ETA Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative:

BEST PRACTICES:
MISSISSIPPI CORRIDOR CONSORTIUM

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
INTRODUCTION

This case study was originally written as a part of the Workforce Systems Sector Strategies Guide, a document created through a partnership of Maher & Maher and the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources, as a part of the USDOL Employment and Training Administration’s multi-year Sector Strategies Technical Assistance Initiative.

The Guide focused on innovation employed in the design and implementation of sector strategies within workforce development over the last two decades. The programs included in the case study portion of the guide demonstrated advanced thinking in one or more of the five elements of ETA’s Sector Strategies Framework: Data-Based Decision Making, Industry Engagement, Organizational Capacity and Alignment, Sector-Based Service Delivery, and Sustainability and Continuous Improvement.

MISSISSIPPI CORRIDOR CONSORTIUM

Interviews with Nicole Lambert Cole and James Williams

SECTOR STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The Mississippi Corridor Consortium (MCC) was established in 2005 by the presidents of three of the region's community colleges — East Mississippi Community College, Itawamba Community College, and Northeast Mississippi Community College — responding to a perceived need to improve the region’s capacity to compete economically. While the colleges have always vied with each other around more traditional academic issues (e.g., enrolling area valedictorians, sports competitions), they decided they had much to gain by collaborating in the workforce development realm. Specifically, they came together to support the location of a major auto assembly plant, ultimately helping the region land a Toyota plant in Blue Springs, just outside Tupelo, MS. Between the three colleges, one was in a county that could provide the necessary water, another the land, and a third the electric power generation. In addition, they decided to share both instructors and equipment in order to make their pitch to employers as “seamless” as possible. Northwest Mississippi Community College and Coahoma Community College joined MCC in 2007 and 2013, respectively, making the MCC five colleges strong serving all of North Mississippi.
The college presidents serve as MCC’s board of directors, delegating administration to a management committee consisting of an instructional administrator and a workforce administrator from each college. The vice president for community services for one of the colleges serves as the consortium director for a two-year term on a rotating basis. Itawamba Community College has acted as MCC’s fiscal agent since the outset.

Its main objective is “to raise the economic competitiveness level of the region,” strengthening the institutions’ collective ability to provide services in the areas of workforce, community, and economic development throughout the 28-county region.

According to a 2010 report from the Mississippi Economic Policy Center and information from the consortium, MCC has leveraged resources to meet employers’ training needs in several ways, for example:

- The Tupelo-based Manufacturing Solution Center works with employers and workers in the region to build the workforce’s advanced manufacturing skills in automated manufacturing, supervisory management, automatic identification system and welding.

- The Existing Industry Training Program helps existing industries provide high-impact training for incumbent workers in the region. Course offerings provide high-cost training for immediate skill enhancement for students and a fast return on investment for employers.

- Project Navigating Employment Opportunities in Nursing (NEON), which was initially funded by a 3-year USDOL grant in 2007, helps bridge the gap between demand and supply in allied health, developing career pathways in health care, so students can transition over time from a GED to a nurse practitioner. Training via NEON can start with CNA and extend through LVN to RN; it can also help enhance skills of existing LVNs and LPNs, offering instructor and supervisory training. NEON incorporated an I-BEST approach for basic skills education and 24/7 individualized tutoring through a software application.

- Advanced manufacturing training is also offered supported by a Round I TAACCCT Grant as well as funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission and others.

- A mobile welding laboratory travels to communities throughout the region to meet local training needs. The mobile lab is furnished with welding booths and provides welding training (e.g., MIG, TIG, Stick).

### INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

Ways in which MCC has partnered with employers include: curriculum review and validation; participation on advisory councils to establish industry need, specialty testing and training for potential employees; partnership tours to evaluate curriculum design (new robotics or safety units added to curriculum); successful internships; and hiring of graduates. Invitations to join employee training and education groups has been very successful. HR and other industry representatives meet with college staff/instructors and workforce specialists to talk about emerging needs, new credentials, and methods to better meet industry needs.

Currently, MCC’s primary emphasis is on manufacturing with an emphasis in transportation, though all types of major manufacturing entities have been partners, including furniture, lawn equipment, helicopters, and others.
MCC partnered with over 50 companies. Major employers MCC has worked with include: Toyota, PACCAR, Goodyear, GE, Winchester, Aurora Flight, Hershey Co, MTD, Mueller Copper Tube, Comfort Solutions, Yokohama Tire Co., FedEx Ground, Advanced Urethane Technologies, Weyerhauser, South Central Polymers, ALP Lighting, Volvo, National Pump, Skyline Steel.

SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

In addition to using WIA Adult funding to support training for entering workers, MCC has secured support from Mississippi’s Excess Unemployment Insurance Fund to provide incumbent worker training.