survey was associated with the activity involved in the Solutions phase of the SSI process. This phase of the SSI process allowed the EGRs to propose solutions for possible funding by the Department. This table shows the responses to five questions related to the solutions phase.						
Solutions Phase	S/A n%	M/A n%	M/D n%	S/D n%	N/A n%	Overall Mean
Solutions tied to root causes	49(59)	40(36)	6(4)	2(1)	3(3)	3.4
Clear alignment from identification to solutions	42(54)	44(42)	6(4)	2(1)	5(5)	3.3
Solutions represent meaningful effort to address root causes	56(69)	28(26)	7(4)	4(1)	4(4)	3.5
Industry partners involved in developing solutions	53(70)	26(26)	5(3)	3(1)	12(12)	3.5
Solutions have the potential to address shortages	61(72)	27(24)	5(3)	2(1)	3(3)	3.5
n=114 Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Averages computed on a scale of 4 for (Strongly Agree (S/A), 3 for Moderately Agree (M/A), 2 for Moderately Disagree (M/D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (S/D)						

- Most of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (95%) that the proposed solutions to addressing occupational and skill shortages were tied directly to the root causes identified by the EGR.
- A substantial number of respondents strongly or moderately agreed (96%) that there was clear alignment from the initial identification of occupational and skill sets shortages to the solutions identified to address them.
- Almost all of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (95%) that the solutions identified by the region represented meaningful efforts to address the root causes for the occupational and skill sets shortages.
- A significant number of respondents strongly or moderately agreed (96%) that industry partners were involved in the development of the solutions proposed by the region and 96% of

respondents strongly or moderately agreed that solutions identified by the region had the potential to address short and long-term occupational and skill sets shortages.

- Average responses in all areas for solutions questions ranged from 3.3 to 3.5.

Table 9 - Impact of the SSI Process						
The final section of the online survey instrument was focused on the impact of the SSI process. Table 9 shows the responses to six questions associated with SSI impact.						
Impact of the SSI Process	S/A n%	M/A n%	M/D n%	S/D n%	N/A n%	Overall Mean
Process allowed EGR to assess workforce issues in the context of economic development	59(69)	33(29)	3(2)	1(0)	2(3)	3.6
SSI allowed the EGR to link workforce/economic development to focus resources	55(67)	29(27)	9(6)	1(0)	5(5)	3.5
SSI process has stimulated regional thinking and collaboration	50(63)	32(33)	10(6)	2(1)	4(4)	3.3
SSI process has built internal capacity	41(54)	39(38)	10(7)	3(1)	5(5)	3.2
SSI process has the potential to improve the skills of Indiana's workforce	56(66)	33(29)	6(4)	2(1)	1(1)	3.5
SSI process has improved capacity to develop competitive advantages	38(53)	34(36)	15(10)	3(1)	8(8)	3.2
n=114						
Note: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Averages computed on a scale of 4 for (Strongly Agree (S/A), 3 for Moderately Agree (M/A), 2 for Moderately Disagree (M/D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (S/D)						

- Almost all of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (98%) that the SSI process allowed the region to think about and analyze workforce investment issues in the context of economic development.
- Most of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (94%) that the SSI process had provided the opportunity to link regional workforce development and economic development to enable the region to better focus its resources. Ninety nine percent of respondents believed that the SSI process had stimulated regional thinking and collaboration among employers, workforce, economic development, service providers, labor representatives, and educators within the region.
- Most of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (92%) that the entire SSI process had been useful in building internal capacity in the region for demand-drive workforce analysis.
- Almost all of the respondents strongly or moderately agreed (95%) that the SSI process had the potential to improve the skills of Indiana's workforce. Finally, 89% of the respondents

strongly or moderately agreed that the SSI process had improved the capacity of the region to develop competitive advantages to compete in the national and global economy.

- Average responses for those questions addressing SSI impact ranged from 3.2 to 3.6.

Site Visitation Results

From August, 2006 to January, 2007 visitations were conducted in each EGR to engage in focus groups and key interviews with more than 75 individuals involved in the SSI process. Key interviews typically lasted 30 minutes and focus groups about 1 ½ hours. The site visit questions appear in Appendix B of this report. A visitation report was prepared for each EGR. This section of the report identifies dominant and recurrent themes clustered in strengths, challenges and long-range needs emerging from the eleven visitations.

