

Recommendations to the Wisconsin Economic Summit

From the Greater Wisconsin Task Force



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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the need for a strategic vision to address challenges associated with major shifts in the nation's economy, the University of Wisconsin established a 2000 Economic Summit to address seven key issues:

- Building quality jobs;
- Enlarging venture capital investment;
- Improving the regulatory climate;
- Educating the workforce;
- Improving Wisconsin's fiscal future and entrepreneurial climate;
- Enhancing key infrastructures; and
- Building a distinctive brand/image for Wisconsin as a technology leader.

Regional committees were established to invite public participation in this process. This report, coordinated and produced by the University of Wisconsin-Extension, reflects the diverse goals and interests of four regions:

- **Central Wisconsin** – Adams, Green Lake, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Marquette, Oneida, Portage, Taylor, Waupaca, Waushara and Wood counties.
- **La Crosse** – Buffalo, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon counties
- **Northern Wisconsin** – Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Florence Forest, Iron, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Washburn and Vilas counties.
- **St. Croix Valley** -- Barron, Pierce, Pepin, Polk and St. Croix counties

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Each of the regions began by examining their respective potential for success, in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This “SWOT” analysis yielded some common themes.

Good educational systems were identified by many regional participants as a core strength, and almost everyone acknowledged the high quality of life enjoyed by their residents. Many groups took the time to voice their concern that these current assets be preserved and protected amidst any effort to support economic development and growth.

In analyzing their respective weaknesses, the regions included references to the limited variety of jobs in their communities and a general lack of high-tech jobs.

The latter seems to correlate closely with a shortage of high-technology resources and the need for additional venture capital to spur the development of new businesses, which would, in turn, enhance the diversity of the job market.

People in each of the four regions seemed genuinely anxious for their communities to participate in the New Economy, and to use this opportunity to expand the quality of jobs available across Wisconsin. Likewise, they expressed their opinions that, with proper resources and support, Wisconsin businesses could effectively collaborate within statewide and regional alliances to compete effectively on a global level. All of this hinges on a strong educational system to adequately prepare the state's workforce.

Uneven development of the telecommunication infrastructure was uniformly named as a significant threat to Wisconsin's future prosperity, and the state's ability to bring New Economy jobs to areas outside the major metropolitan clusters. The apparent lack of capital for development of business and education was also viewed as a major obstacle.

CONCLUSIONS & MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the input from more than 100 members of regional task forces and hundreds of people who participated in public listening sessions, the Greater Wisconsin Task Force collected a total of 85 specific recommendations (see pages 19-23). Following a thorough examination of those suggestions and the SWOT analysis described above, the Task Force submits the following items as its **major recommendations**:

1. **Use education and research assets to nurture New Economy growth** – Wisconsin must build on its current strengths in biotechnology and agriculture, leveraging the corresponding educational, research and training programs at University of Wisconsin campuses, private colleges and technical schools. Additional research and development parks linked to these educational resources could attract and grow New Economy businesses.
2. **Showcase Wisconsin's high-tech leadership** – Wisconsin must change its branding messages to emphasize a high-technology image, building out from the traditional strengths of the region—agriculture, tourism and manufacturing. State leaders and economic development alliances should develop a targeted national marketing campaign to promote Wisconsin and its technology strengths.

3. **Invest in Wisconsin’s communications backbone** – Wisconsin must develop, expand and maintain a state-of-the-art, high-speed telecommunications infrastructure around the economic development needs of the entire state. In some areas, current systems cannot adequately support telecommuting, distance learning and other high-demand usage.
4. **Reshape the educational system to meet new and emerging needs** – Wisconsin must develop an integrated PK-16 curriculum that aligns standards, curricula and assessments with New Economy business needs, high-tech skills and the full range of career opportunities. Schools and employers should work to ensure smooth transitions from high school to all types of post-secondary programs, address instructional technology needs, and infuse the population with an entrepreneurial spirit at an early age.
5. **Foster a growth-friendly regulatory climate where New Economy businesses can thrive** – A multi-agency effort is needed to reform regulatory policies that impact the successful growth of new businesses. Such an effort could eliminate conflicting regulations, provide a user-friendly process and offer a one-stop process for regulatory information and permits. Joint education, training and planning opportunities for regulatory agency staffs and business representatives could improve customer service while encouraging businesses to achieve compliance in the most effective, cost-efficient manner.
6. **Adopt new financial policies and systems that support growth** – To encourage the development and growth of New Economy businesses, Wisconsin must implement new financial policies and tax credit programs that result in better lending practices by banks and an improved tax climate. In addition to new policies, such a strategy should include educational and professional development opportunities for professionals in Finance, Law and Accounting that increase their levels of expertise in understanding the unique issues relating to New Economy business ventures.
7. **Use broad alliances to support expansion and development** – Wisconsin must develop cross-governmental alliances that strengthen collaboration, reduce city/county competition, and provide shared educational opportunities for business and government leaders. These alliances can support the growth and expansion of existing businesses while encouraging the development of new high-tech industries. They should play an integral role in planning and policy development, and provide learning resources that improve members’ core economic development competencies. These coalitions should be supported by an organization that gathers and disseminates information on “best practices,” and develops corresponding educational programs.

Introduction

THE WISCONSIN ECONOMIC SUMMIT

The globalization of markets, the influence of new technologies, questions of workforce availability and other important developments are reshaping Wisconsin's economic landscape. As questions arise about Wisconsin's ability to thrive and prosper in this new environment, University of Wisconsin leaders call for a strategic vision that would enable this state to capitalize on the opportunities of the New Economy.

The UW System and its Board of Regents, in partnership with other interested parties across Wisconsin, organized an Economic Summit to serve as the launching pad for a statewide conversation on building Wisconsin's future economy. Participants at the Summit will address seven key issues:

- **Building quality jobs** – Increasing the number of New Economy businesses and workers in those higher-paying jobs;
- **Enlarging venture capital investment** -- Improving the financial investment, from both within and outside Wisconsin, of funds required to finance the development of new technologies and businesses;
- **Improving the regulatory climate** – Addressing state and local governmental rules and regulations that deal with Wisconsin's quality of life and the state's economic vitality;
- **Educating the workforce** – Strengthening the current workforce and developing new economy jobs through education;
- **Improving Wisconsin's fiscal future and entrepreneurial climate** – Examining the role of government and fiscal policies that shape economic growth, workforce development, financial health and quality of life for citizens;
- **Enhancing key infrastructures** – Identifying strengths and weaknesses relating to Wisconsin's economic potential, in terms of key infrastructures such as transportation, energy and telecommunications; and
- **Building a distinctive brand for Wisconsin as a technology leader** – Considering a statewide brand or image for Wisconsin as a "business-growth state" and strategies for advancing that brand in national and global marketplaces.

Using input from a series of public forums as well as discussion papers prepared by economic experts, the Summit will accomplish three essential goals:

- Provide a forum for information sharing inclusive of all citizens;
- Create a feeling of statewide unity and ownership in the development of economic strategies for the future of the state; and
- Demonstrate the benefits of a collaborative, partnership approach to action.

