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Introduction:

In its *2007 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council determined that the “lack of better trained, educated, and/or skilled workforce limits businesses in the Tampa Bay region from being more competitive.”

In March 2011, SRI International reported that “The original design for the analysis that led to the *Regional Business Plan for Economic Development* called for a Workforce Competency Analysis, including a “workforce skills strategy and implementation program.” This approach recognized that while an increase in good-quality jobs is a desired outcome of the regional economic strategy, that outcome cannot be realized unless the region’s workforce has sufficient skills and preparation to fill those positions and contribute to the competitive position of the region’s target clusters. In other words, building a resilient, diversified regional economy will increase job opportunities, but only if the region’s companies can draw on a strong and talented workforce as a foundation.”

This strategic plan has been developed in response to these gap analyses and calls for action with the ultimate goal of business retention and diversification. This plan is presented to provide appropriate background and a clearly outlined summary and defined approach that will be utilized by the associated regional workforce development boards and partners to accomplish the goals, objectives and activities identified to support of the *Regional Business Plan for Economic Development* over the next two years.

Background:

The intent of the call for the formation of Eight (8) Regional Business Teams (RBTs) by Workforce Florida, Inc. was “the creation, launch and management of region-based, state-connected strategy and action to drive job and business retention.” The first outcome requested was the creation of a RBT strategic plan.

Though WFI required that the strategic plans include some consideration of diversification in international markets, and lead to improvement of business retention and recruitment, and employment prospects for the workforce; RBTs were given broad latitude in seeking out and securing the right approaches, tools, and resources to get the job accomplished.

The Workforce Consortium of West Central Florida was formed in response to this “call for formation” issued by WFI. A RBT application was submitted in the fall of 2011 and approved by WFI. This application documented the agreement and support of each of the regional boards to this effort, described the partners that would be involved, and committed the RBT to convene at least eight meetings within the region to “forge regional partnerships and innovative

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solutions to business retention, economic diversity to include international trade, as well as RWB employment prospects.”

Since the approval of the application the RBT has aligned its activities and planning with the *Regional Business Plan for Economic Development*. This *Regional Business Plan for Economic Development* was the result of a region-wide environmental scan conducted by SRI, International. After analysis, SRI recommended the targeting of four industry clusters in the Tampa Bay area: Applied Medicine & Human Performance; High-Tech Electronics & Instruments; Business, Financial, & Data Services; and Marine & Environmental Activities.

These industries were targeted because:

- The region has assets to build upon;
- Market trends are strong and positive;
- Potential to create jobs and diversify the economy;
- Can grow and develop in all eight counties;
- Can benefit from region-wide attention and efforts; and
- Can differentiate the region from competitors.

Over the past six months, more than 140 volunteers have met as working group teams centered around the four target clusters, as well as the foundational and workforce initiatives, to delve deeply into the research and activities suggested by SRI. Multiple meetings were held where goals, objectives, activities and proposed outcomes were discussed thoroughly. Recently, nearly 100 of these working group team members met to collectively prioritize and build consensus for the 2012-2014 Regional Business Plan work program - the "marching orders" that will lead to 150,000 target cluster jobs.

Why another Strategic Plan?

Strategic planning assumes that certain aspects of the future can be created or influenced by a group of committed partners, such as the RBT. Strategic planning is ongoing; it is "the process of self-examination, the confrontation of difficult choices, and the establishment of priorities" (Pfeiffer et al., *Understanding Applied Strategic Planning: A Manager's Guide*). Strategic planning involves "charting a course that you believe is wise, then adjusting that course as you gain more information and experience" (Wilder Foundation, *Strategic Planning Workbook*).

It was quickly determined that it was necessary and appropriate for the RBT to plan strategically in coordination with the implementation of the Regional Business Plan for Economic Development to achieve our future objective of economic diversification, and lead to improvement of business retention and recruitment, and employment prospects for the workforce. It will take structure and regional collaboration, across many different organizations, to achieve our goals and objectives.

