

## Attachment VII

– Oregon and Florida Case Studies from the Jobs for the Future (JFF)  
WIN-WIN Partnership Paper –  
(URL – <http://winwin.workforce3one.org>)

### **“Innovations in Labor Market Intelligence: Meeting the New Requirements of Regional Workforce and Economic Development”**

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*The Oregon Employment Department  
Regional Outreach for Labor Market Intelligence*  
(pages 6 – 18)

Over many decades, and particularly since 1997, the Oregon Employment Department has made significant investments in regional services that make labor market intelligence more accessible and relevant to local users. While the investments are consistent with Oregon’s long history of supporting quality information and analysis to support decision-making, the state legislature bolstered this support in 1998 when it re-allocated employment service funding to create a system of workforce analysts to be out-stationed across 15 regions of the state. These analysts are charged with focusing sixty percent of their time on direct services to businesses in their regions, and the remaining time to workforce, education, and economic development stakeholders. Since implementing the regional system and developing the website [www.QualityInfo.org](http://www.QualityInfo.org), Oregon's Research Division has won more than a dozen national and state awards for its work on making quality data accessible locally.

#### **Purpose and Goals**

The State of Oregon passed legislation in 1997 authorizing the Oregon Employment Department to create a system of workforce analysts that directly support businesses, workforce agencies, educational institutions, and others located in all regions across the state. The law’s intent was to make the state’s labor market and economic data more relevant and more accessible to these local and regional stakeholders. The legislation, which was implemented in 1998, allowed the Department to add a team of 13 business-focused workforce analysts to the existing group of eight regional economists. Regional economists are experts at creating labor market intelligence that builds on in-depth local knowledge; workforce analysts assist employers, planners, and other workforce development partners with their labor market information needs.<sup>1</sup> According to Graham Slater, administrator for research at the Department, two core purposes drive the program: quality information and customer service.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.qualityinfo.org/>.

## Regional LMI

### Regional Research Services

After passage of the 1997 legislation, the Oregon Employment Department re-allocated funding formerly budgeted for about twenty employment service worker positions that had been vacant, and used that funding to create the new the workforce analyst positions, adding them to the long-existing, out-stationed regional economists. Today, the Department has deployed eight regional economists and 13 workforce analysts across local regions, positioning them inside one-stop centers and linking them closely with workforce investment boards (WIBs) at the local level.

*"Because Economic Development for Central Oregon and the Employment Department have similar geographic charters, we're able to share information to create a fuller picture of the dynamics of Central Oregon's economy."*  
- Roger Lee

The eight regional economists are considered "the go-to people" for generating regional data that is relevant to local stakeholders; estimating employment and economic trends; and writing articles, analyses, and other publications. These Oregon Employment Department employees are seen as experts on employment and workforce issues for the region, and are the resource most used for giving major economic and labor market presentations to business and civic groups, education institutions, and the public.

About half of the regional economists' time is spent developing data and analysis for their regions of Oregon. In addition to standard statistical analysis, the economists gather local intelligence by participating in relevant meetings of the local chambers of commerce and WIBs, by meeting with economic and workforce leaders, and by reading local newspapers to spot major labor market events and trends. Much of their time is also devoted to providing regular updates to those organizations and responding to requests for intelligence from board members and executive staff. They produce monthly employment reports, ten-year employment projections, and a host of specialized reports on individual industries and special issues in the labor market.

Businesses and workforce groups frequently turn to their regional economists for special presentations on the economy, as well as for handling media contacts. One Research

*"When I have a tough question about the economy from the local media, I can take it to Jan [workforce analyst] and Carolyn [regional economist]. They're eager to explain what's behind the data, and I really appreciate that."*  
- Laurel Werhane

Division customer reports that she refers almost all media inquiries about labor trends to her regional economist because the economist has an in depth knowledge about how the data are generated and is adept at explaining the nuances of the data that can have political ramifications if misinterpreted.

The state's 13 workforce analysts are located at One-Stop centers throughout Oregon, often with the regional economists, and directly assist employers, employer associations, planners, and other workforce development partners in meeting their labor

market information needs. Their role is to make LMI more accessible, and help businesses understand and use the data.

Upon request, the analysts help employers conduct customized research, most often in the areas of wages, occupations, and workplace strategies, frequently using the web and other information technologies.<sup>2</sup> Regional economic development leaders regularly use the workforce analysts in their business attraction and retention efforts, requesting research on the skills supply, wage levels, and other issues relevant to businesses considering locating in the region, and involving the analysts in meetings with prospective employers. One economic development leader reports that she now includes her local workforce analyst in most initial meetings with business recruitment prospects and for almost every recruitment finalist meeting, so that the analyst can address any last minute labor market and skills supply questions that arise.

The Department drives the workforce analysts to be relevant to local businesses and workforce partners through the set of performance standards by which they are evaluated. Department managers consider the analysts' primary job to be providing services to employers. As such, the analysts are expected to

*"Annette calls me – a one person business – to offer me information. She wants me to know what's available because she knows I'll use it."*  
- Brian Cole

devote 60 percent of their time to serving businesses. This includes regular one-on-one meetings with businesses, as well as work with such business groups as manufacturers associations, the regional Society for Human Resource Management, and local chambers of commerce. The other 40 percent of their time is to be split between services to workforce intermediaries, educational institutions, and economic developers; media interviews; and building their general knowledge of workforce and economic trends.

This standard of practice often is challenging for workforce analysts because the non-business stakeholders find their participation in board and staff meetings invaluable, and make frequent requests for specialized information. To encourage the analysts to focus first on employers' needs, the Department has developed performance goals and measures that reward analyst visits to businesses and ensure that special research requests are well considered. For example, the Department worked out new performance goals in 2006 requiring each analyst to meet with the top 75 businesses in his or her region during the year.