To maximize participation, regional committees were established statewide and charged with inviting a wide range of individuals and groups to participate in the planning process and substantive discussions. Five task forces organized and sponsored listening sessions in specific regions of the state:

- Chippewa Valley (Don Mash and Chuck Sorensen, co-chairs)
- Fox Valley and Green Bay (Kathi Seifer and John Gilbert, co-chairs)
- Milwaukee & Southeastern Wisconsin (Nancy Zimpher, chair)
- Southern Region (Mark Bugher, chair)
- Greater Wisconsin (Kevin Reilly, chair)

GREATER WISCONSIN TASK FORCE

The Greater Wisconsin Task Force was established to ensure that plans and recommendations would reflect the diverse goals and interests of all Wisconsin communities. Coordinated by UW-Extension Chancellor Kevin Reilly, this effort utilized the resources and strong community relationships of four UW campuses and UW-Extension. See **Appendix II** (page 34) for a map of the four Greater Wisconsin regions.

Campus	Chancellor	Region name & description
UW-Stevens Point	Thomas F. George	CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGION <i>Adams, Green Lake, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Marquette, Oneida, Portage, Taylor, Waupaca, Waushara and Wood counties.</i>
UW-La Crosse	Douglas N. Hastad	LA CROSSE REGION <i>Buffalo, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau and Vernon counties.</i>
UW-Superior	Julius E. Erlenbach	NORTHERN WISCONSIN REGION <i>Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Florence, Forest, Iron, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Washburn and Vilas counties.</i>
UW-River Falls	Ann M. Lydecker	ST. CROIX VALLEY REGION <i>Barron, Pierce, Pepin, Polk and St. Croix counties.</i>

Each Chancellor worked with her or his campus and community leaders to assemble a local task force, with representation from all major stakeholders. These groups included representatives from chambers of commerce, UW campus faculty and staff, UW-Extension county educators, business leaders, educators, economic development directors, elected officials, organized labor, tribal leaders and municipal/county government staff.

REGIONAL PLANNING & INFORMATION GATHERING PROCESS

Central Wisconsin

Using UW-Stevens Point's established relationships with a number of community groups, the Central Wisconsin task force met on Sept. 15 for a five-hour planning session. People from across the region gathered for a presentation on the state of the economy and a facilitated SWOT analysis, resulting in a ranked set of recommendations.

An Oct. 11 meeting gathered more than 50 citizens from around the region to react to the work done by the planning group. Many people participated in the economic development discussion via live videoconferencing, providing oral comments and written recommendations to UW-Stevens Point Chancellor Tom George, the Task Force chair. Videoconference sites were available in each of the 13 counties in this region, providing an opportunity for broad public participation. UW-Extension county agents, technicians, and Task Force members facilitated the sessions.

La Crosse

UW-La Crosse Chancellor Doug Hastad convened a group of 20 key La Crosse business leaders on Sept. 12 at the UW-L campus for a presentation on Wisconsin's New Economy challenge. The presentation prompted active discussion, and participants generated enthusiasm for venture capital initiatives as a specific strategy to promote high-tech economic growth.

Approximately 100 people attended an Oct. 20 forum designed to educate the media, government representatives and area businesses on the state's economic position in technology development and the long-range significance of the state's apparent poor standing in some areas. Participants heard a presentation on the "New Economy and What it Means for Wisconsin," followed by group discussion and a second presentation on the regional economy and existing efforts to build the science and technology base.

The community-based Technology Business Alliance convened a three-hour working session on Oct. 25 to discuss local strategies for technology business support. In addition to media announcements, over 2,000 invitations were mailed

to prospective attendees. About 120 people registered for the event, with excellent representation from technology businesses.

Northern Region

A listening session was held in Park Falls on Sept. 29, with approximately 40 participants. Small work groups were assigned to address specific issues, with moderators selected from their members. An introductory overview was presented by UW-Superior Chancellor Julius Erlenbach, followed by an overview of the current state of Wisconsin's economy.

Lively discussion followed, addressing each of the seven Economic Summit issues. Group moderators then transcribed and posted their notes. As a large group, participants reviewed all recommendations and identified ideas that they felt were most important. Additional discussion followed, allowing members to reach consensus on the priority issues.

Unique to the event was a telephone feed to a UW-Superior alumnus in California who participated fully in the day's activities. Also in conjunction with the event, the Chequamegon Bay Group presented its proposal for establishing a technology segment for the area's economy.

St. Croix Valley

Using an analysis of the region and information about economic development initiatives in other states, members of the planning committee met on Sept. 12 to perform a SWOT analysis of the St. Croix Valley Region, and to plan the regional listening session.

On Oct. 4, Chancellor Ann Lydecker hosted the St. Croix Valley Economic Forum at the UW-River Falls campus, with more than 150 participants from the five-county region. Following a series of informational presentations, participants engaged in facilitated small group discussions focused on the seven themes under consideration. Immediately following lunch, participants viewed a presentation of the key recommendations generated during the morning and follow-up actions were described.

Members of the regional Planning Committee considered the recommendations in greater detail and prioritized the recommendations generated by forum participants. These recommendations were then posted on the UWRF web page to allow continued input from the public. Additionally, these recommendations were presented to the Advisory Board of the School of Business and Economics for their consideration, with a number of their suggestions incorporated into the region's final recommendations.

Situation Analysis

At regional planning meetings and public listening sessions, participants analyzed the status of their region in terms of:

- **Strengths** – Core assets and characteristics that support economic growth;
- **Weaknesses** – Areas where the region may lack adequate resources or natural strengths to address future challenges;
- **Opportunities** – The region’s greatest potential for success, but may require a catalyst or initial investment; and
- **Threats** – Obstacles, barriers and negative forces (internal or external) that represent the most significant impediments to future growth and prosperity.

SWOT AT A GLANCE

	<i>Central</i>	<i>La Crosse</i>	<i>Northern</i>	<i>St. Croix Valley</i>
STRENGTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic & geopolitical location • K-16 education • Quality health care • Low cost of living • High level of public services • Positive inter- & intra-governmental relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversified metropolitan economy cushions single-industry failures • Unique collaboration serves 23 counties with health education and research • High-tech growth rate tied to software industry • Technology Business Alliance coordinates public-private concerns. • Strong health care industry • PK-16 education responding well to industry needs • Equity investor network • High quality of life • Transportation (highway, air, river and rail) • Natural beauty contributes to significant tourism revenue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration among various entities • Work in progress, such as the Chequamegon Bay Group, which emphasizes collaboration • Strong work ethic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to the Twin Cities • Projected population growth over next 10-20 yrs. • Strong higher education institutions • Proximity to I-94 • Desirable quality of life • Strong work ethic • Independent political culture • Competitive business taxes, compared to nearby Twin Cities