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Who was Involved in Developing this RBT's Strategic Plan:

In addition to the regional workforce development boards, including Tampa Bay Workforce Alliance, WorkNet Pinellas, Pasco Hernando Workforce Board, Polk County Workforce Development Board, Suncoast Workforce, and Citrus County within Workforce Connection; a cross-functional, cross-organizational team of leaders and experts from various education institutions including community colleges, school districts and universities; economic development organizations; planning councils; county offices of business development; and private sector business leaders have been involved in the development of this strategic plan. Involvement has included providing critical

input during the plan development, reviewing the various goals, objectives and activities, and determining the expected outcomes and timeframes within this Tampa Bay Florida Eight RBT strategic plan. Fairfield Index, Inc. provided staff support to this planning process.



Strategic Initiatives to Address Regional Workforce Development:

According to the Tampa Bay Regional Business Plan "to develop a workforce with competitive and relevant skills, the Tampa Bay region must facilitate communications among three key stakeholder groups:

- The employers in the four target clusters identified in the plan, who need competent employees to build their own capabilities and spur further economic growth;
- The jobseekers who wish to enter those target clusters and pursue related career opportunities; and
- The workforce education system, particularly the postsecondary institutions, which can provide formal training and skill development relevant to the target clusters."

The initiatives included in this strategic plan are designed to address issues within and between all three sets of stakeholders as well as the regional workforce development boards. These initiatives address three critical gaps:

1. The need for coordination across postsecondary institutions throughout the Tampa Bay region, to move towards a regional view of workforce development;
2. Improving the data and intelligence on employer needs for the entire Tampa Bay regional economy, so that the region as a whole can be more strategic in how it meets those needs; and

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3. Outreach to current and future workers about the emerging job opportunities in the target clusters, and how they can design their own career paths to take advantage of those opportunities.

Background research has shown that there are existing initiatives in the Tampa Bay region that do address these gaps, but those initiatives are generally targeted at a specific part of the region rather than the entire region. In other cases, the initiatives focus on industries other than the target clusters contained in the Regional Economic Development Plan. The RBT approach is to leverage these existing efforts as much as possible, building on lessons learned and expanding on processes and practices already in place. This will help to minimize the additional investment needed to implement the workforce initiatives, and simultaneously reduce the burden and commitment required from participants in each initiative.

The three initiatives or goals in this RBT strategic plan provide “foundational” improvements. Rather than adding additional new initiatives focusing on each of the four target clusters, this strategic plan integrates workforce elements into the existing cluster-specific initiatives to ensure that the workforce strategy is aligned with the overall cluster strategies.

The three initiatives/goals within this strategic plan are to:

1. Expand partnerships and improve communication between the four target industry clusters and the workforce development system.
2. Increase coordination, collaboration, and information sharing among the region’s postsecondary institutions.
3. Increase awareness about career ladders and opportunities in the target clusters among existing and future workers.

Following is the rationale for each initiative/goal and the objectives, activities and action plans associated with each of these initiatives/goals.

WORKFORCE INITIATIVE/GOAL #1: *Expand partnerships and improve communications between the four target clusters and the workforce development system.*

Rationale: To create a competitive regional workforce for the four target clusters, employers need to make an honest assessment about their workforce needs and communicate those needs to other actors in the workforce development system. SRI identified numerous activities in the Tampa Bay region currently in place to facilitate this kind of communication. Still, the lack of a two-way line of communication has been a challenge cited by multiple stakeholders in SRI surveys and interviews. The results of an employer survey conducted by SRI in

November-December 2010 showed that a number of the region’s employers report having minimal contact with postsecondary institutions in the region. In particular, employers in the

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target clusters indicate that educational institutions are not producing a workforce with the skills needed to support future growth.

At the same time, while some educational institutions report to have strong relationships with local employers, they also claim that local employers are often unaware of the programs available at their institutions or fail to approach their institutions to develop a curriculum that will better meet employer needs.

These challenges are augmented by the fact that the Tampa Bay regional economy is dominated by mid- to small-sized businesses, with fewer than average large-scale employers. In particular clusters, such as manufacturing, the Tampa Bay regional business community is diverse and fragmented, and making it all the more difficult for schools to identify and communicate with employers who are aware of broader trends in their own industries. This pattern is more pronounced in certain portions of the target clusters, such as medical devices. Some interview subjects also point out that smaller employers have fewer staff available to attend meetings with educational institutions, and so are less likely to be represented at such gatherings.