An additional feature of Oregon's regional service approach is in its requirements for hiring analysts and economists. When recruiting staff for these positions, the state made the ability to communicate with stakeholders about labor market data a priority. "We hire for great communication skills," as Slater, the Division's administrator, shared about the state's approach. The state also tries to hire staff who understood client needs

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.qualityinfo.org/>.

as much as data. In the initial hiring for the new positions, the state hired five staff who had previously served as employment service (ES) workers. They did this in part because of the ES workers' in-depth experience and understanding of the workforce system. Though these workers' initial analytic experience was less than other candidates, the Division invested substantially in their economics training to prepare them for the positions. Satisfaction with the workforce analysts in the regions interviewed was almost uniformly, and enthusiastically positive.

*"We hire for great communication skills." – Graham Slater*

*"Our person in La Grande is phenomenal. She's a 'gem' who loves her job. And she 'gets' the difference between data and information." – Brian Cole*

### **Close Contact with Decision Makers**

One essential benefit from out-stationing workforce analysts and regional economists has been the Research Division's improved capacity to understand intimately the information needs of decision makers at the regional and local level. The analysts' and economists' constant participation in industry association, chamber of commerce, business recruitment, workforce investment board, community college, and other decision making meetings has given each a first-hand understanding of the issues facing these leaders. The continual contact and discussion with these leaders helps the analysts and economists learn, and then develop and improve, the type of information the leaders most value for making informed decisions. The proximity also helps the researchers sharpen the ways in which they offer the information.

Through such frequent contact, analysts and economists have been able to develop rapidly information and tools that respond to the pressing questions of stakeholders and their preferences for how to access that information. For example, the Research Division developed additional tools to search the applicant resume banks in Oregon's on-line job matching service, iMatch Skills, to create skills inventories of workers who are currently looking for work in their regions. These allow economic development recruiting staff to answer an urgent question often asked by businesses considering re-location to the area: "Does your area have the kinds of skilled workers we need?"

When the 2008 economic downturn began and more layoffs started to occur, analysts turned the question around and began asking: "Do the businesses we're targeting need the kinds of skilled workers we have in this region?" To address the needs of laid off workers in particular, the Division's analysts and economists have been using the same iMatch Skills data to help economic developers target companies likely to seek the region's available skills.

One challenge that can arise from such close relationships with decision makers is that the relationships might interfere with providing unbiased information and objective counsel. Though analysts and economists are sought after to participate in many stakeholder board and staff meetings, they are barred from voting membership in any organizations where they provide market information. Maintaining the perception of

objectivity among its customers, as well as the reality, also helps the Division steer clear of any political battles that could jeopardize its effectiveness.

### **Research Support on the Web**

Close contact with businesses and other local stakeholders has taught the Division's regional economists and analysts as much about the preferred delivery systems for market intelligence as it has about preferred content. One outcome of this learning has been the continuous improvement of the Division's Internet-based LMI tools.

*"We especially appreciate that the website reflects the knowledge of the regional economists" – Roger Lee*

www.QualityInfo.org is Oregon's labor market information system website, which reflects the Employment Department's emphasis on information for decision making, as well as its priority on serving regional economies. The home page headlines a regional map, splitting the state into 15 regions, and linking customers immediately to overviews of each region, the region's economy in comparison to that of the state, jobs and careers in the region, and publications and services available for the specific region. The home page also provides entry points based on the types of customer likely to use the site. These link employers, job seekers, education institutions, and workforce professionals to a series of tools that feedback has shown to be in demand for each customer group.

These features are becoming more widespread among LMI shops, but Oregon appears to remain on a leading edge because of the continuous feedback afforded by the individuals out-stationed in the regions. In Oregon, the LMI website was developed early on, not by IT specialists in consultation with LMI workers, but rather by LMI workers who became enthusiasts for web development and were supported by the Division to develop their web skills and ultimately begin full time work on the website.

While local businesses typically were able to find answers to their questions on the state's website, analysts began hearing complaints that these answers were dispersed in many different parts of the site, so the businesses often needed to rely on analysts to direct them. In response, a group of analysts themselves designed the site's "Business Information Center," which organizes the most frequently requested information into a format tailored to business. It also allows businesses to create their own custom reports about industries, economic trends, population, recruiting and training resources, and other business resources by county. The Division's regional economists and workforce analysts continually suggest improvements based on what they hear from their close contacts with businesses and other stakeholders.

The state also has honed its reports and distribution methods to match customer needs and push outreach to regions. Gary Gipson, the systems development manager for the Research Division, uses a list-serve to distribute monthly summaries of the latest articles,

projections, and reports available on the website. Some of the WIB directors report that it is so well oriented to business that they forward this email to their “VIP list of employers and economic development colleagues,” and encourage the colleagues to join the Division’s list-serve directly.

The state continues to push the envelope of Internet outreach by experimenting with other web tools as well. It recently began pioneering the first known “state LMI blog” to make data more accessible, and just joined Twitter to gauge whether this tool will increase the convenience and use of up-to-date labor market intelligence. Though the state now has begun marketing the blog tool, both its blog and Twitter applications are in developmental stages.

Nevertheless, they reflect the Division’s outreach orientation, as Slater puts it: “To engage young business owners and young human resources managers, we need to communicate the research in their way.”

### Environment

Since the 1990s, the State of Oregon often has gained recognition for investing in quality data collection and analysis. The establishment of the Oregon Progress Board in 1989 reflected the state legislature’s value on data-based decision making and benchmarking to spur improvement and monitor the state’s 20-year strategic vision, *Oregon Shines*. Though the Progress Board lost state funding due to the budget crisis in 2009, the state’s strong data collection and analysis extends beyond employment and economic data to transportation, education, environment, and a wide variety of related intelligence. Establishment of the Progress Board also reflects the state government’s relatively proactive role in the state’s development over the past several administrations.