It is very important to understand the context of the EGR representatives' involvement in the SSI process and other significant activity occurring in the region. At the same time that the regions were involved in the SSI process, several regions were undergoing a significant restructuring to achieve status as an EGR. In these cases, county configurations in each region were often restructured, new regional operators were selected to provide leadership for the restructured workforce development system, and in two cases regions were involved in the development of proposals for the Federal Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) Initiative. In some cases, the core agent involved in providing leadership for the SSI process may have not have been the same individual(s) that were involved in negotiating and carrying out the Training Phase of the SSI process. This interesting array of participants and the regional restructuring probably influenced the ability of some EGRs to carry out all of the purposes intended by SSI and could have played a significant role in the success of SSI in selected regions. The SSI process may also have provided a framework for collaboration that assisted regional representatives as they formed a new regional workforce structure. This background is necessary to understand the context of the EGR representatives' involvement in the SSI process.

Strengths - The following are strengths identified as a result of site visits.

- In all regions visited, the SSI process clearly stimulated regional thinking about the relationship between the local economy, the workforce, and education. Often, participants noted that for the first time a group of representatives had come together to think in a broad-based fashion about how the economy, its workers, and the educational enterprises can work with one another to address occupational and skill sets shortages.

- For almost 75% of the regions, the capacity of the region to address labor market shortages has been dramatically increased as well as the regions' commitment to ongoing assessment of occupational and skill sets shortages and how they might be best addressed. The data and Webinars supported by the Department to assist in the SSI process appeared to be most useful in helping the regions to begin the process of analyzing data, identifying root causes, and proposing solutions to identify a range of occupational and skill sets shortages.
- The specific design and structure of SSI was identified as both comprehensive and focused. Regional representatives noted that in an unprecedented fashion, the Department had taken a relatively hands-off approach to the process by allowing them to systematically and objectively identify what drives the economy in the region and identify occupational and skill sets shortages. Participants noted that the Department approached the process in a business-like fashion making an investment in the regions rather than focusing on costs and allowed for a significant degree of grass-roots decision making.
- There was an extensive amount of collaboration identified by all of the regions among diverse groups with different value perspectives. Members of the leadership or executive teams interviewed were able to articulate broad and specific goals for the region and speak to the relationship between workforce and economic development. In a substantial number of regions, SSI appeared to serve as a catalyst for additional professional conversations that may have gone beyond discussions of occupational and skill sets shortages including attracting new employers, need for new highways, and a variety of infrastructure needs.
- The Department utilized a number of different funding streams to support the solutions identified by the EGRs. Regional representatives were pleased that funding had been put behind the process and the resources were provided in support of the regions' work in identifying solutions. This demonstrated the commitment of the Department to recognize the unique attributes of each region and provide funding to address important regional solutions.
- To varying degrees, solutions funding in each region will leverage some local dollars. In some regions, solutions funding has leveraged a significant amount of funding which when combined can have a dramatic impact on the ability of the region to address local needs.
- For those regions where considerable restructuring was taking place, a time of significant systemic change, the Department staff were willing to work with those regions. One might have expected a great deal of tension between the Department and region-level management staff during this period of restructuring and to observe this tension in the independent assessment of the SSI process. However, in most cases, regional representatives were able

to separate their involvement in restructuring with benefits accrued by their participation in the SSI process.

Challenges - The following are challenges identified as a result of site visits.

- In virtually all of the regions, the time-dependent nature of the SSI process (approximately two months for each report) was viewed negatively. In particular, regional representatives noted that the time involved in the Solutions Phase of the SSI process needed to be increased. They recognized the sense of urgency in completing the tasks. However, especially in areas where significant restructuring occurred, it was difficult for some of the regions to identify solutions to occupational and skill sets shortages.

As noted, the Department took a hands-off approach to the SSI process allowing the regions to systematically and objectively identify occupational and skill sets shortages. However, sometime late in the solutions negotiation process, a Strategic Skills Initiative Incentive Plan was put in place to set up two tiers of possible funding based on the annual deliverables to the solutions identified and funded by the Department. This became a part of the grant agreement between the Department and the region. A few regional representatives suggested that they might have generated placement outcomes differently had they been aware of this requirement prior to the development of the solutions proposal. This has also made implementation of the solutions somewhat difficult because of the process and the need for more information on how solutions will be evaluated.