Consequently, the disconnect between the Tampa Bay region's business community and educational institutions has made it difficult for institutions to gauge the future workforce needs of local employers in the target clusters; to gauge whether there is sufficient "critical mass" of demand to support new program development; and to ultimately plan, fund, develop, and launch effective new programs.

This initiative supports a number of activities that will build communication channels and pull together the business community and educational institutions in the Tampa Bay region in order to pinpoint and address the region's cross-cutting workforce needs as the target clusters emerge as drivers of future economic growth.

Objectives: Build more formalized mechanisms for communication and collaboration across the business and academic communities in the region so that:

- The region's educational institutions and students are receiving the right information about what occupations/skills will be in demand for the future workforce in the region's target clusters.
- The region's educational programs are meeting business needs, especially in terms of training workers for the jobs/skills demanded by the target clusters.
- Adequate "on-the-job" training, experiential learning, and job-relevant curricula exist to equip students with the practical skills needed to work in the target clusters.

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Activity 1:

Establish and convene region-wide Target Cluster Skill Panels, whose membership would include a cross-section of company representatives in each of the four target clusters drawn from multiple counties to:

- a) identify and prioritize the future occupations and skills most needed by businesses in their cluster;
- b) assess/review the region's existing training providers and programs to determine whether future needs are met or whether new program need to be developed; and
- c) communicate this information to other key players in the region's workforce development system, including schools and workforce agencies.

The Target Cluster Skill Panels would essentially become the "voice of industry" responsible for identifying highest-priority areas for new program development and/or curriculum changes to support future target cluster workforce needs.

Responsible person(s):

The Regional Workforce Development Board Executive Directors within this Florida Eight region.

Potential Action Plan:

- 1) Plan for Florida Eight region-wide event to be held in Hillsborough County to include:
 - a. venue selection;
 - b. coordinating with educational institutions, Partnership and others to obtain appropriate targeted cluster mailing lists;
 - c. drafting appropriate agenda to include key discussion topics;
 - d. selecting facilitator(s);
 - e. discussion about potential breakout sessions during the skill panel forums;
 - f. determining AV equipment needed;
 - g. preparing invitation;
 - h. creating a publicity plan to include drafting public service announcements and message to be placed on various websites; and
 - i. identifying the goals of each skill panel.
- 2) Implement the plan developed to include:
 - a. finalizing the agenda and workshops;
 - b. launch publicity plan;
 - c. issuing invitations,
 - d. registering appropriate industry employers; sending out reminders of the skill panel;
 - e. contracting with the facilitator(s);
 - f. contracting with the venue;
 - g. securing any speakers, etc.

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- 3) Post skill panel discussion tasks to include:
 - a. reducing discussions and decisions to writing;
 - b. submitting the report to the regional workforce boards, education institutions, etc.;
 - c. convening discussion groups on how to implement the recommendations made during the skill panel discussions; etc.

What will success look like? What will be the outcomes?

- 1) Four target cluster skill panel forums will be held with appropriate representation of the targeted cluster employers in attendance.
- 2) A survey of the attendees will show at least 90% are at least satisfied with the discussions held at each of the skill panel forums.
- 3) A report will be generated and distributed to the education institutions, regional boards and other key partners outlining the future occupations and skills identified and prioritized during each of the Region-Wide Target Cluster Skill Panel forums. The report will also address any assessment conducted on the need for program development and refinement that occurred during the Skill Panels forums discussion.
- 4) A discussion group of educational institutions, regional boards and other appropriate key partners will be convened for each skill panel forum to discuss the report and recommendations made during the forum.
- 5) Each regional workforce development board's President/CEO will submit the report for each skill panel forum, the results of the discussion group and any appropriate recommendations to his/her board of directors for review, input and possible support/action.

What is the timeframe?

- 1) Four targeted cluster skill panel discussions to be held once per month starting in August 2012 and concluding in November 2012.
- 2) The post-forum report will be prepared and distributed by March 1, 2013.
- 3) The report discussion groups (one for each targeted cluster skill panel) will be convened and will meet by April 30, 2013.
- 4) Reports and possible recommendations will be taken to the regional boards of directors by June 30, 2013.