This data- and analysis-friendly environment supported the Oregon Employment Department and state legislature’s decision to create the workforce analyst positions in

### Business Information Center

*The Business Information Center provides information tailored to the needs of your business... Select options from the menu below to create your own custom report:*

#### County Overview

- Geography
- Economic Background

#### Industry Information

- Employment, Wages, and Businesses
- Local Business Contacts
- Sales Data

#### Economic Trends

- Employment & Economic News
- Recent Business Activity
- Current Employment by Industry
- Unemployment Trends
- Industry Employment Projections
- Consumer Price Index

#### Population and Income

- Population
- Per Capita Income
- Median Household Income

#### Recruiting and Training Resources

- Wages by Occupation
- Staffing Patterns
- Staffing and Training Resources
- Job Description Writer
- Benefit and Compensation Trends

#### Other Business Resources

- Local Business Assistance
- Business and Industry Associations
- Business Financing Resources
- Tax Credits and Information
- Legal Resources

<http://www.qualityinfo.org/olmisj/BIC>

*“To engage young business owners and young HR managers, we need to communicate the research in their way.” - Graham Slater*

it: “To engage young business owners and young human resources managers, we need to communicate the research

1997. Despite the initial political challenges of re-allocating funding from other employment service positions, the Division has maintained and grown support for its regional operations over the decade. This appears to be due to broad-based support from business and other community stakeholders who have benefited from the LMI services and who communicate that to their elected officials. It is noteworthy that because of the individuals out-stationed in the regions and their close relationships with local leaders, state legislators from all reaches of the state have a familiarity with the Research Division's staff and the staff's benefits to their constituents.

Oregon's economic situation also has contributed to its emphasis on regional services. In the 1980s, Oregon leaders began efforts to diversify the state's traditionally resource-based economy (timber, fishing, agriculture) toward a more mixed manufacturing and marketing economy, emphasizing its growing high technology industries in the Portland region. This shift to new industries generally did not occur in the rural areas of Oregon. So, when the 1990's rapid growth collapsed, most of the state was again confronted with high unemployment. The state lost about 43,000 payroll jobs from 2000 through 2003, particularly among advanced manufacturing firms around Portland. The state rebounded from 2004 to 2007 through growth in construction and services, with 21,000 jobs added in the construction industry alone. However, that growth again collapsed with the mortgage and housing market in 2007, and Oregon fell into a deepening recession in 2008 that continued into 2009.

*"In some areas we have the deepest unemployment in the U.S. ... but our population continues to grow. When people come to Oregon, they stay." – Jonathan Schlueter*

This economic environment has influenced the Research Division in two ways. The first stems from state leaders' concern that most of Oregon's recent economic successes have been concentrated in the Portland region, while other regions continued to face decline. This highlighted the need for stronger support to economic and workforce leaders in the farther regions of the state. The second influence stems from the need for more proactive action – and use of more relevant and accurate data – to solve persistent problems of unemployment. Both influences bolstered the argument for regional services that encourage the use and relevance of the Research Division's information.

## **Funding**

The Oregon Employment Department has devoted substantial resources to the Workforce and Economic Research Division. The Division's two-year budget is approximately \$11 million, and derives from both state and federal funding, along with a relatively smaller portion from fee for service research. Federal sources include the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Department of Labor Employment Training Administration, the Workforce Information Grant, and the Wagner Peyser Act. From the state level, Oregon applies a portion of its Supplemental Employment Department Administration Fund (SEDAF), which is separate and distinct from the state's general fund and is collected by the state secretary of the treasury through the Unemployment

Insurance system. This overall budget funds 65 staff for the Division, of which eight are regional economists and 13 are workforce analysts.

Slater reports that repeated reductions in federal funding would have made the program very difficult to maintain, were it not for the additional state SEDAF funding for labor market information services. Though the state legislature acted to fund the workforce analyst positions in 1997, Division staff have not taken that funding for granted and have worked to maintain community support.

*"We've been given relatively generous resources, so we just didn't want to blow it."*  
- Graham Slater

The Division raised approximately \$350,000 in its most recent budget from fees for special studies, surveys, and other customized research. Its customers have included employer groups as well as education, WIB, university, and economic development stakeholders. The service fees are generally minima, and cover costs for specific, customized projects, but they are significant primarily to ensure that the Division focuses on research projects that are a priority to customers and partners.

### **Partners**

Oregon's regional outreach strategy and staff have made the Research Division a close partner with local decision makers on a broad scale. The Division's extensive direct work with businesses is supported by work with economic developers, workforce agencies, and education institutions. As noted earlier, the regional economists and workforce analysts consistently are included in a variety of board and executive decision making meetings because of the quality of their information and their responsiveness to the decision makers' information needs.

A prominent feature of the Oregon LMI shop is its in-person business services and partnerships with business recruitment and retention organizations. The groundwork for business partnering appears to stem from the systematic interview contacts that the analysts conduct with local businesses. In meeting the workforce analysts' performance goal of spending 60 percent of their time with businesses, one analyst's schedule for the past year documented over 80 trips to local businesses and workforce organizations, not counting those inside her most immediate county.

Building on the workforce analysts' knowledge and experience with individual businesses, the Research Division is in a strong position to provide mutual assistance to its economic development partners. As the director of one business recruitment and expansion organization put it in a letter of support for the Division, the two organizations collaborate on several levels, and "that process can be iterative, where each organization shares its knowledge and perspective for a better end product." In many regions, the workforce analysts participate with multiple economic development boards and are highly involved in business recruitment meetings.

