

**FLORIDA’S BEST INITIATIVE**  
**“Business Employment Solutions and Training”**  
**KEY RWB RESPONSE HIGHLIGHTS**

**Background**

This year, the WFI Board approved a new strategy for competitively allocating its council-awarded funds. With funding reduced for virtually all 24 Regional Workforce Boards (RWBs) as well as the state’s set-aside funds, the Workforce Florida (WFI) board reduced the total amount of funds available for council projects from the \$14 - \$15 million in previous years to \$10 million for FY 2005-2006. WFI’s three policy councils innovatively responded with a cross-council funding opportunity – the “Business Employment Solutions and Training (BEST)” initiative.

WFI has utilized since its inception in 2000 state council competitive grant opportunities to help drive change in Florida’s workforce system. Many of the resulting demonstration projects, leading edge at the time, have been replicated throughout the state and are producing positive impacts on Florida’s workforce. For example, Employed Worker Training, Career Advancement & Retention Challenge (CARC), Industry-Youth training model replications (Community High Okaloosa Institutes for Career Education—CHOICE), and intervention programs for juvenile offenders all began as state-level council demonstration projects.

**BEST**

The 2005-2006 *Business Employment Solutions & Training* (BEST) initiative was developed to encourage regions, through a cross-council competitive funding opportunity, to develop innovative solutions to local challenges. This initiative was met with wide appreciation by the RWBs and enabled them to address several unmet funding needs that WFI asked them to identify earlier this year as part of the annual performance review process. The 15 regions awarded BEST funds are: RWBs 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 22 and 24. Collectively the funded projects will result in nearly 10,000 persons trained, many receiving industry-recognized credentials at an average cost of \$905 per trainee. The funded RWBs will leverage an additional \$18,405,705 in funds through numerous partnerships.

Some **common themes** from the regional proposals received include:

- Transition to new service delivery models that are business-driven and designed to meet the needs of today’s job seekers
- Integration of funding streams (WIA & TANF) on a common objective
- Focus on work readiness skills based on business/employer input
- Focus on industry valued training (e.g., industry-recognized credentials)
- Strong connectivity to regional economic development goals
- Strong outreach to disabled groups, the neediest and most at risk youth, and underemployed workers

Exemplary regional responses and planned initiatives include:

### **R20 Treasure Coast**

This BEST project addresses two critical regional needs—workers skilled in good-paying, high demand jobs in the healthcare industry and the trades, plus workers with the skills demand by Florida’s emerging industries—biotechnology. The project targets biotechnology (bioinformatics) and health systems technology (Certified Nursing Assistants, Central Process Technicians, Patient Care Technicians and Registered Nurses). The RWB is partnering with the Scripps Research Institute and its major regional medical centers. Nearly 700 trainees will result from this initiative.

### **R17 Polk County**

The development and implementation of the Polk County Manufacturing and Pre-Engineering Academy will address the critical worker shortage needs experienced by the area’s large number of manufacturers. It will also build a sustainable career ladder for the industry from entry-level to advanced, highly skilled training. The project will train 702 persons and has wide-industry partnership support, including Pepperidge Farm, Florida’s Natural Growers, and Technology Research Consultants (defense contractor), among others.

### **R2 Okaloosa/Walton Counties**

The number one business issue facing this region is a severe shortage of qualified workers. For this reason, this region’s proposal, “Uncovering the Hidden Labor Force,” focuses on reaching out to persons who are able, available and seeking employment, particularly from special population groups: seniors, displaced homemakers, military spouses and their dependents, the disabled, individuals on probation or parole, juvenile offenders, high school drop outs, among others. This project will generate a state model for employing the hardest-to-serve, while ensuring responsiveness to Florida’s business community for work ready employees. 300 trainees will result from this initiative.

### **R3 Chipola**

The “Rural Achievement for Training and Employment Success” project, or RATES, targets the high-growth construction industry. In partnership with the Tri-County Builders Association and the Florida Home Builders Association, this project will generate 250 workers with credentials in the building trades—electrical, plumbing, carpentry, HVAC—in such hot demand by Florida’s economy today.

### **R13 Brevard**

“Project Profile” addresses this region’s tight labor market by focusing on job training, placement and retention for non-traditional populations. 250 persons will be given the services and training they need to enter and advance in the workforce, gaining industry-recognized credentials, as well as meeting businesses’ needs for skilled, work-ready employees.

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