	Central	La Crosse	Northern	St. Croix Valley
WEAKNESSES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aging population • Lack of high-tech jobs to retain and attract workers • Demise of family farming • Limited transportation capacity • Resistance to change • Lack of venture capital, conservative banking culture • Tax structure not favorable to corporate residency • Low wages • Limited access to specialized training • Weak support for school expansion • Modest culture • Resistance to diversity • Inadequate energy resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-tech growth concentrated in metropolitan area • Local government jurisdictions often compete; may lack expertise for collaboration and economic development • Inability to recruit qualified high-tech employees • Lack of Ph.D., research, and advanced IT programs • Limited number of high-tech jobs, and few R&D opportunities • Few accountants, attorneys and bankers with high-tech specialty • Not enough regional support for product innovation and development of intellectual property • No access to equity investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionable and unreliable access to technology resources • High prices for technology services • Inconsistent curricula in entrepreneurial and technology careers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive labor market • Lower wages • Few indigenous corporate leaders • Higher technology access costs and limited availability • Outdated economic development • Distance from Madison • Media void—between Wisconsin and Minnesota outlets • Limited venture capital • Lack of affordable housing • Limited occupational mix

	Central	La Crosse	Northern	St. Croix Valley
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population’s interest in maintaining skills and preparing for second careers • Discussion of transportation and other issues may produce better planning • Globalization and Internet usage can help people build the economy & embrace diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest and enthusiasm for an “angel” network • Health Science consortium provides opportunities for allied health research and partnerships • Newly-formed Technology Business Alliance, similar to other technology councils dedicated to solving local challenges • Business incubator can focus more on high-tech companies • Intellectual property and R&D support services can be developed, using the existing referral network of UW-Extension and the SBDC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peoples’ attraction to the natural beauty and lifestyle of the region • By improving technology access and quality jobs, people who enjoy the area can remain there • Opportunity for seamless education—partnerships between business and schools, elementary schools and post-secondary schools • Talent and creativity mean possibility for real job growth • Reward risk takers • Support examples of successful state/business coalitions in other states 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage New Economy business growth • Develop the local workforce • Develop creative public/private partnerships • Promote business-to-business networks • Encourage collaboration across cities, towns, counties • Build links to higher education, new post-secondary programs • Access venture capital in Twin Cities • Promote Western Wisconsin identity and advantages in Twin Cities market

	<i>Central</i>	<i>La Crosse</i>	<i>Northern</i>	<i>St. Croix Valley</i>
THREATS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology infrastructure improvements will require significant resources • Workforce may not keep up with technology • Decreasing commitment of tax dollars for education • Departure of highly-trained young workers • Disregard for the talents of retirees. • Erosion of the work ethic • Downsizing and its impact on morale • De-emphasis of basic trades (carpentry, plumbing, electrical) • Higher costs in health care and energy • More governmental regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local governments that choose not to participate can hinder regional technology development • Competition among municipalities creates barriers to cooperation • Manufacturing companies in mature industries may suffer downsizing and closures faster than the economy can retrain and redirect the labor force • Lack of increased education funding will diminish capacity for student enrollment, and hinder faculty recruitment and retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverse attitudes and outdated structures in banking & financial services • Equity and venture capital, as well as government assistance, tied to old economy formulas • Taxation structure, which does not support a New Economy, requires a complete review. • Reliance on tourism & dairy image will not reflect New Economy advances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discouraging regulatory environment • Higher individual (property) tax • Failure to benefit from increasing globalization • Failure to execute a promotional/media campaign • Failure to manage population growth • Failure to address workforce development needs • Failure to develop high tech/high wage jobs • Failure to build a high capacity telecommunications infrastructure

STRENGTHS

Central

The strengths of central Wisconsin can be summed up in a single phrase: *high quality of life*. A primary strength is its location, both geographically and geopolitically. The area is rich in natural resources both for exploitation (paper products, agriculture, the Wisconsin River system) and for recreation (natural forests, fishing, hunting, the Wisconsin River system). Its geopolitical location is also a strength, with numerous medium-sized urban centers connected by well-maintained highways, freight rail lines, and air transportation.

In terms of education, residents have access to excellent educational resources from kindergarten through post-secondary education. Through UW-Extension services, UW campuses and Wisconsin Technical College System schools, people in central Wisconsin can pursue educational opportunities throughout their lives.

Also contributing to the quality of life are such attributes as a premier health care system, especially in Marshfield and in Wausau, with centers that serve the entire region.

Urban centers are safe, with relatively low crime rates that help maintain a low cost of living. But that low cost of living comes with a high level of services—including well-maintained roads, good telecommunications services, reliable utility service and a strong network of nonprofit organizations.

Although government and its relationship to residents can often be seen as a weakness or a threat, this is not the case in central Wisconsin. Good relations were noted between business and government and among individual municipalities. The strong relationship between public education and other government agencies (e.g. the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the UW-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources) set the stage for further economic growth.

A diverse economy, solid work ethic, good financial resources (including the joining of public and private capital) strong chambers of commerce, and federal support of rural and urban development (including high-skilled job training in all areas), all contribute to the region's economic success. The region also identified a "cultural dividend" derived from this quality of life and economic health—as evident in the generous funding for the arts in metropolitan areas.

La Crosse

A diversified economy cushions the metropolitan area from single-industry failures and recessions. The region's high-tech growth rate is sixth in the nation, thanks to its software and information systems cluster. Product innovation in this sector has been significant.

Likewise, a strong health care industry drives the service sector employment—an industry likely to continue to grow in demand. The Health Science Center is a new educational and research facility.

Educational institutions from kindergarten through post-secondary are responding well to the needs of the top industry clusters and are prepared to work on development issues. These education systems compare well regionally and nationally.

Local efforts already exist to address some of these economic development challenges. The Technology Business Alliance (TBA), with broad community involvement, has already mobilized community resources for technology development. Two grants have been awarded for a feasibility study and the hiring of an executive director. The TBA is a membership group of public and private organizations that will work on regional challenges. A "venture" initiative has been launched to organize equity investors into a formal network with prospective investors already involved in the planning process. Several organizational meetings have yielded rapid progress toward the formation of the network.

Overall, the region has a reputation for good quality of life, including excellent resources for families. The region is well known for natural beauty and recreational opportunities—a valuable asset in recruiting and retaining employees.

The transportation infrastructure of the region is excellent with the Interstate 90-94 corridor connecting the region to Minneapolis and Madison, Milwaukee and Chicago; commercial navigation facilities on the Mississippi River; commercial rail; Amtrak and the airport.

Northern

The participants in Park Falls identified collaboration among various entities as a major strength. As a primary example, the Chequamegon Bay Group proposes that several communities, public and private interests could work together to create a strong technology-based segment for the Chequamegon Bay economy. The proposal presents researched ideas to create this technology segment in the areas of infrastructure, education and workforce development, finance, and

business development/ incubation. Such a project could also work in other communities in the north and other segments of the state.

Other identified strengths include the work ethic of the Wisconsin people. With training and encouragement, they can move the state forward. There are opportunities, for example, to establish new relationships with unions so the workforce can make the turn in a new technological direction.

