

# FACT SHEET: Regional Innovation Grant (RIG) for Mid Iowa Growth Partnership (MIGP) region

**NATIONAL and REGIONAL CONTEXT:** Today, the economy operates at a regional level. It is in regions where companies, educators, entrepreneurs and investors come together and where new ideas and new knowledge are transformed into advanced, high-quality products and services. In other words, innovation occurs in regional economies.

Further, surveys tell us that when modern companies are deciding where to locate, expand, or re-tool operations in order to compete globally, their primary concern is the presence of a well-skilled, adaptable workforce. **Aligning workforce and economic development resources at the regional level will drive economic prosperity.** The Department of Labor's (U.S. DoL) WIRED Initiative is built on the regional approach to growth and prosperity, and MIGP RIGS approach reflects WIRED principles. It is the framework within which an economic and workforce development strategy can be designed and implemented.

The Mid Iowa Growth Partnership came together in 2005 as a nine-county regional marketing collaborative. Over time, the partnership has become known as the most reliable source for regional economic development information for those seeking opportunity and prosperity in the nine county region. Early in 2010, the regional collaborative was awarded a DOL regional innovation grant to assist the region in a process that will strengthen and link the innovation assets of the region for economic growth and vitality.

**RIGS/WIRED PLANNING:** A key initial step in the RIG/WIRED planning process is to identify and expand the **Regional Leadership Group** that represents all the innovation assets that drive regional economies: Human capital (and education and training institutions), small and large businesses and entrepreneurs, public and private organizations that fund innovative commercial and workforce development approaches, physical and technological infrastructure, corporate research and

## Wired Framework



development assets, and government agencies.

The Leadership Group (LG) is the group that defines the Regional vision and creates the collaborative Regional Innovation Plan. Only through a truly collaborative process can a dynamic Plan worthy of implementation be created. The LG is led by a chair, or more likely co-chairs representative of key regional assets. The importance of a socially networked Leadership Group is exhibited in the “WIRED Framework” graphic above, which summarizes the **success factors** in creating a globally competitive regional economy.

In order to create a Regional Innovation Plan, the LG is divided into a series of content-based Core Teams, such as Entrepreneurism, Aligning Education with Industry Needs, Creating a Pipeline of Workers for Targeted Industries, and the like. Each Core Team develops strategies and tactics for each respective focus area, which are then compiled into the Regional Innovation Plan. The completed Plan consists of a series of initiatives designed to spur economic growth and align education and workforce development with the intended growth. The resources to fund those initiatives come both from aligning available resources represented within the LG, and from sources external to the LG but identified by it, such as: Government funding programs, angel investors, education grants, etc.

**COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS:** It is expected that the Regional Leadership Group will meet in person three times with a possible fourth meeting to adopt the Regional Innovation Plan. The focus of the first meeting is on arriving at a consensual vision for the economic future of the Region achieved through a very engaging, scenario planning process. There is also time set aside at the first meeting for Core Teams to be identified and to do organizational work, including setting the parameters of their respective agendas. Subsequent Leadership Group meetings are spent “connecting the dots” of members’ ideas and resources.

There is also Core Team work to be done in between Regional Leadership Group meeting dates, primarily these Core Team meetings and discussions will take place via conference calls. Individual commitment to the group’s success is essential if a productive plan is to be created. All Core Teams are facilitated by experts in the content who, more importantly, are facilitators adept at surfacing all possible ideas from the Core Team members. In the end, the Regional Innovation Plan is created by and for the citizens of the Region.

**BENEFITS:** The completion of the Plan is really only the beginning. Implementation of a well-conceived Regional Innovation Plan, coordinated through a governance structure developed as part of the process, produces its own kind of momentum. As initiatives are implemented, the benefits of the socially-networked LG begin to multiply and manifest themselves in new initiatives which are tied to the original LG vision. Ideas are offered a venue to be shared. Resources present themselves where none were thought to exist because the right PEOPLE were not involved and networked with each other. Geopolitical barriers are overcome because the networked group is THINKING REGIONALLY.

Ultimately, competitiveness in a global market depends on the ability of regions to create conditions that enable and encourage innovation. According to the Council on Competitiveness, those regions that are successful demonstrate the ability to connect innovation assets—people, institutions, capital and infrastructure to generate growth and prosperity in the region’s economy. Less successful regions are not lacking in assets but

rather the ability to link the resources on a regional basis.<sup>1</sup> Please join us as we work to make the Mid Iowa Growth Partnership region a strong and competitive region.

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<sup>1</sup> *Engage. A Practitioner's Guide for Effective Engagement of Business Leaders in Regional Development*, Washington: Council on Competiveness, 2008.