The regional teams' close relationship with business, economic, and workforce organizations also has helped grow and maintain statewide support for the regional outreach work. The direct benefit to businesses locally has led those businesses to advocate for maintaining the Division's resources. At least one large employer, who also served as a regional WIB chair, went to the state legislature to advocate for continued Division funding, with the message that "as a business, I need this." The Division's relationships and first-hand experience (usually on a first-name basis) with businesses and business growth organizations help to maintain its steady support from legislators across the state; the business and business growth organizations keep the legislators very aware of the Division's benefit to the legislators' constituents. While legislators in other states tend to know very little about their LMI shop, some in Oregon are reported to know regional LMI staff on a first-name basis.

*"Graham [Slater]'s positive attitude, willing spirit, collaborative approach, and inspirational work ethic are the basis of his success."*  
- National Association of State Workforce Agencies

Public sector partnerships are also strong, though they have not always been without challenges. When the Department advocated for reallocating funding from about 20 employment service worker positions to create the workforce analyst positions, the Employment Service group was understandably concerned. While this led to some tension between the divisions in the early years, the Research Division worked to show its value to the Employment Service office, which eventually "came to be one of the Division's biggest fans." This shift is in large part the result of information services the Division provides to the employment service managers, which help the managers then succeed by providing value to their customers.

Another important public sector partnership stems from the regional economists' and analysts' location in the local one-stop centers serving the regions in which they work. The partnership is symbiotic because their location in the one-stop centers keeps the economists and analysts in frequent contact with a variety of labor market stakeholders - including job seekers, businesses, training organizations, sector associations, and government officials - while making them easily (sometimes too easily) accessible to workforce system staff. Analysts in the regions interviewed attend weekly center staff meetings as a valued resource, and the regional economists often fill functions that resemble such staff functions as conducting research and making presentations to the media. When describing these staff, one-stop operators tend to refer to the Research Division workers as "our researchers," rather than the state's.

*"We Consider Jan [workforce analyst] and Carolyn [regional economist] and the central office to be "our research department."*  
- Laurel Werhane

The Research Division's primary education partners are the community colleges, though the Division would like to have a broader role with education institutions in the regions (see "Future Plans"). Among community colleges, Division staff work with both state administrators and individual colleges to provide general labor market information and

specialized research requested by the colleges. The analysts and economists collaborate both to inform program changes at the colleges themselves and in meetings with other stakeholders concerned with regional workforce and economic development needs. The partnership with community colleges in the Central Oregon region, for example, is extended through the analyst's and college staff's participation in the Business Resource Network, a group of the region's front-line workers for the community college, economic development, vocational rehabilitation, and other Title 1-B partners who work regularly with employers and share what they are hearing about the economic environment.<sup>3</sup>

## Results

According to Department staff and economic development partners, the first result of this regional outreach strategy is the increased use of labor market data for decision

*"We're infinitely more engaged as a result. If not for the regional offices, there's no way legislators from 400 miles away would know us. Because of those offices, we can make a meaningful contribution in all communities." - Graham Slater*

making among businesses in Oregon. The Department and these partners believe that larger numbers of businesses are aware of the information provided and have made better decisions as a result of the regional economists' and workforce analysts' work and the use of the data on the [www.QualityInfo.org](http://www.QualityInfo.org) website.

Though the impact on local decision making is difficult to quantify, interviewees shared multiple examples that flowed from local engagement. For example, a workforce analyst's meeting with an economic development manager in one region led to a manufacturing skills survey based on the manager's experience with manufacturing employers. When the survey results were reported to county commissioners, the presentation mobilized local elected officials and training institutions alike. Though the very rural region suffered high unemployment, the survey revealed a large number of manufacturers experiencing a shortage of skilled workers. The region's community college created one completely new training program as a result, and adapted another to help fill the gap. In this case as elsewhere, the link between the research and the behavior change stemmed from both in-person connections to conceive of research relevant to that community and to in-person presentations with local elected officials to spur action.

Economic development groups also cite accessible data as a factor in many private and public investment decisions in their regions. The Portland region's Westside Economic Alliance notes that the workforce analysts' data, particularly the data identifying the area's rapid growth in college-educated 25 to 35 year olds and its large number of engineers looking for work, contributed to recent expansion or new investments of over a billion dollars in the region from such companies as Kaiser Permanente, Intel, Genentec, and Solar World.

*"The three workforce analysts in our region are indispensable to me."*  
- Jonathan Schlueter

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<sup>3</sup> Title 1-B refers to the title of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 covering services to adult and dislocated workers.

They also note that data about the population growth and employment growth in the Portland region led local elected officials to invest another one billion dollars in the purchase and expansion of the Scoggins Dam, which feeds agriculture, recreation, and residential needs in the area.<sup>4</sup>

Another result from locating the economists and analysts in the regions has been the impact on data quality for Oregon's local regions. Because the analysts and economists are in such close contact with businesses, they are able to provide intelligence forecasts that are not possible simply by extending statistical trend lines. Monthly employment estimates for small counties, for example, frequently include first-hand knowledge provided by the relevant workforce analyst or regional economist, that a mill is laying off 30 people or that another employer is expanding in the area. In a county of 3,000 people, such information has a large impact on planning.

*"Oregon's green industry sector is growing – and it hasn't been by accident. State policies have encouraged this growth ... Now, with even more data, we will be able to continue to attract companies that create green jobs by ensuring that we have a workforce ready to go to work." – Governor Ted Kulongoski*

Some local leaders also see an impact on fundraising as a result of the research provided by the Division. The largest and most recent example is the award of a \$1.25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to strengthen the state's ability to analyze and distribute labor market information about green jobs to a variety of customers, including businesses, job seekers, and workforce and training providers.<sup>4</sup> The grant benefits several regions directly because of the way that the Division gathered regional partners to ask for their input on the grant – a step that was enhanced by the Division's strong, ongoing

relationship with these regional partners. The Central Oregon Workforce Coordinating Council, for example, will use \$170,000 of the grant to train staff and conduct green jobs profiling, and the community action organization NeighborImpact, and local community colleges will expand their weatherization training programs as a result of the grant.