St. Croix

The St. Croix Valley region offers numerous strengths that provide a solid foundation for the continuing economic development and success of the region. Collectively, these strengths are enduring features of the region's social, political, and economic fabric. They provide a stable platform upon which current and new businesses may grow and prosper in the New Economy. The region's foremost strength is the product of two factors. First is the region's proximity to the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Consistently the Twin Cities provide one of the nation's strongest economic bases, characterized by both its vibrancy and stability. Second is the region's independent political culture and enduring respect for its natural environments. Together, these factors provide the "best of both worlds", continual economic energy within the context of preservation for unique natural and socio-cultural environments. Given these factors, economic growth in the St. Croix Valley region is approached with optimistic caution, with careful attention paid to environmental and social impacts. As a whole, this approach has reaped significant dividends for the region whose ultimate strength is its high quality of life, high level of residential desirability, and substantial population growth through 2020.

The St. Croix Valley region offers numerous educational strengths, including PK-12 schools, technical colleges, and UW-River Falls. These institutions are well established, nationally recognized, and support the development of a world-class work force. Strong ties across these institutions, along with a history of collaboration, amplify the region's capacity to connect educational strengths with the needs for future economic development. In addition, proximity to the Twin Cities educational sector provides critical synergies that further strengthen the region's educational institutions, especially in terms of their curricula and faculties.

Additional strengths are provided by convenient access to I-94, and the continuing improvement of state highways such as the recent upgrading of Highway 35 between I-94 and River Falls. These projects enhance the strategic geographic position of the region and encourage continuing residential and retail growth. Business development in the region is enhanced by Wisconsin's competitive business tax structure, comparing business costs in Wisconsin with those found in Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

WEAKNESSES

Central

The aging population, and its attendant increased healthcare costs, pose several challenges for the Central region. Area businesses have an increased demand for additional workers while trying to replace experienced retiring workers, which has the potential to create a skills gap. Moreover, the area needs to increase the number of high-tech jobs, which are important in retaining and attracting younger workers. Further compounding this is an agricultural restructuring occurring since the end of World War II. With the growth of “corporate” farming and the demise of family farming comes a rise in the number of young workers needing alternative outlets for their skills. Too often, young workers do not see those alternatives in the Central region.

The quality of transportation services is good, but the capacity of the region’s current infrastructure is limited. Four-lane highways, large-capacity jet service and regional transportation planning need to be expanded. Likewise, while telecommunications services in most of the region are good to adequate, quality services need to be enhanced in the northern reaches of this region.

The availability of venture capital needs to be increased in the central region and the state of Wisconsin as a whole. A conservative banking culture needs to become more aggressive to assist more businesses in their expansions, especially in a region reliant on tourism as a major industry. The current tax structure of Wisconsin is not favorable to corporate residency.

Low wages may also contribute to the problem of younger workers leaving the area, especially in northern areas of the region where the cost of living may be higher than in other parts of the region.

In addition to these issues, some weaknesses in education must be addressed. There are occasions when business and industry have difficulty accessing specialized training, and not all students have the financial means to pursue higher education. Community resistance inhibits improvements such as building expansion and technology upgrades.

Social and economic backgrounds may also be a factor, as people from traditionally modest cultures learn to sell themselves in a global economy, and learn to be more open to differences and embrace diversity. Furthermore, the region’s workforce may not reach its full potential, which is partially due to educational programs not matching skills required for existing or future job opportunities in our region.

A lack of energy resources, and people’s negative attitudes toward energy development and delivery systems, is a major issue in Wisconsin that may inhibit long-term growth of existing businesses and new high-tech industries.

La Crosse

Not all Western Wisconsin counties are participating equally in economic growth. Per capita income in the La Crosse metropolitan area is 95% of state average, but other counties in the region fall far short of this level. High-tech growth is concentrated in, although not limited to, the metropolitan area. Fast-growth firms are also locating along the Interstate 90-94 corridor.

Too many local government jurisdictions and insufficient economic development expertise on the part of government decision-makers often create barriers to company growth and retard development.

Difficulty in recruiting qualified high-tech employees plagues the knowledge-based industries, especially software and information systems industry.

The lack of Ph.D. programs and research programs hinders the region, as does a scarcity of advanced computer-related programs. This hurts recruitment efforts and is a barrier to helping mid-level professionals stay current.

Despite high growth in technology, the image of the La Crosse region does not reflect this strength. It is known for a beautiful landscape and associated natural resources, not its industry or economic strengths. Despite good growth rate in high tech, the core is still relatively small. The absolute numbers of high-tech positions are not high, nor are research and development opportunities. Only a very small number of accountants, attorneys and bankers are familiar with the needs of emerging high-tech businesses. A larger core would create the necessary synergies.

There is no regional support for product innovation and development of intellectual property. Speed-to-market becomes especially important with high technology, yet the step of investigating and applying for patents and trademarks can be a barrier. R & D resources are limited. There is virtually no access to equity investors. Companies must go outside the region to find investors, with limited success.

Northern

The northern part of the state has questionable and unreliable access to technology resources. Service providers are years late in fulfilling the technology needs of communities while asking very high prices for the services. That puts the region at a disadvantage for recruiting businesses and for current businesses to stay in line—or even online—with technological advancements. The above, combined with inconsistent curricula in entrepreneurial and technology careers, compounds the drain of talent from communities.

St. Croix Valley

While proximity to the Twin Cities affords the region numerous economic advantages, it also presents the St. Croix Valley with several challenges. First, the vibrancy of the Twin Cities' economy has produced a very competitive labor market, creating stiff competition for employees. This, together with lower-than-average wages, presents the region with a significant challenge. The region's employers—small and large—consistently report problems associated with employee recruitment and retention.

Another challenge stemming from proximity to the Twin Cities is people's attachment to that media market. The prevalence of the Minneapolis and St. Paul media across the region presents significant marketing and communication problems. Regional businesses, governments and other institutions struggle to get their word out in a market that is both focused on Minnesota and the Twin Cities, and expensive. Citizens across the St. Croix Valley feel isolated from their state. It is very difficult for residents to learn about statewide concerns and initiatives when they are bombarded with Minnesota-related news and information.

Additional challenges faced by the St. Croix region include limited access to venture capital, the uneven availability of high-speed telecommunications infrastructures, and a shortage of affordable housing. To date, the region has attracted limited venture capital for general business development. Typically, venture capital has been applied to retail or residential building projects, with little monies going to high tech, New Economy ventures. Access to state-of-the-art telecommunications networks varies tremendously across the St. Croix Valley region. While some communities are well served, neighboring communities and rural areas receive outmoded service. This presents a major challenge for the region whose economic success in the New Economy will rest to a large extent on removing the limitations of geographic place for more remote and rural areas of the St. Croix Valley.

In many of the region's fastest-growing communities, the lack of affordable housing stock presents a significant barrier to sustained economic development. Without readily available and affordable housing, regional employers face great difficulty in recruiting and retaining local workers

OPPORTUNITIES

Central Wisconsin

Participants in this region's listening session believe that weaknesses may also present opportunities. For example, the population (aging and otherwise) is interested in maintaining their skill level and possibly preparing for second careers.