- In some of the regions, there was a disconnect between the solutions proposed by the EGR and those that were ultimately funded by the Department. In those regions, individuals questioned the extent to which their involvement in the Research and Identification and Root Causes Phases of the SSI process were useful. In short, in several of the regions, it is not possible to clearly align research and identification and root causes results in a region with the solutions funded by the Department. Several regional representatives noted that there was some lack of clarity on how solutions proposals were evaluated and solutions identified for funding were selected.

Long-Range Needs - The following are long-range needs identified as a result of site visits.

- Regional representatives focused on the need for sustainability of the SSI process. In particular, they are concerned that regions will have the long-term ability to continue to address solutions funded by the Department beyond the first year of solutions funding. They indicated that an assessment should be made of the extent to which various solutions are impacting on

the regions' ability to address occupational and skill sets shortages. An extensive mid-year and year-end review should be conducted to assess the progress being made to address solutions funding by the Department.

- Regional representatives noted that the SSI process is, without question, worthy of replication. The visitations in each region suggest that the process might be replicated in future years to build on the internal capacity that has been generated. Most of the regions now have the ability to conduct extensive occupational and skill shortages research and analysis and identify root causes and possible solutions to address them. That capacity can be built upon and leveraged to further impact Indiana's workforce.
- As solutions are being implemented in each region, a best practices manual or conference might be considered to allow regions the opportunity to highlight some of the more innovative solutions in the regions. The visitation team was extremely impressed with the array of solutions funded and the unique approaches in each region to address those solutions. There is an opportunity here for regions to learn from one another about best approaches to address occupational and skill set shortages and how to use creative ways to leverage local dollars and continue the collaboration that existed in earlier phases of the SSI process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of the comprehensive documents review, online survey, and visitations made to each of the EGRs a number of conclusions have been drawn by the assessment team that are worthy of note.

The conclusions are as follows:

- The design and structure of the SSI process as employed in each of the eleven EGRs was both comprehensive and focused. The Department provided clear information about the SSI and its purpose and clear methodological guidance to the regions relative to the conduct of the SSI work in each region. For those regions involved in restructuring, the Department was willing to work with them during a time of significant systemic change.
- The quantity and quality of data and workshops provided during the SSI Research and Identification Phase were provided in a timely manner, conveniently accessible to all regions, and clearly useful to individuals directly involved in the SSI process.
- The SSI process as implemented in each region appeared to be coherent in design, imagination, and innovation. Regions employed a variety of processes during the three phases of the SSI process and are to be complimented on their willingness and ability to carry

out the SSI process in each region. One cannot help but to be impressed by the level of involvement of an array of individuals in the majority of the regions.

- In most cases, a significant amount of internal capacity has been built in the region to address future occupational and skill sets shortages. The level of expertise of in-house staff to analyze labor market information has been increased and aspects of the SSI process have been institutionalized so that each region now has the capability to identify shortages, root causes, and possible solutions. The SSI process has clearly encouraged regional vitality and collaboration bringing together a variety of groups to focus on the state's investment in Indiana's workers. The process appears to have increased an understanding of the relationship between economic development, workforce development, and education in the eleven EGRs.
- In most cases, there appeared to be regional buy-in from business, industry and labor that played a key role in the solutions identified to address occupation and skills shortages. In some regions, representatives have been able to leverage other funds and resources to support the SSI process. In these cases, it is clear that the solutions identified have the potential to become sustainable in the long-term. It appears that the SSI process has furthered regional thinking and in some cases broken down barriers that existed to implementation of a demand-driven workforce investment system.
- The SSI process provided a framework for collaboration in some areas that supported the work involved in the selection of the newly established regional workforce boards and regional operators. Often, it appeared that the SSI process was used as a vehicle to openly assist regional representatives as they formed a new regional workforce development structure. In some cases, new public/private partnerships have been implemented as a part of the SSI process.
- While the SSI process was highly structured and time dependent, the Department showed a willingness to work with core agents and others to be responsive to the unique nature of each region.
- All of the state's regions, not a select few, benefited to varying degrees from their involvement in the SSI process. The process targeted solutions that represented shortages and skills gaps in existing and emerging occupations.

