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NEWS. . . FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Workforce Initiative Association, operator of the OhioMeansJobs Centers in Stark and Tuscarawas Counties, has been awarded a \$41,065 technical assistance planning grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) for the Coal Business United Resource Network (Coal BURN) Real-Time Insights for Real-Time Actions project.

This grant will result in the implementation of a formal multi-state planning process to obtain a better understanding of current and future workforce opportunities in coal-impacted communities in parts of Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The project begins this month and runs through December 2017.

This new multi-county, multi-state consortium will draw on data and actions that currently exist while obtaining information and data on specific skills needed in the workplace, and helping the workforce system to more effectively enable dislocated workers to meet the needs of local businesses. Data collected will be integrated into an interstate development strategy and the model will be expanded to include Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

In 2011 the Workforce Initiative Association received a \$250,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Development to replicate a business retention and expansion model that originated in Youngstown, Ohio in 2008. The Business Resource Network (BRN) takes hundreds of resources and streamlines them into a single access point for employers, bringing them from Point A-to-Z of the process. The BRN navigates through the red tape of governmental agencies and programs to determine which funding streams would be best suited to the employer's current and future needs to grow, improve, or expand their businesses. The primary goal of the BRN is to connect workforce development, economic development and education in a collaborative, seamless and customer-focus partnership structure to deliver effective business services.

As a result of the success of this model, the Workforce Initiative Association was tapped in 2012 to serve as the administrative and fiscal agent for a \$6 million U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant that expanded the BRN to 16 counties in Ohio. Since July 2012, the BRN has assisted over **1,800 businesses** in the 16 Ohio counties to access over **\$10.7 million** in workforce and economic development programs and incentives.

"The vision for a BRN interstate model began over two years ago and the planning grant from ARC will help us formalize and create the foundation for expansion of the BRN process and model to additional workforce development boards in southeastern Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania," said Matt Falter, Project Director for the BRN.

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