



Southern Economic Development Region

Executive Summary

The ***Southern Economic Development Region***, composed of Workforce Investment Areas #25 and #26, is pleased to present this application for planning funds under the Critical Skills Initiative. Both Local Workforce Investment Boards are proud to partner in this regional approach to increasing workforce and economic development. We are committed to developing a comprehensive plan that will allow our region to build a skilled and competitive workforce. Our LWIA's have a history of working together on economic and community development issues due to the geographic, economic and social commonalities shared by our areas. The board chairmen and staff members from both areas, through involvement in workforce professional and economic development activities, have built good working relationships and are dedicated to a successful outcome for this initiative. It is our belief that these relationships between the two boards allow us to begin this initiative with a solid foundation – a foundation from which to build a plan that will allow our region to grow and prosper.

A firm foundation is the first step. However, we recognize a successful, comprehensive plan for the future requires many different organizations, boards, commissions, agencies and individuals to work together to promote the strengths of the region and to improve those areas of need. We must be proactive in our approach to defining the means by which we can achieve a truly competitive position in business and commerce for our region. These efforts will best be realized by the involvement and collaboration of many different members of the communities throughout our 19 county region.

With the agreement of WIA 26, and due to past successful alliances, Management, Training and Consulting, Corp. (Man-Tra-Con, Corp.) has been designated as the grant recipient for the Southern EDR. Appointed by the Chief Local Elected Officials, Man-Tra-Con has served as the grant recipient for LWIA 25 for the past 35 years and has demonstrated meticulous effort with all programs to ensure complete fiscal responsibility for each service it provides. Man-Tra-Con is committed to promoting economic and social development for communities in southern Illinois by working for all the people in the region and assisting them in attaining better lives for themselves and their families. In partnership with WIA 26, our efforts will benefit thousands more throughout the Southern EDR.

To demonstrate our enthusiasm for this initiative, the LWIBs recently organized and convened a regional information and planning session to enlist support for the Critical Skill Shortages Initiative. Over 400 invitations were mailed out, public notices ran throughout the Southern Region and an

advertisement was placed in the regional newspaper, *The Southern Illinoisan* (see Attachment H). The information and planning session was held at Southeastern Illinois College on November 5, 2003, and over 100 stakeholders representing business, education and training agencies, one-stop partners, labor, workforce development and economic development were in attendance. A PowerPoint presentation on the Critical Skill Shortages Initiative was delivered to the audience followed by a brief question and answer period. The participants were then asked to choose one of five consortia groups: Education, Workforce Development, Labor, Economic Development, and Business & Industry. Each consortia group nominated two co-chairs, one from each WIA. The groups set dates for meetings to begin the process of identifying sectors critical to the regional economy and to recruit additional consortium membership.

At the Initial Planning Session, the board chairmen from WIA 25 & 26 along with WIA 26 board staff and Man-Tra-Con staff, were able to measure the anticipated level of involvement and commitment to this initiative by citizens throughout the region. The session also allowed us a means from which we could generate ideas to assist us in developing this planning grant application for the Southern Economic Development Region. Preparation of this application was possible through a coordinated effort among Workforce Board #26, their board members and staff, Workforce Board #25, and the staff and Executive Director of Man-Tra-Con, Corp.

The Initial Planning Session was the first major step in the planning process for this initiative. The consortium committees will be refined as the

groups meet in the next weeks. The other major steps planned in order to complete the necessary research include:

- Selection of the Steering Committee will occur in January
- Development of Consortium Committees when sectors are identified
- Data and research gathering from state and local labor market data, community audits, and surveys will be conducted by consortia committee members
- Personal interviews, focus group meetings and industry summits will be conducted throughout the region
- Skill shortages and root causes will be identified
- Solutions will be developed to address the causes

After careful consideration of the scope of work involved for this initiative, the Southern Economic Development Region respectfully requests \$156,870 in planning funds to underwrite the activities of this important project.