Activity 2:

Develop an inventory of the current availability of practical or “on-the-job” career training and awareness-building programs in the Tampa Bay region related to the four target clusters. Programs to focus on in this inventory would include a wide variety of experiential learning opportunities, including: internships, apprenticeships, externships, job shadowing, career

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mentoring, student summer job/associate programs, and so on (focusing first on the postsecondary level, but also potentially including secondary level programs). Working through partners in education and industry (e.g., through the Target Cluster Skill Panels and the Regional Education Coordinating Council), identify gaps or areas where new “on-the-job” training programs should be developed to build the awareness and skills of potential future workers for key fields; prioritize new programs to be developed; and build partnerships to make this happen.

Responsible person(s):

The Regional Workforce Development Board Executive Directors within this Florida Eight region.

Potential Action Plan:

- 1) Plan this inventory process methodology by
 - a. identifying what type of programs will be included under the definition of OJT and "awareness-building";
 - b. identifying the potential entities that could be providing OJT for these four targeted clusters such as the regional workforce development boards, the educational institutions, apprenticeship programs, CBOs, etc.;
 - c. determining how to best "get the word out" on this inventory process;
 - d. drafting a format for reporting on the OJT program characteristics for each provider to complete;
 - e. defining what is meant by "gap";
 - f. defining the need for OJT and/or "awareness-building" programs so a gap analysis can be conducted;
 - g. determining how gaps will be identified; and
 - h. deciding how the results of this inventory will be shared and how priorities will be established.

- 2) Implementation of the plan developed to include
 - a. sending out email blast to appropriate potential OJT providers advising them of this effort and asking them to complete inventory form;
 - b. following up if form is not returned within reasonable time period;
 - c. consolidating responses; and
 - d. identifying gaps; etc.

- 3) Post inventory activities to include
 - a. evaluating and analyzing gaps identified;
 - b. prioritizing areas for potential new OJT programs; and
 - c. discussing potential new areas of need with potential providers.

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What will success look like? What will be the outcomes?

- 1) An inventory of the OJT and "awareness-building" programs in the four targeted clusters will be completed.
- 2) An executive summary of the inventory and a gap analysis will be produced and distributed.
- 3) A region-wide forum will be convened with all providers of OJT and "aware-building" programs invited to attend and discuss the gap analysis and future potential for expansion of these prioritized programs.
- 4) Each regional workforce development board's President/CEO will submit the inventory summary, gap analysis, results from the forum discussion and any appropriate recommendations to his/her board of directors for review, input and possible support/action.

What is the timeframe?

- 1) Planning and inventory to be completed by 9/30/2012.
- 2) Executive summary of the inventory and the gap analysis to be completed by October 15, 2012.
- 3) The region-wide forum to discuss the gap analysis and future potential for expansion of these prioritized programs. to be convened by November 15, 2012.
- 4) Inventory summary, gap analysis, results of forum discussion and possible recommendations will be taken to the regional boards of directors by December 31, 2012.

WORKFORCE INITIATIVE/GOAL #2: Increase coordination, collaboration and information sharing among the region's postsecondary institutions.

Rationale: The Tampa Bay region is home to a large number of postsecondary institutions ranging from technical centers to four-year universities, all of which support the development of a workforce appropriate for the region's new target clusters. While there is some degree of coordination occurring across the different levels of the workforce system (e.g., between the technical schools and the community colleges/state colleges to articulate curricula), for the most part the region's postsecondary institutions tend to be fragmented and are not strategically communicating with one another – and with the economic development system or the workforce development system – about region-wide workforce development needs and issues. In particular, there is a lack of awareness across the region's postsecondary institutions regarding the programs and initiatives of other players within the system, resulting in each institution pursuing its own individual initiatives (and sometimes even a degree of competition). This is particularly true as private sector (for-profit) training providers become a more prominent player in the region's workforce development system.

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As a result, financial/capital resources for new program development may be inefficiently invested, duplication of efforts can occur, and investment risks are not always mitigated through cost-sharing mechanisms with strategic partners. For example, programs in key fields such as nursing and business administration are sometimes duplicated across community colleges, for-profit universities, and four-year non-profit universities, creating competition for students instead of a “career ladder” to progressively develop the knowledge and skill sets of the region’s workforce.

