

Workforce Development in the Tri-State Region: One-Page Summary

Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri | Prepared for the Tri-State Development Policy and Advocacy Committee

The Big Picture

Workforce is the top employer concern across the region. With tight labor markets and young people leaving, all three states are moving from competing for the same workers to building a long-term talent pipeline. Common themes are early career exposure, school and employer partnerships, work-readiness skills, and help with barriers like childcare, housing, and transportation. The main shared challenge is connecting many good programs into a system that is easy to navigate.

State Snapshots

State	Where things stand	Approach
Iowa	Unemployment 3.2% statewide, about 3.8% in Southeast Iowa. Employers rank workforce as their top challenge.	"Grow Your Own": career exploration required by fifth grade, CTE, apprenticeships, industry credentials. Nearly 45% of 2025 graduates completed work-based learning. WRAP embeds specialists in workplaces.
Missouri	Trades shortages. Only 6% of students know a lot about local careers; 45% unlikely to stay.	HREDC Workforce Pipeline; \$1.5M House Bill 7 request for three staff and three components; resource hub, employer storytelling, Innovation Campus career fair.
Illinois	Western Illinois Network for Students (WINS) has 40+ participants across sectors. Challenges: alignment, access, and ability to sustain CTE.	Collective impact model; Illinois Career Success Network; proposed Open Doors series for the ALICE workforce at Quincy Works.

Shared Challenges

- Low career awareness and students planning to leave; family is the top career information source.
- Skills gaps in trades, healthcare, and middle-skill jobs, plus a soft-skills gap such as communication and punctuality.
- Fragmented programs that are hard for students, parents, employers, and workers to navigate.
- Barriers beyond work: childcare, housing, transportation, and financial stability.

Ideas Worth Sharing

- Early exposure: Iowa's fifth-grade requirement and Southeast Iowa career events.
- Barrier navigation: Iowa's WRAP and Illinois's Open Doors take different routes to the same goal.
- One front door: Missouri's centralized resource hub as a model for connecting programs.

Opportunities for Tri-State Development

- Exchange best practices and connect employers to training, apprenticeships, and wraparound supports.
- Link schools, colleges, and employers across state lines and tie workforce to childcare, housing, broadband, and entrepreneurship.
- Track Missouri House Bill 7, Open Doors, WINS, and Southeast Iowa pilots.