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## **Eastern Region applies for grant to create directory of skilled workers**

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In response to troubling labor trends linked to a large unskilled labor force, the Eastern Region Development Commission announced its intention to create a directory of skilled workers.

If granted, the \$5 million U.S Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant would fund the use of WorkKeys assessments in the Eastern Region's 21 member counties. Testing and training would begin in marine trades, life science and healthcare fields, Eastern Region director Albert Delia told area economic developers and officials at the TransPark Center on Wednesday.

The grant would create a directory of up to 5,000 skilled workers in the three fields. The list - complete with workers' names, addresses and phone numbers - could be distributed to businesses and prove Eastern North Carolina has a trained labor force.

The assessments could also help existing industries provide better training to current employees, Delia said.

"This could be a huge tool. We usually miss opportunities because of statistics. The WIRED initiative proposal is going to change that," Delia said. "By using this tool, we will identify gaps in the workforce and we can assess the effectiveness of our K-12 schools, community colleges and universities."

Only two proposals per state can be submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor through state governors. Gov. Mike Easley will submit North Carolina's proposals by April 13. Other state regions are in competition for the grant.

Delia called on Eastern North Carolina officials to work through their legislators to influence Easley's decision.

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