

EMSI Helps Idaho Workforce Agency Plan for Future Growth

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BACKGROUND

Unlike much of the post-recession U.S., Eastern Idaho's economy is prospering. Unemployment has remained below 7% in most counties, and there's a strong business core with a healthy supply of skilled workers.

Nonetheless, regional planners see the need to diversify the area's economic base from mostly government, agriculture, and service-based employment, sectors that are stable but tend to offer low wages.

To help, the **Regional Workforce Innovation Team (RWIT)** worked with EMSI to produce customized analysis on four key regional industry clusters: energy, advanced manufacturing, health care, and food manufacturing. The reports gave an overview on the regional performance of industries and occupations inside each cluster, as well as a growth comparison for Eastern Idaho to the state and nation.

According to Shawn Perkins, Executive Coordinator of RWIT, the reports provided "a lot of baseline data that we needed to make decisions that were data-driven and not simply well-intentioned. If our strategies have any chance of being successful, they must be developed around sectors which represent a regional specialty, are projected to grow and provide great jobs, and will actually provide the most bang for our buck. Our ultimate goal is to increase the prosperity of everybody here in Eastern Idaho, and we want to do it strategically, to the best of our abilities."

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— Shawn Perkins, Executive Coordinator,
Regional Workforce Innovation Team

TAKING A REGIONAL FOCUS

After securing a Regional Innovation Grant from the Department of Labor, RWIT has been tasked with crafting an economic and workforce development plan for the 16 counties that make up Eastern Idaho. While local workforce boards and economic development agencies mostly focus on their specific municipalities or counties, RWIT is concerned with combining these entities' resources to promote the region as a whole.

That's an important distinction for such a diverse area.

"We're seeing that we can gain strategic advantages by focusing our efforts and marketing our strengths as a region," Perkins said. "We only have 360,000 people in this entire area — a population which is smaller than most big cities — and we are dispersed geographically; we cover a large area. We cannot afford to not utilize every asset that is available to us. Bringing people together around a unified vision is very important if we expect to maintain our leadership and be globally competitive."

RWIT LOOKS AT CLUSTERS' GROWTH POTENTIAL

Each of the selected industry clusters hold promise because they provide higher-than-average wages and they fit well with the skills of Eastern Idaho's existing workforce. For example, the energy cluster includes one of the state's largest employers — the Idaho National Laboratory, run by the U.S. Department of Energy and private contractors.

EMSI's analysis helped RWIT estimate the four clusters' potential for growth, and how the planning organization can possibly hasten that growth. Said Perkins, "We really needed to have the ground-level data that would confirm our suspicions and fill the gaps in our planning. The prosperity of our region depends upon the success of our businesses. Timely and accurate information can make the difference between merely surviving and gazelle type growth; and merely surviving just isn't an option with so much at stake in this competitive world. EMSI's services provide that critical difference."

For more on EMSI's industry cluster analysis or any other consulting services, visit economicmodeling.com/consulting.