Objectives: Establish a mechanism to improve coordination across different institutions in the Tampa Bay region’s workforce education and workforce development system, to ensure that students/workers can move seamlessly through the system, reduce duplication of programs or competition across institutions, and encourage strategic development/focus of new programs.

Activity:

Create a region-wide online networking forum or portal to serve as a platform for ongoing, informal dialogue within the region’s workforce system.

Responsible person(s):

Patrick O’Neil, _____ and Ed Peachey, President and CEO of WorkNet Pinellas and Tampa Bay Workforce Alliance

Potential Action Plan:

- 1) Plan the launch of an online networking forum or portal by
 - a. researching on-line tools available at no cost;
 - b. determining what institutions are interested in participating in this on-line networking forum;
 - c. obtaining contact information from those interested;
 - d. determining whether there will be any restrictions to the types of information that will be allowed/encouraged to be posted;
 - e. determining if there will be any restrictions to the membership;
 - f. determining who will be the moderator - the person that "approves" any request to be added to the networking group and manages the group;
 - g. exploring various tools that could be made available such as: message boards/forums for discussing specific workforce/education-related topics and sharing information, a “bulletin board” to post information about workforce-related events and activities taking place in the region, a place to post information about workforce/education-related RFPs and funding, etc.;
 - h. determining if there will be any need or desire on the part of the potential workforce development institutions involved to have periodic reminders and encouragement to use the on-line networking forum;

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- i. determining if there is any need or desire on the part of the potential workforce development institutions involved to have periodic discussion topics scheduled;
 - j. determining how success of the on-line networking portal will be measured;
 - k. determining what benefits would be realized by the participants; and
 - l. drafting an appropriate invitation.
- 2) Implementation of the launch plan to include:
- a. setting-up the on-line tool;
 - b. issuing invitations to participate in the on-line networking portal;
 - c. accepting individuals into the membership of the forum;
 - d. sending out reminders to participate; and
 - e. periodically post issues important to the workforce system to generate dialogue.
- 3) Evaluation of networking forum or portal by capturing input from participants on the usefulness of the portal and any suggested improvements and evaluating the frequency of use.

What will success look like? What will be the outcome?

- 1) An online networking forum or portal to serve as a platform for ongoing, informal dialogue within the region's workforce system will be launched.
- 2) A survey of the users will show that at least 90% are at least satisfied with the networking portal and the discussions usefulness.

What is the timeframe?

- 1) An on-line networking or portal to serve as a platform for ongoing, informal dialogue within the region's workforce system will be launched by August 1, 2012
- 2) Evaluation conducted 6 months after launch.

WORKFORCE INITIATIVE/GOAL #3: Increase awareness about career "ladders" and opportunities in the target clusters among existing and future workers.

Rationale: As existing industries change and new industries emerge, it is important for the workforce development system to keep abreast of these developments and to inform the Tampa Bay regional workforce about new and emerging career pathways and opportunities. Emerging niches – such as electronic health records, aquaculture, and algae biofuels – offer job opportunities that may be unfamiliar to a large portion of the existing workforce. Meanwhile, the evolution of the construction industry toward energy efficiency and sustainable buildings represents an example of a changing industry that could potentially employ a number of

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displaced construction workers in the region, given that they are aware of the re-training opportunities available at local institutions.

Within these new pathways of opportunity there are various promotional or lateral steps required for advancement, which come with higher levels of pay, skills, responsibilities, and ultimately, higher standards of living – these are known as “career ladders or career lattices.”

Workforce development programs structured along these career pathways, career ladders or career lattices have the potential to improve economic efficiency by fulfilling unmet skills-gaps in the workplace and focusing training resources, while also providing more accessible opportunities for advancement amongst low and middle-income workers.

Objectives:

To increase the availability and awareness of career ladder opportunities within the target clusters, as well as improve access to relevant training programs (especially for unskilled, entry-level, and unemployed workers); to identify pathways by which traditionally marginalized and low-income workers, as well as unskilled, entry-level, or unemployed workers, can progress to positions with higher skill levels and wages.