Transportation needs identified above, along with the restructuring of rural areas, may warrant a search for better planning to accommodate growth in urban and rural areas of Central Wisconsin. This type of planning will require citizen engagement and involvement in decision making.

Globalization and widespread use of the Internet have brought all areas of the world within reach in terms of communication and commerce. Central Wisconsin residents see this as an opportunity to build the economy and embrace diversity.

La Crosse

Preliminary meetings in the La Crosse region regarding the feasibility of a formal "angel" network uncovered the interest and enthusiasm for such a group. This can and will be pursued.

The new Technology Business Alliance is in place, similar to technology councils across the country that have been extremely successful in solving local challenges. Local leaders can build the Alliance to include manufacturers, service providers, government and educational systems.

The region's modern 30,000 square-foot business incubator can focus more on high-tech companies, creating more shared benefits for this target. Residents and businesses in the region can work together to find funding for infrastructure and facility requirements.

Intellectual property support services can be developed using the existing referral network of UW-Extension and the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center as a base. The region can build on its existing high-tech cluster industries, especially allied health, software, and agri-tech.

Northern

People are drawn to various areas of the state by the natural beauty and appealing lifestyle offered in those regions. However, young people are being forced to look elsewhere to do the jobs of the New Economy because of technology limitations. By creating technology access, an environment supportive of technology jobs and by creating quality jobs (not just numbers), people who enjoy the area can stay in the area.

Real opportunities exist for seamless New Economy partnerships between business and schools, both PK-12 schools and post-secondary schools. The state should put resources into high-quality school facilities on all levels.

There is talent and creativity in the people of this state, and incentives to encourage entrepreneurial ventures would result in job growth and financial contributions to communities. Risk-takers should be rewarded.

There are examples of successful coalitions in other states, where partnership between business and the state is bringing about success. The state's leaders should research and mirror the projects these coalitions have put in place.

St. Croix Valley

The St. Croix Valley region has numerous opportunities, many of which are derived from the region's strengths and weaknesses. For example, the region's high quality of life coupled with its strong work ethic, extensive educational capacity, and competitive business tax structure offer potential businesses distinct advantages as compared to other regional locations across the U.S.

Given the region's substantial educational capacity, significant opportunities exist to build upon this capacity through the creation of regional networks and alliances. These must be developed proactively to counter the balkanization that often characterizes older, well-established educational structures. PK-20 institutions across the St. Croix Valley have before them a special opportunity to take the lead in insuring the region's success in the New Economy whose main commodity is knowledge creation and life-long learning. In partnership with local businesses and governments, a regional educational alliance can insure access to skills development and training that translates into direct economic benefits.

The St. Croix Valley's competitive advantage in the New Economy will depend to a large extent upon the ability to link the region's private, public and non-profit organizations and firms to a seamless "knowledge supply chain". The educational sector has an opportunity to articulate the elements of this chain and create structures for maintaining it.

In addition, the St. Croix Valley has an opportunity to grow and develop emerging bio-technology businesses, thanks to its proximity to the Twin Cities, coupled with the region's existing agricultural and agri-businesses sectors.

THREATS

Central

Though the region is technologically sound now, its technology infrastructure must be continually upgraded to remain competitive. This will require significant resources. Education, although a current strength, also is threatened, and the workforce may not be able to keep up with technology. Connected to this is a decreasing commitment of tax dollars for education. The brisk pace of technological change continues, and education must emphasize technology in addition to critical thinking and communication.

Participants in this region identified as a weakness the small number of jobs for highly-trained youth. As these individuals leave the area, the region may effectively export its best talent to the extent that it cannot catch up with other areas. Many of those leaving are young women, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that Wisconsin's gender gap is already one of the largest in the United States. This is an indicator of decline in the labor force and a decline in the level of education of those remaining.

There are social threats, as well, including a disregard for the talents of retirees. These individuals have much to offer. Although outreach efforts like SCORE are a start, retirees are not seen as a primary asset in this region. The regional task force also identified erosion in the work ethic as a threat. The tradition of a good work ethic may change as family structures loosen, and individuals have fewer ties to the region. The continual downsizing of companies and its impact on workforce morale may exacerbate this shift.

Rapid change itself may also pose a threat, if it de-emphasizes the training of individuals in basic trade skills such as carpentry, plumbing, and electrical, which could be given more emphasis at the high-school level. With rapid change also frequently comes higher costs in all areas, especially health care and energy, which may undermine the low cost of living and high living standards. Finally, rapid change poses the threat of more governmental regulations, especially environmental regulations that will add to the cost of doing business.

La Crosse

Local governments, if they do not choose to participate in efforts to develop regional technology resources, may continue to be a barrier to growth.

Regional economic development may continue to suffer due to competition(s) between municipalities and political boundaries. La Crosse needs to embrace and support major developments outside of La Crosse County and *vice versa*.

Manufacturing companies in mature industries may suffer downsizing and closures faster than the economy can retrain and redirect the labor force.

Lack of increased funding for education will accelerate the downsizing and diminished capacity for student enrollments. Recruitment and retention of teaching faculty requires significant resources.

Northern

Adverse attitudes and outdated structures in banking and financial services may threaten new and emerging businesses by curtailing the flow of venture capital funding and loans. As an example, one client who wanted to discuss a technology loan had to go through a financial advisor trained in agriculture. Government resources and assistance programs are similarly tied to old economy formulas.

Formulas for taxation, for individuals and business, require a complete review. The current state tax system does not support a New Economy.

Relying on a tourism or dairy image will not reflect Wisconsin's advances into the new economy.

St. Croix Valley

Threats to the region's economic success in the New Economy result primarily from inaction. Failure to aggressively build high speed telecommunications infrastructures across the region or failure to create a regional "knowledge supply chain" and focused workforce development model via the PK-16 educational sectors typify such inaction. In addition, failure to manage population growth as a result of the eastward expansion of the Twin Cities substantially threatens the St. Croix Valley region.

Other threats include Wisconsin's comparatively high taxes on both individuals and families. This coupled with the growing lack of affordable housing poses significant threats for employee recruitment, relocation and retention across the St. Croix Valley. Also, many feel that Wisconsin's regulatory environment discourages new economic development. Often cited are the mass of regulations and lack of customer service faced by potential business entrepreneurs.

