



# opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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## **GOVERNOR BLAGOJEVICH ANNOUNCES CRITICAL OPPORTUNITY RETURNS GRANT TO STRENGTHEN WORKER SKILLS IN THE CENTRAL REGION**

SPRINGFIELD - Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced the that he is awarding an *Opportunity Returns* planning grant to the Central region as part of a program designed to prepare workers with the training necessary to fill jobs in industries facing critical shortages in skilled labor. This grant will be a part of his *Opportunity Returns* program for Central Illinois – the Governor’s pro-active, comprehensive plan that will be unveiled shortly to promote economic growth and create more jobs throughout the region.

Workforce Investment Solutions in Decatur will receive **\$173,000** under the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI). CSSI is a vital component of the Governor’s statewide plan to build a more dynamic and highly skilled workforce by strengthening education and job training. The Central region is comprised of 12 counties and includes three workforce investment boards that are partnering together in this initiative: Workforce Investment Solutions, Land of Lincoln Consortium and West Central Development Council, Inc.

“One of the most effective ways we can create new jobs is to provide prospective employees with the training they need to thrive in employment sectors facing the greatest shortage of talent,” said Governor Blagojevich. “The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is such a valuable tool because it helps pinpoint sectors with the most immediate needs, and matches them with able and well-trained workers.”

Through a group of local stakeholders, which includes the private sector-led Local Workforce Investment Boards, other area employers, economic development professionals, educators and service providers, the *Opportunity Returns* planning grant will be used to identify industry sectors, and specific occupations within those sectors, where there are current or projected shortages of skilled workers. Once these industries and occupations have been selected, the group will work to determine the root causes of these skill shortages and then develop regional solutions to address them.

“We are very excited to bring the Governor’s Critical Skills Shortage Initiative to the Central region. We have no shortage of talented and well-educated workers here, and this formal training will provide the skills necessary for many employees to find better-paying jobs,” said State Senator Deanna Demuzio (D-Carlinville).

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is administering the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI). A second component of CSSI is a training phase, where DCEO will competitively award \$15 million over two years in federal Workforce Investment Act funds to help bridge the gap in training services available to fill these occupations.

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In addition, DCEO administers other workforce programs that might help in fulfilling regional solutions, including the Employer Training Investment Program, the Eliminate the Digital Divide Program, the Job Training for Economic Development Program and a School-to-Work Program.

“The Critical Skills Initiative highlights the dramatically different direction the Governor is taking to job creation and economic growth,” DCEO Director Jack Lavin said. “Governor Blagojevich is taking this forward-thinking approach because he knows that a highly skilled workforce is a vital element for growth in the Central region.”

In order to create more high-paying jobs and help businesses grow throughout the state, Governor Blagojevich believes that workforce development must be better linked with economic development. To meet this crucial goal, the Governor has consolidated several workforce programs into DCEO, the state’s economic development agency.

The *Opportunity Returns* regional economic development plan is the most aggressive, comprehensive approach to creating jobs in Illinois’ history. Since a one-size-fits-all approach to economic development just doesn’t work, the Governor has divided the state into 10 regions – finding areas with common economic strengths and needs, and developing a plan with specific actions for each region. This grassroots effort is a product of significant outreach over several months with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. *Opportunity Returns* contains tangible actions to make each region more accessible, more marketable, more entrepreneurial and more attractive to business.

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