

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 27-16
	DATE January 3, 2017

TO: AFFILIATE AMERICAN JOB CENTER DIRECTORS
 COMPREHENSIVE AMERICAN JOB CENTER DIRECTORS
 WORKFORCE INNOVATION OPPORTUNITIES ACT (WIOA) 166 INDIAN
 AND NATIVE AMERICAN GRANTEEES
 DEPARTMENT OF LABOR EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING
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 STATE GOVERNORS
 STATE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE DIRECTORS
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 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD LOCAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

FROM: GERRI FIALA /s/ for PORTIA WU
 Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Release and Availability of Two Reports Under the Project Entitled State
 Demonstration Projects in Providing Reemployment Services to Unemployment
 Insurance Claimants (commonly known as the Reemployment Connectivity
 Project)

1. **Purpose.** The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) announces the release and availability of two papers under the subject project: *Strategies for Connecting Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants to the Workforce System: Findings from the Implementation Study of the UI Workforce Connectivity Grant Program*, and *Experiences of Three States in Developing Social Media Strategies for Employment Assistance Programs*.
2. **Background.** The U.S. Department of Labor continues to explore strategies to improve UI claimants' access to re-employment services provided through the public workforce system to speed their return to work in good jobs with good wages. The use of virtual service delivery methods to administer the UI program has significantly increased since the 1990s and now most UI claimants apply for and maintain their benefits primarily via the internet or phone. One result of this shift has been that many claimants are physically disconnected from the workforce system and are often unaware of how to access the range of reemployment, job search, career counseling, and training services available to them. The automated systems for filing UI benefits claims and accessing re-employment services are often separate, with limited or no connections between them, making it cumbersome and sometimes confusing for

individuals to navigate between the two systems. The challenge is how to best connect UI claimants to the services available on-line and in the American Job Centers (AJC).

It should be noted that the bulk of the work on this project was accomplished prior to the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which superseded several of the relevant statutory provisions of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).¹ Since this Training and Employment Notice (TEN) is intended to be a summary of the reports themselves, most of the references within it are to WIA. However, to the extent that this TEN refers to present or future programmatic considerations, the references will be to WIOA. Also, where there is no particular inference to present or future planning, the findings are relevant for WIOA implementation.

The Initiative

In 2010 the Department established a workgroup comprised of workforce leaders at the local, state, and national levels, and partnered with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA). The goal of the workgroup was to develop a shared national vision to improve connectivity between UI program service delivery and reemployment services provided through the workforce system, both through one-stop centers and virtually and to promote innovative reemployment service delivery strategies for all job seekers. This workgroup identified several “transformational” elements to improve connections between job seekers, particularly UI claimants, and employment services.

- The first element is an **integrated workforce registration (IWR)** system that would allow all individuals to register online, through a single process, for a range of workforce services, including UI benefits, WIA and ES services.
- The second element, **real time triage**, involves using information from the IWR to continuously assess, through an automated system, customers’ reemployment options, using up-to-date information on their education, skills, and work experience to link job seekers with the most appropriate current job openings, workshops, and training opportunities. A critical feature of real time triage is that listings of job openings are continuously refreshed and provided to the claimant or job seeker when he or she logs into the account.
- The third element is **skills transferability**, which focuses on matching the experience, interests, and skills of job seekers to link them to job openings that match their background and skills or to help them to transition their skills to new occupations. A key feature of the skills transferability component is that it helps job seekers better understand and consider other occupations based on their skills and background, which leads to a broadening of the range of job openings and skills upgrading within those occupations that claimants and job seekers may consider.

¹The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) became law on July 22, 2014, and WIOA supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

- The fourth element focused on the potential to use **social media** to implement new reemployment service delivery strategies. Given its explosive growth as a primary communication method in both the professional and personal realms, social media potentially offers the workforce system a way to enhance the job search process and improve employment outcomes. In particular, the Department is examining social media strategies to improve UI claimants' access to employment services provided at the AJCs with support from the Wagner-Peyser and WIOA programs.

To advance this new national vision the Department partnered with NASWA's Information Technology Support Center (ITSC) to provide grants to states to implement strategies and technology tools that embodied the different elements of the vision, now referred to as the UI Reemployment Connectivity Project (the project). As noted below, all grants were awarded in 2011.

Reemployment Connectivity Project

In 2011, as part of the project, three-year grants were provided to the Mississippi Department of Employment Security and New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) to improve connections between job seekers and the workforce system using strategies based on the first three transformational elements enumerated in the previous section of this TEN. Oregon also received a grant but was unable to complete the project and, therefore, was not included in this evaluation and report.² At an operational level, the transformational elements required the design and implementation of two key automated tools. The first newly developed tool is the IWR tool, which enables individuals to register for a range of workforce services, including UI and reemployment services, in one place. The IWR captures key demographic information and educational and employment history that is used by workforce programs to determine eligibility for services and benefits and provide connections to appropriate job openings.

The second newly developed tool is the Workforce Integrated Profile Page (WIPP), an interactive on-line service delivery hub for reemployment services where registered individuals can access a range of services online. The WIPP is used to launch the real time triage and skills transferability elements.