Recommendations

The assessment team would like to acknowledge the hard work of individuals throughout the state engaged in carrying out the purpose and intent of the SSI process. As noted, a great deal has been accomplished to produce information and to facilitate the administration of regional decision making and future activity. Several recommendations are worthy of follow-up activity by the Department and include:

- Conduct an assessment of the SSI process midway through the first year of solutions funding to identify challenges associated with implementing solutions. A mid-year assessment may uncover new opportunities as well as to take stock of EGR progress. Also, conduct a year-end assessment to determine if funded activities are reaching intended targets. It will be important to examine whether the results of the SSI process have created higher skills/high wage jobs, whether the results have enhanced the competitiveness and viability of regional businesses and organizations, and if the SSI process ultimately enhanced the economic development of a region. In some regions, it may be useful to utilize case studies to fully document unique solutions being implemented to address workforce and economic development needs. This assessment only provides a snapshot of the SSI *process* in each region and not the implementation of the various solutions funded by the Department.
- Some of the solutions funded by the Department are long term in nature and may require continued funding to assure sustainability. Addressing some of the root causes to occupational and skill shortages in the region will require time, effort, and a long-term commitment by the state and regions as they continue to improve the economic development, workforce development, and education in each of the state's regions. The Department should continue to support new workforce boards and regional operators to build on the internal capacity that has been generated to analyze occupational and skill sets shortages and identify creative solutions to address them. In short, the Department can continue to serve as a catalyst for regional planning and development. The relatively unprecedented approach to grass-roots decision making appears to be a model that can be employed for other statewide purposes.
- Results of this report should be provided on the statewide SSI Web site for review by regional representatives. The best practices associated with various solutions funded in the regions should be documented and disseminated throughout the state. The state might consider hosting Webinars and/or a statewide conference to focus on some of the best practices and build upon the activity in each region and how all of the state's regions might benefit.

The identification of best practices should be based on a philosophical approach of continuous learning and improvement. To that end, successful best-practice transfer efforts are ongoing and dynamic and set benchmarks for documenting quality results. The Department may want to focus best practice documentation in areas such as best practice exchange among EGRs, benchmarking, good process and solutions practices, and project management.

- The Department should continue to foster regional buy-in to the importance of workforce development through the solicitation of input from an array of local groups, and, where possible, encourage grass-roots decision-making at the regional level. This should include providing multiple opportunities for statewide and cross-regional interaction. The framework for collaboration stimulated by SSI can build strong ties between groups that will solidify in years to come.

Appendices

Appendix A - Online Survey Instrument

Thank you in advance for assisting in the independent evaluation of the Indiana Department of Workforce Development Strategic Skills Initiative (SSI). The survey will take, at the most, 10 minutes to complete.

If you have questions or comments about the study contact Dr. John S. Washburn at 618-453-6726, jwash@siu.edu, or you can write to him c/o 621 Surrey Lane, Carbondale, IL 62901.



In which Indiana County do you live? _____

Which statement best describes your role in the Indiana Strategic Skills Initiative (SSI)?
(Check all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Core agent for the Strategic Skills Initiative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fiscal agent for the Strategic Skills Initiative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Economic development Professional
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business/Industry Representative
<input type="checkbox"/>	K-12 Educational Institution representative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Higher Education Institution representative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organized labor Representative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chamber of Commerce member
<input type="checkbox"/>	Community or Faith-Based organization representative
<input type="checkbox"/>	Service Provider representative

Other (Please specify):

Below are a number of statements about the Strategic Skills Initiative in your region. Mark the option that best describes the extent to which you agree with each statement.