Recommendations

The following is a summary of specific recommendations from the regional listening sessions, organized according to seven issues:

- *Building quality jobs*
- *Increasing venture capital*
- *Improving the regulatory climate*
- *Educating the workforce*
- *Improving entrepreneurial climate*
- *Enhancing key infrastructures*
- *Building a distinctive Wisconsin brand/image*

ISSUE	LOCAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	Central	Northern	La Crosse	St. Croix Valley
BUILDING QUALITY JOBS	Develop multiple research and development parks, funded through public/private initiatives, to attract New Economy businesses. Build on current state/regional strengths such as biotechnology and agribusiness, with strong links to educational resources for incubator space, research and applied learning opportunities.	X	X	X	X
	Expand and promote economic development alliances between local/state government and private businesses to expand existing businesses and encourage the development of new high-tech industries. Promote incentives for high tech industries to relocate.	X		X	X
	Create jobs that meet market demands. Assess residents' skill levels, and their relationship to business needs. Work with Human Resources directors to understand employment and retention issues.	X			X
	Embrace diversity and enlarge the pool for human resource recruitment and training, including aging populations. Cultural attitudes have limited the regional vision for the future.	X		X	
	Continue to educate service (trade) workers	X			
	Combat the prevailing goal of many employers to suppress wages. The long-term impact of a below-market wage structure is devastating to recruitment and retention.			X	
	Guarantee access to education and technology.	X			
	Guarantee access to state agencies and resources.	X			
	Inventory current students and residents to learn how to "recapture" commuters and graduates.				X
	Redefine the meaning of "work environment."		X		
+ VENTURE CAPITAL	Develop targeted campaigns to gather venture capital for economic development from private wealth within specific regions of the state.	X	X		X
	Improve the tax climate of the state by enhancing state tax credit programs and providing more funding to counties to help identify entrepreneurs. (e.g., tax breaks, private venture capital, revolving funds, venture capital mutual funds)	X	X		X

Recommendations from the Greater Wisconsin Task Force

ISSUE	LOCAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	Central	Northern	La Crosse	St. Croix Valley
INCREASING VENTURE CAPITAL	Strengthen collaboration – reduce city/county competitiveness – and provide education to businesses and counties on how to apply for grant funding. Explore regional economic development incentives.	X	X		X
	Create an angel network to respond to regional proposals for equity financing.			X	
	Develop a “regional” clearinghouse to link entrepreneurs and venture capitalists, clustered by sector, to seek dollars from outside Wisconsin. Provide confidentiality.				X
	Focus on attracting companies appropriate for a specific region— that protect the environment, relate to existing companies, and link to business incubators and the research park.		X		X
	Get banks to shake loose dollars—financial institutions are risk averse. Develop venture capital opportunities like community bankers’ association or angel network.		X	X	
	Encourage accounting firms, attorneys and banks to increase their expertise in high-tech development.			X	
	Identify natural “niches” for possible incubators – Paper, environmental, medical research, etc.	X			
	Maintain connections with statewide financial resources.			X	
	Offer educational opportunities for people who are considering angel investment to help prepare them for making sound decisions.			X	
	Promote UW Foundation investment in venture capital firms	X			
	Work with companies to assist them in accessing different kinds of debt financing, public and private, before they are ready for equity financing or as part of the whole financing package.			X	
IMPROVING THE REGULATORY CLIMATE	Coordinate regulatory efforts more effectively, so that regulated businesses no longer face conflicting regulations from multiple agencies. Streamline processes by making rules and forms clearer, reducing the numbers and layers of regulations and developing a one-stop process for information and permits. Improve customer service, technical skills and solution mindedness. Speed-to-market is very important and unnecessary delays are costly.	X	X	X	X
	Advocate for regulations that will support the development of New Economy businesses in Western Wisconsin.		X		X
	Develop partnerships and alliances to enhance advocacy efforts.			X	X
	Educate regulators and encourage them to be creative and flexible when incorporating regulations that may affect economic development – but balance with responsibility.	X	X		
	Improve communications about regulations in order to facilitate New Economy growth.			X	X
	Regulations should be easily understood, user-friendly, less punitive and more assistive.	X			X
	Include government representatives in local Technology Business Alliance and other discussions to ensure the mutual needs are communicated.			X	

Recommendations from the Greater Wisconsin Task Force

ISSUE	LOCAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	Central	Northern	La Crosse	St. Croix Valley
IMPROVING THE REGULATORY CLIMATE	Initiate a complete review of regulations toward a new strategy to protect high quality of life and high-tech businesses. Move beyond regulations tied to physical property toward protection of intellectual property. Likewise, focus regulations on quality of jobs, rather than the number of jobs created.		X		
	Regulation issues such as cable, wastewater, zoning and land use, and annexation should better promote balance between economic health and environmental health.	X			
	Require collaboration among governments and require area-wide planning.			X	
	Work to influence legislation regarding regulation of uncharted, unregulated areas of the New Economy; at the same time we must educate the public and the legislature on the impact of new regulations.	X			
EDUCATING THE WORKFORCE	Assess and coordinate the instructional technology needs of various educational institutions. Bring technology training to secondary schools and increase funding to schools so as to lower the teacher-student ratio; provide better access to technical education.	X	X	X	
	Build communication between educational institutions (K-12 and post secondary) and employers. Connect standards and credentials with industry requirements.	X	X	X	
	Develop vertically-integrated P-16 curriculum, aligning standards, curriculum and assessments with an emphasis on New Economy skills and career opportunities. Provide for smooth transitions from high school to all types of post-secondary programs, and from 2-year/technical programs to 4-year programs. Reduce barriers to returning to education after being out of the system.		X	X	X
	Provide teachers, guidance counselors and schools with professional development resources to keep pace with technology, to enhance both classroom instruction and guidance offered to students about new types of jobs available and entrepreneurial career opportunities.		X	X	
	Expand collaboration and cooperative planning and delivery of educational programs among government, universities, technical colleges and businesses.		X		X
	Increase skilled and certified instructors for computer-related training.			X	
	Increase use of internships to expose individuals to education. Promote alternatives to the standard, four-year degree, including on-the-job training; ease the transfer of credit between four-year college and two-year technical programs.	X	X		
	Link education placement services to regional jobs.				X
	Offer more advanced degrees and graduate programs, especially in response to regional specialties. Educators and industry must work together to plan and prioritize.			X	
	Provide incentives to businesses to develop the workforce and incentives to educators to develop programs; encourage businesses to collaborate in job training so as to lower cost.	X			
	Continue to provide incentives to employers to retrain workforce.			X	

Recommendations from the Greater Wisconsin Task Force

ISSUE	LOCAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	Central	Northern	La Crosse	St. Croix Valley
EDUCATING THE WORKFORCE	Provide more institutional support so that the local enrollment caps can be lifted and student enrollment capacity can be increased.			X	
	Provide training in cultural, generational, gender, and ethnic diversities.	X			
	Strengthen outreach programs at the university by matching workforce development needs to the university/educational resources in order to utilize research capabilities, strengthen mentoring and internship programs, and facilitate training and education of non-traditional students.				X
	Use telecommunication infrastructures to expand distance learning opportunities for residents of smaller communities.				X
IMPROVING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CLIMATE	Infuse the population with an entrepreneurial spirit at a young age through education. Start talking about entrepreneurial opportunities in the classroom. Encourage schoolchildren and post-secondary students to invent new products or services.	X	X	X	
	Develop and support strategic entrepreneurial alliances.		X	X	X
	Promote regional cooperation and development, facilitated through an organization that gathers and disseminates information on “best practices,” and develops educational programs around strategies with a proven track record.	X		X	X
	Create more substantial and visible technical assistance to fast-growth companies.			X	
	Seek venture capital and grants for entrepreneurial start-ups.		X		X
	Develop one-stop center for information about entrepreneurship (e.g., SBDC) and venture capital.				X
	Encourage product innovation by making support services readily available.			X	
	Establish new incentives (e.g., provide a local think tank, reduced start-up costs) for entrepreneurship.		X		X
	Communicate better to the public on Wisconsin’s natural, human, and financial resources.	X			
	Keep media attention on entrepreneurial successes, especially those with product innovation.			X	
	Balance economic-development issues with quality-of-life issues	X	X		
	Offer incentives for entrepreneurs.		X		
	Reduce and prioritize tax impact.		X		
	Reduce governmental red tape and oversight; government agency policies must make good, common sense; the state tax structure must be less onerous; eliminate unfunded mandates.	X			
	Support international business expansion with information resources and technical assistance as a strategy to support both high-tech companies and increase per capita wages.			X	
	Continue to emphasize access to lifelong learning.	X			
Work toward the goal of increasing the per capita income in all counties.			X		