## Challenges

While the regional outreach services of the Division of Workforce and Economic Research have met with wide success, they have not been without challenges. The start-up of the program saw two challenges in particular. The reallocation of funding from other divisions to fund the workforce analyst positions created some conflict. Some of the lingering issues from that conflict were overcome by personal efforts to rebuild damaged relationships. They were also overcome by efforts to demonstrate the value of the program to all of the divisions involved. A smaller fraction of the conflict was only healed by time and attrition among some of those involved.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.employment.oregon.gov/EMPLOY/COMM/news/lmi\\_grant\\_11-20-09.shtml](http://www.employment.oregon.gov/EMPLOY/COMM/news/lmi_grant_11-20-09.shtml).

The second set of difficulties in the start-up phase is common to most program innovations. The fact that such a program had few if any models to emulate meant that, as one staff person put it, “the first couple of years were a little messy.” When the 13 analysts were hired in one day, for example, none on the team had ever implemented a decentralized effort of this magnitude before. Combined with the geographic distances, this decentralization created training challenges for those stationed far from Salem.

The Division needed an extended time to develop a vision for the new services, as well. Though managers and staff knew their charge was to engage business, they did not have an agreed upon definition of what that meant for the new regional staff. As a result, it took some time to develop some standards of performance for the analysts spread across the state.

Though management of the decentralized staff has been successful, the primary ongoing challenge remains developing effective management systems for the employer engagement mission. While the regional economists’ performance can be tied clearly to reports and delivery dates, appropriate deliverables have been less clear for analysts. Four years ago, one approach was to identify the top 75 businesses in the region, and require the analysts to reach all of them by the end of the year. In the last year, the workforce analysts collectively developed a set of core deliverables, including contacts with new businesses, total business requests filled, and number of presentations.

Slater’s research of other states showed that these challenges are worth battling. All state officials that had once had individuals out-stationed in the regions regretted eliminating them.

### **Future Plans**

Customers of the Workforce and Economic Research Division report that the state’s regional research strategy is functioning well and meeting their needs, and major structural changes are not currently planned. In the longer term, however, Slater would recommend at least two major improvements to his Division:

First, though the Division finds the current number of regional economists to be sufficient, Slater previously submitted budget proposals to add three to four workforce analysts to the staff in order to dedicate one analyst for each region while keeping four for the Portland region. The Division sees additional analysts as necessary for Portland because of the high concentration of Oregon’s businesses in that region and the analysts’ key role with businesses.

Second, the longer-term change that Slater envisions is to create a third group of research staff focused on providing labor market intelligence to education institutions in Oregon. Slater envisions this staff working with education customers specifically on occupational skills and training requirements. The researchers also would participate in educational

institutions' career fairs, community college planning meetings, and other events that could use skills and occupational information.

In the shorter term, two smaller, new activities are emerging in the form of research and products for Oregon's green jobs economy and the use of technology to give Oregon's regional leaders more access to data. The recent \$1.25 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to strengthen Oregon's collection, analysis, and distribution of labor market information about green jobs will address the first of these activities. The Division's experiments with providing intelligence through social media such as Twitter and a daily LMI blog will address the second.

### **Observations**

A number of observations and insights can be gleaned from the interviewees for this case study:

1. The investment in staff dedicated to helping regional leaders apply labor market data has paid off in the wider use of data, customer satisfaction, and broad support for the program.
2. Success in garnering broad support (local stakeholders and state legislators) was enhanced by a disciplined focus on providing value to businesses.
3. Given the value of personal service, the quality of staff "makes or breaks the program," as one customer put it. So selection of staff with excellent communication and customer service skills, as well as analytical skills, is critical.
4. Maintaining a regional system of out-stationed staff requires a leader who has passion for customer service and selects and supports field staff to extend that enthusiasm. It also requires strategic management approaches to support and guide performance in decentralized offices.
5. Frequent training, systems to encourage peer support, and clear performance guidelines are key management tools to replace the benefits sacrificed from location in a central office. Clear performance guidelines also allow flexibility and effectiveness at meeting the mission of providing value to businesses.
6. Analysts' and economists' frequent and meaningful engagement with local decision makers helps them enhance the relevance of intelligence to decision making. The relationships developed from interaction also encourage creative collaboration to solve local problems.
7. Direct community interaction and knowledge provides more accurate and reliable data and the capacity to forecast local trends.
8. Out-stationed staff need to have strong links to local economic and labor market intermediaries. In Oregon, the staff is located in one-stop centers and establishes relationships with the WIBs.
9. High quality, customer friendly, web-based information tools and out-stationed staff are mutually strengthening. Together they allow for more flexible, customized service to distant regions, as well as metropolitan hubs.

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*Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation  
Viewing Workforce Investment Boards as Valued Customers  
(pages 37 - 44)*

The Agency for Workforce Innovation is Florida's lead state workforce agency, and directly administers the state's workforce development programs, including the labor market information (LMI) program housed in the Labor Market Statistics (LMS) Center. LMS operates as a service provider, and as such, structures its activities to meet the needs of its customers. LMS' primary customers are Florida's 24 workforce investment boards (WIBs), but they are not the sole entities relying on LMS' services. LMS is tasked with providing information to "the state's workforce partners and the general public." Workforce partners include - in addition to the 24 WIBs - the governor and state legislature; the Agency for Workforce Innovation itself and Workforce Florida, Inc. (the state workforce board); all levels of the education system, K-12 through college and university, teachers, staff, and career counselors; the state's 67 economic development agencies and chambers of commerce; and the media. This keeps the 70 person LMS office busy until late at night.