S/D=Strongly Disagree, M/D=Moderately Disagree, M/A=Moderately Agree, S/A=Strongly Agree, N/A=Not Applicable Given My Role in the SSI Process

SSI Representation	S/D	M/D	M/A	S/A	N/A
A consortium was assembled to represent my Economic Growth Region in the SSI process.					
The consortium was comprised of private sector representatives who could assist in identifying and verifying occupational shortages and skills gaps.					
An executive team was assembled to help provide leadership for the region's SSI efforts.					
The consortium was represented with local economic development officials, community-based organizations, Chambers of Commerce, business/industry, education, labor, and service provider representatives.					
Research & Identification	S/D	M/D	M/A	S/A	N/A
The SSI "Toolkit", including the How-to Handbook and DWD workbook, supported the work of my region in preparing the three reports.					
The region used a coherent methodology to identify industries or clusters of industries within my economic growth region that are critical to the economy of the region.					
To my knowledge, consortium representatives made use of primary and secondary sources of data to identify industries or clusters of industries critical to the economy of the region.					
Regional representatives were able to identify the size of short and long-term occupational shortages in my region.					
Regional representatives identified the location of short and long-range occupational shortages in my region.					
Root Causes	S/D	M/D	M/A	S/A	N/A
The Web-based SSI Workshops helped in the development of the SSI analysis and report writing.					
The consortium identified the key industries and employers that are experiencing or are projected to experience shortages in critical occupations and skills?					
I believe the specific occupations and skill sets shortages identified by the region represent strong employment demand					
I believe the specific occupations and skill sets shortages identified for my region are critical to industry competitiveness.					
I believe that addressing specific occupations and skills sets and shortages identified for my region can provide good earnings and benefits for workers.					
Regional representatives were able to identify the root causes of the critical occupations and skill sets shortages identified for my region.					

Internal Capacity	S/D	M/D	M/A	S/A	N/A
To the extent possible, existing resources in the public and private sector will be leveraged to address solutions to occupational and skills shortages.					
The region was able to employ additional local staff to help institutionalize the SSI process in the region.					
The core agents and/or consortiums hired or allocated staff to perform the SSI research and analysis.					
The level of expertise of in house staff to analyze labor market information has been increased as a result of SSI training supported by the Department of Workforce Development.					
The core agents and/or consortiums hired consultants to perform the SSI research and analysis.					
Consultants were used extensively in helping the region to identify occupational shortages, root causes and possible solutions.					
Solutions	S/D	M/D	M/A	S/A	N/A
Proposed solutions to addressing occupational and skill shortages were tied directly to the root causes identified by my consortium.					
There is a clear alignment from the initial identification of occupational and skill sets shortages to the solutions identified to address them.					
The solutions identified by my region represent meaningful efforts to address the root causes identified for the occupational and skills sets shortages.					
Industry partners were involved in the development of the solutions proposed by the region.					
The solutions identified by my region have the potential to address short and long-term occupational and skill sets shortages.					
SSI Impact	S/D	M/D	M/A	S/A	N/A
The SSI process allowed the region to think about and analyze workforce investment issues in the context of economic development.					
The Strategic Skills Initiative has provided the opportunity to link regional workforce development and economic development to enable the region to better focus its resources.					
Overall, the SSI process has stimulated regional thinking and collaboration among employers, workforce, economic development, service providers, labor representatives, and educators within the region.					
Overall, the entire SSI process has been useful in building internal capacity in the region for demand-driven workforce analysis.					
As a summary judgment, the Strategic Skills Initiative has the potential to improve the skills of Indiana's workforce in my region.					
As a summary judgment, the Strategic Skills Initiative has improved the capacity of my region to develop competitive advantages to compete in the national and global economy.					
As a summary judgment, the Strategic Skills Initiative has the potential to improve the skills of Indiana's workforce in my region.					
As a summary judgment, the Strategic Skills Initiative has improved the capacity of my region to develop competitive advantages to compete in the national and global economy.					

Site Visit Questions

Identification Phase

1. Did core agents assemble a consortium to represent the assigned EGR in the SSI process? Was the consortium comprised of private industry representatives who could assist in identifying and verifying occupational shortages, skill gaps and root causes?
2. Did core agents assemble an “executive team” of individuals to drive the SSI efforts? Was the team represented by local economic development officials, Chambers of Commerce, industry, education, labor, and service provider representatives?
3. To what extent was a coherent methodology employed in the determination identification phase? Was this the methodology recommended in the SSI Guidebook?
4. To what extent did the region identify industries or clusters of industries within their EGR that are critical to the economy of the region? Did the region make use of primary and secondary sources in the identification process?
5. To what extent did the region specify the size and location of short and long-term occupational shortages?
6. After identifying industries or clusters of industries critical to the economy, did the regional teams find the key industries and employers that are experiencing or are projected to experience shortages and critical occupations and skills?
7. To what extent did specific occupations and skills sets in shortage represent strong employment demand, are critical to industry competitiveness, and provide good earnings and benefits for workers?
8. When critical skill set shortages are prevalent across multiple occupations, did the region specify the location and significance of the gaps? To what extent did the region’s work suggest the full engagement from industry representatives in the targeted key industries and/or cluster throughout the process?