Activity:

Establish a process to identify and develop appropriate career ladder strategies to meet the workforce needs of the region's new target clusters

Responsible person(s):

Ed Peachey, President and CEO of WorkNet Pinellas and Tampa Bay Workforce Alliance, Mary Ellen Elia, _____, and Rob Aguis, _____

Potential Action Plan:

- 1) Plan for the development of a process to identify and develop appropriate career ladder strategies to meet the workforce needs of the 4 targeted clusters by:
 - a. identifying who should be "at the table" to discuss the development of career ladders for the four targeted clusters as most career ladder projects are multi-organization, complex partnerships involving multiple employers, education institutions (from k-12 through post secondary) and other workforce development organizations;
 - b. Researching successful career pathways, career ladder and career lattice projects for target industry clusters, including resources needed to develop and sustain;
 - c. identifying the differences between career ladders, career pathways and career lattices and determine which model would be the most effective and efficient in this region-wide effort;

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- d. identifying current career ladders and /or pathways already in place in this Florida Eight region;
 - e. conducting a gap analysis based on identified need vs. current availability;
 - f. researching potential sources of funding;
 - g. identifying what resources have been, and should continue to be, developed to support career ladder innovation, program design and implementation;
 - h. exploring adding several questions to the agenda of the Skill Panel forums (see objective above) on career ladders;
 - i. seeking volunteers from employers in the targeted industry clusters to participate in several discussions about career ladders and their future in this Florida Eight region as well as gain their help in developing a prioritized list of needed career ladders and seeking funding for same;
 - j. exploring how to make career ladders a common subject of discussion and part of public discourse among funders, policymakers, employers and workforce agencies;
 - k. dialoguing with the regional workforce boards to determine if they have already or are contemplating how to integrate a career ladder focus into their current training and placement activities;
 - l. defining how career ladder projects are different from traditional workforce development programs, including employed worker training; and
 - m. defining success in developing a career ladder as career ladder projects require a significant time to develop and longer-term funding to be effective with evaluations and results typically not seen for several years, either in progress by individuals or in improved retention and productivity by our targeted cluster employers.
- 2) Develop the process that will be used to identify and develop appropriate career ladders by:
- a. issuing invitations to participate in workgroups;
 - b. dialoguing with attendees at the skill panel forums;
 - c. utilizing the networking portal established in this strategic plan to generate dialogue;
 - d. analyzing research collected;
 - e. creating models for effective development of career ladders, both generally and within the target clusters;
 - f. drafting a process and vet to a select group of employers and workforce development agencies; and
 - g. using input gathered during the vetting, reconsider the process developed and finalize.

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What will success look like? What will be the outcome?

A paper to be published that will describe a process to identify and develop appropriate career ladder / pathways / lattice strategies to meet the workforce needs of the four targeted clusters.

What is the timeframe?

- 1) Research and planning to be completed by December 31, 2012
- 2) By March 31, 2013 publish a paper that describes the process to identify and develop appropriate career ladder / pathways / lattice strategies to meet the workforce needs of the four targeted clusters.

Strategic Plan Evaluation:

Progress towards initiatives/goals, objectives, activities and action plans will be monitored regularly, with strategies revised, based on the progress made, obstacles encountered, and the changing economic environment.

Monitoring and evaluation activities will consider the following questions:

1. Are objectives, activities and action plans being achieved or not? If they are, the RBT will then acknowledge and communicate the progress. If not, the RBT will then consider the following questions.
2. Will the activities be achieved according to the timelines specified in the plan? If not, then why?
3. Should the deadlines for completion be changed?
4. Do the RBT have adequate resources (money, equipment, facilities, training, etc.) to achieve the activities?
5. Are the initiatives/goals, objectives, activities, and action plans still realistic?
6. Should priorities be changed or should different activities or action plans be developed?
8. What can be learned from the results of monitoring and evaluation in order to improve future planning activities and also to improve future monitoring and evaluation efforts?

Conclusion:

This strategic plan will be used as a compass for the RBT, not an inflexible blueprint for action; a compass that has the potential to lead to more region-wide planning and integration among the partners.