**Purpose and Goals**

Labor Market Statistics' mission is to produce, analyze, and deliver timely and reliable labor statistics to improve economic decision-making. Rebecca Rust, LMS director and chief economist, noted that LMS couldn't just produce data; it had to make sure that the data were used. Employment data, Rust said, are the state's most important economic indicators, and during this recession, the WIBs need these indicators more than ever.

*"The LMS staff are a phenomenal team." - Andra Cornelius*

Many of LMS' customers recognize the importance of its activities. According to Mason Jackson, Workforce One president and CEO, LMI is a WIB's lifeblood . . . it is at the core of what we need to know . . . what the jobs are . . . where the jobs are. Richard Williams, Chipola Regional Workforce Development Board executive director, said that LMS is a resource; you know the data are accurate, you know that they are good.

### Customized LMI Initiatives

LMS is completely customer-focused. All of the office's staff has been trained in customer service and is instructed not to be "the program of no." Staff is directed to meet the requests of all customers, in all cases. If a customer asks for data that aren't available, staff works with the customer to determine the purpose of the data; in many cases staff can find other data that will address the need. Sometimes staff can provide data that are good proxies for what is requested, such as the characteristics of individuals on unemployment insurance in place of the characteristics of the unemployed. If requests require additional resources, then a fee for service can be charged.

*"We have changed the office's values. We no longer say: 'we don't have that,' 'we're not funded for that,' or 'that's not my job.'" - Rebecca Rust*

According to Rust, LMS staff and WIBs speak different languages. LMS staff lives in a statistical world, while WIBs live in a service world. LMS staff needs to learn to speak the WIBs' language. Rust requires staff to manage and then exceed expectations. It is better, she feels, to under promise and then over deliver. Staff is instructed not to respond initially to customers by saying "the data are on the website." Staff is to find the information customers need and then tell them where it is on the website for future reference. Staff is to acknowledge requests the same day they come in, tell customers what information they will receive and when, and then check back to make sure the information met the customers' needs.

*"They find out what we need, and then get it to us." - Mason Jackson*

LMS' customers tell stories that show the success of this customer-focused mindset. Kimberly Moore, WORKFORCE plus chief executive officer, was pleased with the labor supply information she received when her WIB was working with a company thinking of locating in the area. Jackson noted that he received commuter information he asked for within two hours. Williams received information he requested about companies in his region. When it was provided - also within two hours - staff apologized for the delay.

LMS provides the standard LMI statistics: employment and unemployment by industry, wages by industry and occupation. It disseminates its LMI on the Internet, and in newsletters and publications. It produces occupational profiles, local profiles, career comics for youth, and career posters that show career opportunities by level of education.

Both Jackson and Mary Lou Brunell, Workforce Florida board member, mentioned how much they value the pocket cards that LMS provides them. For the WIBs, the cards contain information on “hot jobs” and who is hiring. For the state board, they contain unemployment rates by region, employment by industry, and information on changes and trends. Andra Cornelius, a Workforce Florida vice president, praised LMS’ white papers, which contain graphs, charts, and comparisons to other states, executive summaries and supporting documentation, all understandable to a lay audience.

LMS also trains its customers to access and use the LMI products it provides. When it buys new software, it provides customers with training on how to use it. Rust admitted, though, that there is never enough time for training.

LMS takes everything it does to a higher level. LMS makes data that are not timely more current, supplying updated wage data on a quarterly basis, and producing annual projections for occupations in demand (instead of every other year) for 24 regions and the state as a whole. LMS also adds extra economic indicators – other than workforce – to its reports, such as foreclosures and housing starts.

LMS conducts labor supply studies for WIBs when they are recruiting businesses. It uses GIS to map where potential workers are when businesses are trying to decide where to locate. It helps WIBs make decisions on where to locate their one-stop centers based on where the WIBs’ customers are.

LMS has built its reputation on its responsiveness. It provided a list of growing small businesses when the governor convened a small business forum. It helped Williams analyze a survey on high school graduation that his WIB had conducted, and then offered suggestions on how to conduct a better survey in the future.

Sometimes LMS is not able to meet a WIB’s needs with existing data. In those cases, LMS will conduct a survey for the WIB as a fee-for-service activity that covers costs. LMS designs the survey and uses a vendor for telephone data collection. Results are delivered in three weeks; the finished brochure takes somewhat longer. All LMS surveys are scientific, based on probability samples with response rates over 80 percent.

LMS conducted a survey of growing companies to determine why they were not using particular one-stop centers. It conducted numerous vacancy surveys to determine companies’ current employment needs and future hiring expectations. The vacancy surveys were in such demand that they became part of LMS’ standard package of services. This year Workforce Florida is funding vacancy surveys for the 24 regions using stimulus funds.

LMS does one thing that perhaps no other state does: it shares its confidential unemployment compensation employer database with the WIBs. Florida has

*"LMS' surveys are better priced and more valid than those we could get from the private sector."*  
- Mason Jackson

received a legal opinion that since the WIBs use public funds and carry out a public mission, they are legitimate users of the data. This enables the WIBs to conduct their own surveys if they want. They also can use the database to analyze employers using the one-stop centers, produce lists of companies by industry, and develop information on the impact of natural disasters in their regions. Sharing this database helps the WIBs train and place workers, indirectly assisting the unemployment compensation program.

LMS produces publications and PowerPoint presentations for the WIBs' use. Once

*"What we value from LMS is not its 'standard package' of data and information. What we value is that LMS' product is whatever we ask for."* - Richard Williams

developed, the WIBs can put their names on them as if they were their own documents. Cornelius noted that LMS provides her with data she can imbed in the presentations she develops.

Every month, LMS produces a regional press release for each WIB. WIBs add their own quotes, insert information on their activities, and issue the press releases themselves. This enables the WIBs to "own" their data and be the ones their local media contact for further information. To prepare the WIBs for any questions they might receive, LMS conducts a one-hour conference call with the WIBs on each press release morning, and supplies them with FAQs (and answers) on what the media might ask.

