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Build worker skills

A coordinated effort is vital if New York, U.S. intend to compete

There's a collision coming with serious consequences for the regional labor force.

A number of trends — retiring baby boomers, demographic shifts, immigration, technological change and a skills gap — are beginning to intersect amid a disconnected work force development system. The problem isn't a lack of programs. It's that those that exist don't reflect a coordinated strategy.

Officials with the National Workforce Association and RochesterWorks! are right to sound the alarm. These issues aren't new, but the urgency to act is greater. Spending in New York on work force programs was \$275 million less in 2005 than in 2003. With the growing need for education and training, less money will only exacerbate the problem. But more important than increased funding is how it is allocated and used.

A report put out by the Center for an Urban Future and New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals shows the maze among 28 active work force funding streams that are accountable to 11 different state and federal agencies.

Streamlining and coordination must be a priority in order to ensure funds are being used as effectively as possible. The report urges placing pressure on public universities to appropriate financial aid to more adult and part-time students, strengthening programs that help businesses train current workers and properly educating students about career paths and the training needed.

These are all necessary steps. Locally, the Rochester area was one of 13 sites last year selected for the WIRED Initiative, which awarded \$15 million over a three-year period to help cultivate a more regional, integrated approach to work force development. The award demonstrates this region's commitment to job growth. But until the various players in the work force system get on the same page, the collision will be inevitable.



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