Root Causes

9. To what extent was a coherent methodology employed in the determination of root causes? Was this the methodology recommended in the SSI Guidebook?
10. Did the region identify root causes and their relative importance in addressing skill shortages?
11. Did industry and labor partners verify that they were involved in the root cause analyses?
12. To what extent are solutions identified by the regions tied directly to the root causes? Is there a *line of sight* from the initial identification of occupational and skills shortages to solutions?

Solutions

13. Did the consortium demonstrate that the proposed solutions are meaningful efforts to address the root causes identified for the occupational and skills shortages?
14. Were industry partners involved in the development of solutions and do they agree with the findings?

15. To what extent did the participants believe that a logical methodology was employed in the development of the regional solutions? Were the SSI Research and Identification Guidebook and other materials provided by DWD used in the process?
16. Is there some indication that existing regional resources in the public and private sector will be leveraged to carrying out the planned activities?
17. Did the region identify an implementation and execution timeline for solutions?

Summary Judgments

18. To what extent did the participants believe they had considered the issue of sustainability and measuring the success of the identified solutions?
19. To what extent did the SSI process build local capacity to think about and analyze workforce investment issues in the context of economic development?
20. Did the SSI process link regional workforce development and economic development to enable the region to focus workforce resources on human capital bottlenecks to economic development?
21. Overall, did the visitation suggest that the SSI process stimulated regional thinking and collaboration among employers, workforce, economic development professional and educators within the region?

Appendix C – Survey Comments

Comments from End of Survey:

The process of SSI development in the region has been beneficial. Implementation of solutions, due to state level mandates, have been less beneficial and those state decisions are hampering the local and regional approach to modifying the solutions to make a real difference.

Grant award process was poorly thought out. Policies and procedures were developed after the awards were made—for example, we were told that the grant was performance-based after we were awarded the funds. ____ U. did not prepare appropriate letters of agreement, etc. Seems like the rules were being invented as the questions were asked.

The identification of occupational shortages in some industries along with possible solutions were already being addressed prior to SSI in our region. SSI greatly assisted us to expand this process and accelerate implementation of some solutions.

More transparency in the process would have been better. In our region, surprises emerged that hadn't been discussed in the public meetings involving the partners. Plus, there were too many middle-agents who add overhead but don't seem to add all that much value. In general, contracting directly with the service providers via a single agent would be more efficient.

The SSI initiative locally failed to address what were the employer needs for our counties. They did gather several employers and agencies, but failed to invite those employers that were expanding. After they keyed in on several obvious ones such as Nurses (about two or three) they were either misleading or fraudulent on the other ones. Their proposed solutions take us a step back not forward. Their proposed solutions are all for glitter and fail to achieve growth. I believe they were influenced by the learning institutions into paying for programs that were either going to be paid by that institution, or they were looking for someone else to pay for their endeavors. I site one proposed solution for example. In order to solve the nursing shortage they wish to pay for an instructor with our local college. If there is demand (as even that institution agrees) then it makes sense for that institution to pay for the instructor due to the fact that they will be making money on the classes. This proposed solution will not make it so that people can attend for free. Only that we will be paying for the instructor. Most of the solutions of the project do not have the support of the employer base and this is the most crucial step. They do not have the support due to the fact that they do not even come close to a solution. Their reliance on virtual reality as one of their solutions is not only far fetched, but has been disputed as being effective even in academic situations. Their solutions work only to enrich their training providers, and possibly raise esteem for the leaders of the local SSI.

The SSI process was very beneficial and brought the right people together. It identified skill gaps in the workforce and developed meaningful solutions. However, it was just a start and needs strong follow up to achieve long term goals.