According to Jackson, "owning the data" cements his position as the "go to guy" for workforce information in the eyes of the chamber of commerce, economic development, and community-based organizations serving hard to serve populations.

LMS stays connected with the WIBs. It attends their quarterly workforce association meetings, speaking about new activities and services and learning about their needs. LMS staff supports WIBs' strategic planning and board retreats, making presentations when asked.

*"LMS provides information, not data. It is quality driven, meticulous about accuracy."* - Stephen M. Urquhart

LMS also supports Workforce Florida's LMI needs, supplying information to the board, as well as to its committees and task forces. LMS staff meets with Workforce Florida staff regularly, and communicates by

**Labor Market Statistics** include a variety of labor market, economic, and demographic data such as:

- **Employment and Wages** - current employment, projections, and wages by industry and occupation, occupational profiles, and career information.
- **Labor Force** - labor force, employment, unemployment, and unemployment rates.
- **Economic Indicators** - Florida Price Level Index, Consumer Price Index, income, and unemployment claims data.
- **Population** - age, race, gender, income, veteran's status, and education information.

Data from LMS are provided via reports, publications, CDs, brochures, posters, and the Internet.

phone and e-mail practically every day. Stephen M. Urquhart, another Workforce Florida vice president, said that he takes issues raised by the board to Rust. Using a consultative approach, with her operating from a data perspective and him from a policy one, they will develop goals and ways to measure them.

LMS is very good at what it does. The state conducts customer service evaluations annually, and LMS gets high marks on responsiveness. It has been voted “workforce champion” by the WIBs. Rust is asked to train LMI directors in other states how to provide Florida’s form of customer-focused LMI to their WIBs. LMS’ biggest problem stems from its success: LMS is no longer a “best kept secret,” and it has an “overwhelming” workload.

*“LMS is the ‘star unit’ of the state.” – Kimberly Moore*

## Environment

While Florida provided LMI before, LMS, as it functions now, was created around 2000, when both federal and state legislation pushed Florida’s Department of Labor to reorganize. After the federal government passed the Workforce Investment Act in 1998, the Florida state legislature shut down the state Department of Labor, and privatized both workforce development and the state’s workforce board. Everyone working for the state’s Department of Labor was required to turn in their resignations, and the state’s WIB directors had a voice in which state staff should be retained for the new workforce agency.

*“LMS treats us like we are the boss.” – Mason Jackson*

Rust was told that she needed to “act private.” The state now worked for the local areas, and LMS needed to satisfy them as its primary customers. Rust went on the road, visiting all 24 WIBs personally, and making the case that LMS could provide more timely and accurate data than they could get through any other source. Initially, some WIBs were hesitant; private vendors had told them that they could provide more timely and localized data. But over the years, LMS has proven to be the ultimate and trusted source.

With the current recession, LMS is needed more than ever. With unemployment rates at over 11 percent, Urquhart noted, the state has to be aggressive matching people up to the few jobs that are out there. LMS, he said, gives workforce professionals and those looking for work “competitive insight.”

*“When there were lots of jobs and few job seekers, we had to ‘put ribbons on companies.’ Now that there are few jobs and lots of job seekers, we have to ‘put ribbons on people.’” – Richard Williams*

## Funding

LMS operates on over \$7 million per year, with most funds coming from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics and Employment and Training Administration (ETA), along with some funds from the Workforce Investment and Wagner-Peyser Acts. LMS also has money from the fees it charges for special customer-requested surveys, usually \$30,000 to \$40,000 per survey. This year, Workforce Florida provided LMS an additional \$1.8 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment

Act (stimulus funds), and ETA awarded it a \$1.25 million Green Jobs Improvement Grant.

*"If LMS activities are vital to Florida's economic recovery, we will use Workforce Florida funds." - Andra Cornelius*

LMS also applies for grant funding. According to Cornelius, if LMS had not received the ETA green jobs improvement grant, Workforce Florida itself would have provided LMS with the funds needed to conduct a green jobs survey. Some LMS customers also seek funding for the LMS office. Moore indicated that she likes to write in a role for LMS when her WIB applies for grants.

### Partners

LMS' customers are also its partners. LMS works with its customers in a consultative fashion, jointly talking through their data needs and developing solutions to meet them. William mentioned that whenever he sees something in his data that he doesn't understand, he phones LMS and staff explains it. Conversely, if LMS staff sees something in his region's data that it doesn't understand, staff will phone him, and they will talk it through together to figure out what is happening (e.g. a new company has opened in the region). The fact that Williams receives these phone calls from LMS demonstrates to him that the office actually looks at the data; it doesn't just send data without analyzing them.

*"Because the Chipola Regional Workforce Development Board is a small, rural WIB, LMS staff spend more time with us, conducting more analyses of our data and explaining what the data mean." - Richard Williams*

A "partners council" – composed of Workforce Florida board staff, WIB executive directors, and economic development and chamber of commerce representatives – meets on the afternoon before each Workforce Florida board meeting. This is one of the key forums the WIBs use to communicate their needs and concerns to the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, including LMS staff.

### Results

LMS helps the WIBs do a better job and provide better services. Williams noted that his WIB board uses LMS data to make decisions and set policy. All three WIB executive directors interviewed said they use LMS data to target their training. LMS produces each region's demand occupation list, based on occupational openings, wage levels, and potential for growth. WIBs then use these lists in determining the training programs for which they will issue individual training accounts.

Data are crucial in shaping the core and intensive services the WIBs provide, enabling case managers to guide job seekers into jobs with good prospects. Moore noted that LMS data help her WIB provide reemployment services and transition dislocated workers into new careers. The data also affect the work of the WIBs' job developers and their approach to employers.