Recommendations from the Greater Wisconsin Task Force

ISSUE	LOCAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS	Central	Northern	La Crosse	St. Croix Valley
ENHANCING KEY INFRASTRUCTURES	Invest in and develop a state-of-the-art, high-speed telecommunications infrastructure around the needs of the region. Factor in increased demand from proposed research parks and other efforts. Focus on wireless/cellular communication.		X	X	X
	Promote affordable and available health and child care Develop and promote regional medical facility.	X			X
	Receive assistance in improving transportation—especially road, rail, and air capacity—and telecommunications, both of which also need consistent upgrading. Develop transportation network, including high-speed rail.	X			X
	Ensure consistent and affordable energy.	X			
	Establish affordable housing, water and sewer capacity.				X
	Get a definitive answer on available technology access. A regional inventory of existing technology infrastructure could help define what is needed. Outlying areas are especially burdened by slow delivery of technology.		X		
	Mobilize more resources for educational systems.			X	
	Provide incentives to rejuvenate urban centers.	X			
	Provide support for women in developing businesses and provide families with adequate and affordable day care.				X
BUILDING A DISTINCTIVE WISCONSIN BRAND	Change Wisconsin’s branding messages (e.g., America’s Dairyland, brats and beer, hunting and fishing, etc.) and launch public information campaign to emphasize a New Economy perspective that builds out from the traditional strengths of the region—agriculture, tourism and manufacturing.	X	X	X	X
	Identify and promote those factors that contribute to the quality of life in the region.		X		X
	Develop regional/national marketing campaigns to promote Wisconsin and its technology strengths (e.g., billboards targeting tourists, subsidized tours for promotional purposes, newspaper ads in the <i>Wall Street Journal</i> or <i>New York Times</i>).	X		X	
	Accelerate transfer of biotech statewide.		X		
	Change image first to reflect New Economy – need strong vision of the future. Individuals expressed the need to create the vision first, “where does the state want to be,” then implement the change so that the image is a true reflection of the state.		X		
	Hold a “central Wisconsin day” in Madison hosted by legislature	X			
	Market the region as “the cutting edge of Wisconsin” (e.g., quality work ethic of people, natural resources of the area, St. Croix River Valley, success stories).				X
	Promote access to high quality, public education as means of attracting young professionals to the region.				X
	Promote the value residents receive for their tax dollars.	X			
Promote the work ethic of the people of Wisconsin.		X			

Conclusions & Major Recommendations

While there were understandable differences among the four regions and 36 counties included in this report, several themes were common to at least two or three regions.

The broad participation in regional planning groups, impressive turnout at public listening sessions and generally positive response to the Wisconsin Economic Summit reflect a strong interest in this subject. Residents with very unique perspectives from different regions of the state share a common desire to take action. They are committed to any effort that will increase their chances of continued prosperity and economic opportunity.

One common theme that emerged from nearly every corner of the state was the need to balance peoples' desire for economic growth with efforts to preserve the current quality of life. Many attributes of this high quality of life related to the state's environment, its natural resources and the corresponding recreational opportunities that are not only enjoyed by residents but also feed one of the state's strongest industries—tourism.

A careful, coordinated approach to economic expansion is one way to address concerns about environmental protections. Comprehensive planning, consistent with the state's Smart Growth initiative, may answer questions about how to support existing business and industry and maintain a high quality of life.

Residents across the state recognize that, if we are to be successful in reaching sustainable growth, it must focus on statewide and/or regional strategies. Communities across the state want to share in the continued economic prosperity, and be part of future growth. Businesses that successfully establish a foothold in the urban areas should have incentives to branch out into rural communities that are securely connected to economic centers, including those across the state borders.

Such a broad view might lead policy makers toward a "one-size-fits-all" approach. However, individual regions and communities need to build on existing strengths and niches already identified in their respective plans. Specific industrial and commercial clusters exist on which the state can build a more diversified economic base. Examples include La Crosse's allied health care and software innovation clusters, and the plastics industry in Central Wisconsin.

To meet the emerging challenges of a global, knowledge-based economy, Wisconsin must renew and amplify its commitment to lifelong learning. Educational resources for every life stage must be a keystone to Wisconsin's

economic plans. Traditional educational models may no longer meet the needs of residents who must repeatedly adapt to new career opportunities and new job demands. The need for accessible, flexible educational opportunities throughout the lives of Wisconsin workers means that lifelong learning is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Educational curricula and technical training programs must focus on quality, high-paying jobs. This will require that schools, teachers and counselors be provided with the information and resources to effectively prepare young people for the best job opportunities. They must be fully trained and strongly supported in their efforts to infuse classroom experiences with more hands-on internships and opportunities to show young people the wide array of career and entrepreneurial choices available to them.

Along with enhancements to Wisconsin's already strong educational systems, other public and private services must be maintained at a high level. Access to the finest financial services, transportation, health care, communications, energy and utility resources is key.

Shortcomings in Wisconsin's telecommunications and communications systems emerged as one of the most repeated infrastructure concerns from every region. Moreover, it was identified as an issue related directly to many of the other key issues, showing that a state without reliable communications networks cannot succeed at building quality jobs or enhancing its entrepreneurial climate. The existing inconsistency in the quality of telecommunications services available to Wisconsin communities illustrates the danger of focusing exclusively on services designed to serve a handful of metropolitan areas. If economic vitality is to spread, it needs to travel over a robust communications network that can provide new business and employment opportunities for the broad spectrum of rural and urban populations.

Elected officials and all public agency staff—especially those who oversee various regulatory and rule-making processes—must become more customer-focused. In an environment where speed-to-market can mean the difference between success or failure, businesses should have access to solution-minded regulators and technical staff who understand their role as catalysts, not barriers.

For the best results, this revamped regulatory approach should be coupled with increased financial incentives that would encourage business growth and success, and bring more high-wage jobs to all Wisconsin communities.

Each of the changes described above is predicated on one fundamental shift—in the very culture of Wisconsin. People must accept change, embrace economic diversification and welcome the new populations that will be attracted to this state by any successful economic development effort. Changing the state's image, and establishing a new "Wisconsin brand," begins with an internal communications

effort to promote an open-minded culture and recognize those individuals, businesses and communities whose efforts can serve as a model for others.