With regard to encouraging cooperative regional efforts, we (the State of Indiana) must bring all regional service providers together, under one umbrella. As implemented, SSI did not pull in all regional service providers, conceptually - yes, substantively - no. This is the State's greatest challenge to successful regional economic development.

I am a retired consultant on quality in the Pharmaceutical Industry. My knowledge of SSI is deficient. I have heard of it and that is all.

SSI methodology is now being used in making other decisions regarding the investment of our WIA dollars. The systematic approach learned thru SSI has enabled us to collect and analyze data at a deeper level.

Our region had several SSI proposals that were not included in the final recommendation to the State due to a thought process of "We can only ask for so much". We could address additional skill shortages in other important areas if we were not constrained to a regional allocation of funding.

Very tightly run, well conceived (even if not targeted on the highest priority problem for our area) project. All in all it was a great experience. My only complaint would be that it seemed to unravel a bit at the end in terms of timeliness and focus, but that is understandable when matters of money, appropriations, etc. are involved.

The Strategic Skills Initiative provided for further expansion and increased capacity of the regional partnerships and collaborative efforts which exist.

The process was well thought out, but more communication about the fundamentals of the action phases would have greatly improved our ability to meet deadlines in reporting, applications for grant and actual action plans. Agree that the process has brought people together that had not known each other from our region, and should this continue into additional phases, will really impact the ability to leverage resources and execute a labor strategy for our region that makes its mark

The SSI is a positive step forward toward addressing demand occupation skills shortages but we will not know the results for some time. The research serves as a valid foundation for future planning and funding. Future SSI like activities should build on that foundation, not duplicate the process/research. It is likely that after the two years we will notice funding gaps that were not contemplated or foreseen locally. DWD should consider continued support in some but not all Solutions/Regions. DWD should also look for ways to streamline/simplify future SSI activities. The 80% cost reimbursement 30% incentive funding mechanism is understandable and reasonable but we should have been told early in the process that this would be the funding arrangement. Some of the questions posed seemed to imply that the use of consultants was somehow a negative aspect. We hope that is not the conclusion. We utilized a consultant with excellent results. As the Core Agent we also did much research, coordination, writing and re-writing throughout the process. We were also able to utilize these funds to expand internal capacity. A minor note, rather than asking what county we live in your survey should have asked what Region you are attached to. Finally, thank you to the Department for the opportunity...we are working very hard to make this successful. The level of effort required for SSI versus the other demands of operating the Regional workforce programs is challenging.

Some of my responses are based upon the fact that our solutions ultimately were focused on addressing our economic job loss through entrepreneurship activities. Throughout the research and ID process it was difficult to identify shortages because everything came up single digit or negative using the model. It was a great process - our region didn't quite fit the mold. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Don't mean to be negative...But _____ County had very little input into the process. Seemed to be _____ County Driven.

The data provided by the Indiana Business Research Center was extremely helpful in the research and analysis portion of the SSI process. It is hoped that there will be an ongoing arrangement between DWD and the IBRC to continue to provide similar information (particularly BLS employment data aggregated by EGR) in an ongoing manner.

Need to make the displaced worker aware of how to get the help they need to acquire workforce training with certification.

As a founding member of the original board I think the overhaul by the Gov was the biggest mistake ever made. We had a great board that worked together and could have been the leader in this state. Today it's all gone.

It seems as though we do all of this type of work redundantly when we couple it with CEDS and WIRED. Multiple studies are addressing the same problems with the same people spending different monies. Just my opinion as a Local Economic Development Office.

The SSI research and planning process was cohesive and logical. Since then, the contracting, state guidance re: critical aspects such as what counts as match, employer and otherwise, and what does not . . . has been disjointed and slow. The front-end and the back-end of this process between planning and implementation, with the state (DWD) as the vital intermediary and funding authority, has been very difficult. Regions have yet to receive guidance from the state as to what extent a particular funding source, attached to each solution 6-8 weeks after contracts were signed, goes by its typical formal criteria (including match) and to what extent that source's criteria is set aside if it is counter to what was emphasized to solution proposers by DWD backing early 2006. This is frustrating and compromising in terms of how 1 is able to actually discuss specific cost benefits . . . with employers, how 1 functionally promotes the solutions with employers, etc. . . the timing for 1 to have a program, costs and reimbursement rates to/w employers set . . . and consequently, the time re: incumbent worker enrollment. . . Later, State Monitors and Auditors will be following their requirements, not what the state's staff verbalized. This disjointedness, whether as noted above or as you have noted with the surprise 80% funding cap per solution has not been congruent. That is real weakness, thus far. It can be remedied; I hope that will occur soon.