*"LMS data make our services more efficient. We waste less time trying to figure out where the jobs are and who is hiring." - Mason Jackson*

LMS' practice of providing the WIBs with press releases they issue as their own make the WIBs the "go to" organizations in their regions that media call with questions about the local economy. According to Jackson, releasing the regional LMI establishes the WIB's position as the source for intelligence on workforce development. The business community sees the WIB as the local expert; employers call the WIB for information on wages.

LMS has an impact on policy and programming at the state level as well. According to Urquhart, the data produced by the office direct state workforce development investments, guiding money to activities with the greatest potential payoff. Brunell noted that LMS data are used to determine funding distributions for special projects. Data shape state RFPs, setting the criteria used for reviewing proposals and awarding grants.

LMS data can have an impact even beyond the state level. Because of the data LMS provides, the state is able to craft fact-based arguments and make the case for waivers or changes of national policies.

### **Future Plans**

LMS has a number of new projects it is bringing on line. As mentioned earlier, the office is planning to conduct a green jobs study, surveying 60,000 employers and giving each of the 24 WIBs valid data they can use as a baseline on green activity in their regions.

LMS is continuing to conduct job vacancy surveys for the regions. It is adding an outreach question to its protocol, asking whether the employers would like to be contacted by a WIB for help with any workforce issues they face. LMS is also looking at ways to address the limited data available for small, rural WIBs that are not a standard data reporting area, experimenting with methodologies for forecasting forward.

*"Most of LMI is retrospective. It is like trying to drive a car while looking out the rear window. This only works if the road ahead is exactly like the road behind. Vacancy surveys give us a view of employers' future hiring expectations." - Mason Jackson*

*"LMS is analyzing the current skills and transferable skills of those working on the shuttle, creating cross walks and trying to determine how we can hold on to our talent." - Stephen M. Urquhart*

*"TORQ™ provides a rigorous skills assessment to determine which skills are transferable." - Andra Cornelius*

The state is trying to get out ahead of the planned closing of the space shuttle program. LMS is conducting a job vacancy survey to determine what other jobs might become available in Brevard County. A key piece of this project involves determining the skills shuttle-impacted employees have that would be transferable to other jobs. For this, LMS will begin working with TORQ™, the Transferable Occupation Relationship Quotient, an analytical tool developed by Workforce Associates, Inc. LMS also will start using TORQ™ to construct career ladders for the state.

Perhaps the most exciting thing LMS is doing is purchasing licenses for and working with The Conference Board's Help Wanted OnLine data series.<sup>5</sup> This data series is created by "spidering" through both national electronic job boards and niche market electronic job boards to develop a non-duplicative list of all job openings advertised on the web. LMS is able to use this data to create real time, actionable information on job demand in the state.

LMS is already using the data series to understand the demand for nursing in the state. State data show that there is a demand for nurses in the state, yet individuals graduating from nursing schools are not always able to find jobs. LMS is using the OnLine data series to determine exactly where the openings are, providing this information both in tables and on maps. Brunell would like to see LMS go even further and attach unique identifiers (e.g. social security numbers) to individuals graduating from schools and mapping their locations as well.

LMS plans to train the WIBs to use the OnLine data series to find actual job openings in which to place job seekers. Jackson was an initial user of the OnLine data series, when it was being tried out in the state. Using the series, he said, let him know exactly what companies were hiring for what occupations. Job development no longer required cold calling. Job developers appeared more knowledgeable when they phoned employers as a result of having access to the job advertisements in the OnLine data series.

Jackson is partnering with the economic development agencies in his region, learning which industries they are targeting so that he can develop a workforce that matches. Now that LMS is doing such a good job determining labor demand – including employers' future hiring plans – Jackson suggested that LMS focus more of its studies on labor supply.

### **Observations**

A number of observations and insights can be gleaned from the interviewees for this case study:

1. A key factor in LMS' success is customer service. LMI offices need to recognize that the WIBs are their customers and they need to meet the WIBs' needs. All LMI staff needs intensive training in customer service. Customer requests need to be answered quickly.
2. Good customer service requires bridging the language gap. People in the office who can learn to "talk WIB" should be made the first point of contact for the WIBs and other customers who call with LMI requests.
3. A second key success factor is the strong relationship the LMS office has formed with the WIBs and all of its other customers. States that want to model this need

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<sup>5</sup> More information on the Help Wanted OnLine data series can be gained from the case study "The Conference Board: Supporting Workforce Development."

to begin their effort by visiting each of its WIBs, as Rust did, and making a “killer presentation.” If the LMI director is not suited for this, another staff person can be in charge of outreach. If the number of WIBs to visit is too large, the task can be divided among multiple staff people.

4. States that build a customer-focused LMI office should expect an increase in the demand for LMI services. Maintaining good customer service will require that the LMI office find ways to increase its efficiency, and also may require that the state devote more resources to the LMI office.
5. The LMS office thinks and acts like a consultant or a business partner, not as a bureaucracy. This new mindset needs to be supported by the state government; the LMI office needs to be given the freedom to make decisions independently and act on them quickly.
6. The quality of the data provided by the state is important. Customers want real-time data and reports that are comprehensible to lay people.
7. LMI offices should love their most aggressive WIBs. It is these WIBs that get the LMS office to push the envelope and try something new. The result can be better LMI for all of the state’s customers.
8. Training front-line staff in the WIBs is critical. WIB staff needs to be taught how vital LMI is and how to use it to improve WIB services.
9. Success requires a collaborative process. LMS receives feedback from WIBs and other customers in order to improve its services. It collaborates with industry in order to conduct surveys. LMI offices cannot operate effectively in ivory towers.

*“LMS works too hard. Not everything requires a fire drill.” – Stephen M. Urquhart*

*“I don’t see the LMS office as part of government.” – Richard Williams*

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