



opportunityreturns

Creating more jobs for today and tomorrow

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Rod R. Blagojevich – Governor

news

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GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES VITAL PLANNING GRANT TO STRENGTHEN WORKER SKILLS IN THE NORTH CENTRAL REGION

SPRINGFIELD - Governor Rod Blagojevich today announced the awarding of an *Opportunity Returns* planning grant as a part of a program designed to arm workers with new skills and prepare them to fill jobs in industries facing critical shortages in skilled labor. The United Workforce Development Board in Peoria will receive over **\$150,000** under the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI). The Critical Skills Shortage Initiative is a vital component in the Governor's *Opportunity Returns* plan for the North Central region: to build a more dynamic and highly skilled workforce by strengthening education and job training.

"Workers in the North Central region need better ways to prepare themselves for the types of quality jobs that are emerging in their own backyard," Governor Blagojevich said. "By bringing together all of the key regional players, who know the regional workforce needs the best, the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative helps ensure that there will be a pipeline of qualified workers to meet businesses needs and strengthen the economy."

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.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is administering the Critical Skill Shortages 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. 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 Shortage Initiative is a living model of the Governor's vision to link workforce development with economic development because it places business and labor leaders together at the same table to craft regional solutions to skill shortages. This program is finding an innovative way to ensure that our current and future workers have the skills they need to fill jobs in the 21st century economy," DCEO Director Jack Lavin said.

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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 consortium convened for the first time Wednesday morning to review both quantitative employment data indicating which local industries are facing shortages in skilled labor and to supplement that information with more qualitative data based on the expertise and experience of area professionals at the table.

Governor Blagojevich's *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 for the North Central region is a product of significant outreach over several months throughout each region, with business, civic and labor leaders, and elected officials. The more than 40 specific projects that the Governor announced in December for the North Central region are designed to be flexible and effective. Each plan is tailored to deliver real results that local businesses will see, feel, and, hopefully, profit from.

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