I felt the SSI process was very exciting and our group worked hard and well together. Important information was developed from the research. When the awards were made I learned that our grant proposal had been drastically changed from the original proposal that was submitted. Those who worked on it were not aware of this major change. One initiative was completely left out. Another was barely addressed. I did understand that all programs may not be funded but because the proposal was changed so much it does raise questions about the process. I would also like to comment that because workforce development and economic development are tied together that it is a shame the new workforce boards only have one economic development representative on them. I worked hard on the SSI project and now do not have any information on how the implementation is going. Thank you.

I think we did a good job of identifying some of the challenges to global competitiveness as it relates to labor. We are working on a curriculum for the DWD work ethics certificates. We would like to incorporate that as part of our Character Works program.

This was a good collaborative effort

Sorry for the delayed response. Although not involved in the initial phase of SSI, I am of the opinion that the SSI initiative can (and will in our region) serve as a catalyst for addressing important workforce issues.

I strongly feel that core social issues drive many of the gaps and in the employment picture. The new model in Indiana wants to skim past these issues and focus more on the business outcomes. In other words, slap on the quick fix and paint and get them to work. What about generational poverty, or the older employee who can't retrain to be a nurse, or the single mom without childcare or transportation? Please remember that the building may be handsome on the upper level, but if the foundation has cracks and flaws they will eventually show in the upper levels. We need to look big picture at the systems that support families and are they working "together" with your model. The current "downsizing of assistance" to "less is better" through phone services will have some devastating outcomes for working poor families and seniors. Indiana's greatest problem is that the systems we have and the ones we are creating do not communicate with each other to produce the greatest outcomes for ALL. Thank you for listening.

Note: Comments have been edited slightly to assure that respondent confidentiality is maintained.

Appendix D – References

References

- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (June 1, 2005). Indianapolis: What Should You Expect from the SSI Data Packet, to SSI How-To-Handbook and the SSI Workshops?
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (June 15, 2005). Strategic Skills Initiative Regional Agent Roll-Out Meeting (PowerPoint slides)
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (June, 2005). Request for Applications: Strategic Skills Initiative.
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (July 8, 2005). Indianapolis: What Should You Expect from the SSI How-To-Handbook?
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (July 8, 2005). Indianapolis: What Should You Expect from the SSI Online Workshops?
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (July 28, 2005). Strategic Two Year Plan for Title 1 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and the Wagner-Peyser Act.
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Division. (January, 2006). Strategic Skills Initiative Summary Report: Occupational and Skill Shortages.
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development and Indiana Business Research Center. (January, 2006). Indiana Strategic Skills Initiative. *InContext*. 7(1). Retrieved from <http://www.incontext.indiana.edu/2006/january/l.asp>.
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Division. (April, 2006). Strategic Skills Initiative Summary Report: Root Causes of Occupational and Skills Shortages in Indiana.
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (n.d.) The SSI Research and Identification Guidebook. Retrieved August 4, 2006 from <http://www.stats.indiana.edu/ssi/guide/SSI Research and ID Guidebook.pdf>
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (n.d.) Strategic Skills Initiative FAQs.
- Indiana Department of Workforce Development. (n.d.) Strategic Skills Initiative Solutions Summary Report.

Special note: The Indiana Department of Workforce Development website includes extensive information for the 11 Economic Growth Regions. Each region's reports were reviewed extensively for this assessment including: Research and Development Phase, Root Causes Report, Occupational and Skill Shortage Report, Occupational and Skill Shortages Projections Worksheets, Shortage Summary Sheet, Solutions Summary, and Solutions and Implementation Report. They can be retrieved from http://www.in.gov/dwd/employers/ssi_regional.html. The website also includes resources provided by the Indiana Business Research Center and Workforce Associates, Inc.