Based on these observations, and a thorough analysis of the recommendations listed on pages 19-23, the Greater Wisconsin Task Force submits the following items as its **major recommendations**:

- 1. Use education and research assets to nurture New Economy growth** – To succeed in the New Economy, Wisconsin must begin by building on its current strengths in biotechnology and agriculture, leveraging the corresponding educational, research and training programs at University of Wisconsin campuses, private colleges and technical schools. Based on the unique business and industry niches and educational/research resources in each region of the state, Wisconsin should develop additional research and development parks linked to these educational resources, funded through public-private initiatives. These projects could attract and grow New Economy businesses by offering business incubator space, research capabilities and applied learning opportunities.
- 2. Showcase Wisconsin's high-tech leadership** – People nationwide must have an expanded view of Wisconsin and all it offers, in terms of business climate and job opportunities. Wisconsin must change its branding messages to emphasize a high-technology image, building out from the traditional strengths of the region—agriculture, tourism and manufacturing. State leaders and economic development alliances should develop a targeted national marketing campaign to promote Wisconsin and its technology strengths including subsidized promotional tours, advertisements in national publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*, and other marketing strategies. In-state marketing channels should also be used to build broader awareness among Wisconsin residents of this image, to help people better see the high-tech potential of their own state.
- 3. Invest in Wisconsin's communications backbone** – Using public/private alliances, improved regulatory policies, and financial incentives, Wisconsin must develop, expand and maintain a state-of-the-art, high-speed telecommunications infrastructure around the economic development needs of the entire state. An assessment of the current infrastructure will identify areas where current systems cannot adequately support telecommuting, distance learning, new high-tech business incubators and other high-demand usage that will be critical to statewide participation in a New Economy strategy. Expansion and new development should focus on wireless networks, digital communications, datacasting and other innovative technologies.

4. **Reshape the educational system to meet new and emerging needs** – To ensure economic success for years and decades to come, Wisconsin must focus on the development of a strong, well-educated workforce. Such an effort should start with an integrated PK-16 curriculum that aligns standards, curricula and assessments with New Economy business needs, high-tech skills and the full range of career opportunities. New forums for communication among educational institutions (PK-12 and post-secondary) and employers could facilitate planning around some specific objectives:
 - a) Providing students with a smooth transition from high school to all types of post-secondary programs, from 2-year/technical programs to 4-year programs, and from the workforce back into the post-secondary educational systems;
 - b) Addressing the instructional technology needs of all educational institutions, to improve teaching and provide better access to technical education; and
 - c) Infusing tomorrow's workforce (and the entire population) with an entrepreneurial spirit by starting at a young age and incorporating entrepreneurial thinking and invention in the classroom, and offering more counseling about New Economy job opportunities and career paths.
5. **Foster a growth-friendly regulatory climate where New Economy businesses can thrive** – Wisconsin should consider launching a multi-agency effort to reform state regulatory policies that impact the successful growth of new businesses. Such a coordinated effort should seek to eliminate conflicting regulations from multiple agencies, provide a streamlined, user-friendly process with clearer rules, simpler forms, and fewer layers of regulations, and offer a one-stop process for regulatory information and permits. The state should provide joint education, training and planning opportunities for regulatory agency staffs and business representatives. These opportunities should help regulatory agencies improve their customer service skills and creativity while encouraging businesses to adopt strategies and technology to achieve regulatory compliance in the most effective, cost-efficient manner.
6. **Adopt new financial policies and systems that support growth** – To encourage the development and growth of New Economy businesses, Wisconsin must implement new financial policies and tax credit programs that result in better lending practices by banks and an improved tax climate. In addition to new policies, such a strategy should include educational and professional development opportunities for professionals in Finance, Law and Accounting that increase their levels of expertise in understanding the unique issues relating to New Economy business ventures.

7. **Use broad alliances to support expansion and development** – To implement any of the recommendations above, Wisconsin must develop cross-governmental alliances that strengthen collaboration, reduce city/county competition, and provide shared educational opportunities for business and government leaders. By expanding and promoting economic development alliances between local/state governments and private businesses, Wisconsin can support the growth and expansion of existing businesses while encouraging the development of new high-tech industries. These groups should play an integral role in planning and policy development, and provide learning resources that improve members' abilities to obtain grant funding, support local entrepreneurs, uncover private venture capital, attract existing high-tech businesses, and develop strategic economic development incentives/plans. These alliances and coalitions should be supported by an organization that gathers and disseminates information on "best practices," and develops educational programs around strategies with a proven track record.

Appendix I: Regional Task Forces

Central Wisconsin

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Northern Region

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Task Force Coordinator
UW-Superior

Jean Buffalo Reyes
Red Cliff Tribal Chair
Bayfield

Larry MacDonald
Mayor
Bayfield

Andy Albarado
Rusk County Development Director
Ladysmith

Tom Ellis
President-First National Bank
Eagle River

Karla Mortenson
President-Chamber of Commerce
Shell Lake

Ed Brandis
Logger/Publisher
Upton

Tony Murphy
City Administrator
Ashland

Kaye Tenerelli
Director-Business Improvement District
Superior

Ken Dischler
General Manager-Park Falls Herald
Park Falls

St. Croix Valley

Richard Best
Director, West Central Wis. Workforce
Menomonie

Robert Milam,
Provost & Vice Chancellor, UWRF
River Falls

Peter Bremer
Presenter
River Falls

David Rasmussen
Polk County Planner
Balsam Lake

Susan K. Brown
Dean-Ed. & Training, CVTC
Menomonie

Lynn Regnier, Executive Director
New Richmond Chamber of Commerce
New Richmond, WI 54017

Grant Durham
General Plastics Extrusion
Prescott

William R. Rubin
Exec. Dir., St. Croix Economic Dev. Corp.
Hudson

Jim Harsdorf
Dairy and Livestock Production
Beldenville

Quentin Schultz
President, Biodiagnostics
Ellsworth

Jan Hillard (Task Force Vice-Chair)
UWRF
River Falls

Jack Sroka
Exec. Dir., Barron Cty. Econ. Dev. Corp.
Barron

Bruce Johnson
President, Amery Development Corp.
Amery

Paula Stolp
Community Relations Mgr., Xcel Energy
Hudson, WI

Mark Kinders
Director-Public Affairs, UWRF
River Falls

Bernie Van Osdale
Administrator, City of River Falls
River Falls

Jim Letourneau
Foley United Manufacturing
River Falls

Sandra Whelan
River Falls Area Hospital
River Falls

Ann Lydecker (Task Force Chair)
Chancellor, UWRF
River Falls

Chuck Whiting
St. Croix County Administrator
Hudson

UW-Extension Staff

Bob Andersen
Assistant Chancellor

Kevin Reilly (Gr. Wis. Task Force Chair)
Chancellor

David Giroux
Director, Public Information

Rita Sears
Executive Assistant

Jennifer Grondin
Special Assistant to the Chancellor

Marv Van Kekerix
Provost & Vice Chancellor

Greg Wise
Secretary to the Faculty & Academic Staff

Appendix II: Map of regions