As part of the connectivity grants program, the Department sponsored an implementation study of the Reemployment Connectivity Project. The study was conducted by Abt Associates, in partnership with Capital Research Corporation and George Washington University. One result of the study is a report, which documents the operational experiences and implementation of the grants in Mississippi and New York. Overall, several of the key steps in the development of the web-based systems ultimately took longer than originally anticipated, leading to delays in the implementation of the IWR. In part due to the complex nature of the systems, the IWR and related systems were not developed until about two years into the grant period, which limited the study's ability to review the states' integration of the tools into their current systems. At the time of the report, Mississippi had finished

² Oregon returned the funds and New Jersey was selected as a replacement state; the tools are now being implemented in New Jersey.

development and implementation of the WIPP and was piloting the IWR as well as the real time triage and skills transferability elements in select AJCs. New York had a prototype of the IWR ready for pilot-testing but it had not been made available to the public.

Data for the Reemployment Connectivity report of the implementation of the first three transformational elements was collected through in-person interviews with state-level staff several times during the grant period. This report first discusses the role of the Department and NASWA in the project and their activities under the grant. It then describes the activities each state undertook to develop the IWR, real time triage, and skills transferability. It concludes with key findings from the grantees' experiences.

Social Media Project

As part of the Reemployment Connectivity Project, the Department also provided three-year grants in 2011 to three states to develop and use social media tools in support of reemployment strategies. These grants enabled the states to develop new opportunities and modify existing service delivery processes using social media tools as a way to improve employment outcomes for job seekers, including outreach to job seekers, connecting job seekers and employers, and promoting networking among job seekers. The grantees were the Idaho Department of Labor (Idaho DOL), the Minnesota Department of Education and Employment Development (DEED), and NYSDOL. The initiative focused on social media activities that would be implemented at the state level and used by local workforce agencies.

The Department also sponsored an implementation study of the social media initiatives developed by the three grantees, which was conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with Capital Research Corporation and George Washington University. This study's report provides the results of the study, documenting the grantees' experiences developing and launching social media strategies to improve employment outcomes for job seekers. The report also provides information for program administrators and policymakers interested in increasing their use of social media in workforce development activities. The study data was collected through in-person interviews with state-level program staff in summer 2014, the final year of the grant programs.

The Social Media report first describes activities involved in launching the grant, including the goals and staffing of the social media grants and how the grantees assessed social media knowledge and needs among their stakeholders. It then describes the types and use of different social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and others) by the grantees, the costs and outcomes of grantee initiatives, factors that facilitated and hindered grant implementation, the sustainability of the initiatives, and key lessons based on grantee experiences.

3. Key Study Findings.

Reemployment Connectivity Project

Through its Reemployment Connectivity Project, the Department worked collaboratively with NASWA/ITSC and the states receiving grants to develop automated tools that states can

implement, adapt or modify to improve UI claimants' access to reemployment services provided through the workforce system and to improve the available reemployment services for all jobseekers. Overall, Mississippi and New York made significant strides in terms of development and pilot-testing the IWR and WIPP, and through their administration of the UI Workforce Connectivity grants identified a number of important benefits of their grant-funded effort:

- **Reduction in duplicative data entry by UI claimants, ES registrants, job seekers, and agency staff.** Once the IWR system is fully operational in Mississippi and New York, if a job seeker files a UI claim, relevant information from the UI claim will automatically be available to the ES system, and vice versa. The grants were an important impetus for the two states to improve connectivity across UI and other workforce data systems, which according to staff in both states will save substantial time and effort for claimants, job seekers, and agency staff in terms of reducing duplicative entry of common data items.
- **Claimants receive job referrals and other training and reemployment services that are tailored to their interests, capabilities, and needs when they apply for UI online.** The sharing of data between UI and other workforce programs and systems—in conjunction with the skills transferability software—makes it possible for claimants to be matched with available job openings immediately upon filing a UI claim. Job matches will also be refreshed each time the job seeker logs onto the system.
- **The skills transferability capability can be used as a staff-assisted or self-service tool to provide claimants and other job seekers with real-time job leads tailored to their skills and interests.** Workforce agency customers can use the enhanced skills transferability tools updated and refined by the grant to automatically match job seekers with available job orders based on skills, interests, and past work experience instantaneously (real time). In New York, the skills transferability tools also help customers develop resumes or upload pre-existing resumes. The skills transferability software is intended to broaden the range of jobs and occupations that claimants and other job seekers consider, as well as to provide up-to-date information on training opportunities that could make the difference in expanding career choices and lifetime earnings.
- **The real time triage capabilities will significantly improve the quality and timeliness of job leads provided to job seekers.** The concept behind real time triage is to continuously (behind the scenes) electronically assess the claimant or job seeker's skills, experience, and interests in relation to dynamic changes in available job openings and training opportunities. Previously, job leads may have been provided based on an initial point-in-time assessment (e.g., at the time of intake or at subsequent meetings between the claimant and workforce agency staff), the IWR and WIPP and skills transferability software in combination allow for ongoing job matching and provision of job listings based on the most current information available.

The tools will be useful to other states in developing stronger connections between job seekers and the workforce system. A benefit to the workforce system more broadly is that other states will be able to adopt the IWR and WIPP developed under the grant and use these tools to better integrate their information technology (IT) systems. They are also a model if states want to adapt their own systems to accomplish similar functionality. WIOA provides additional opportunity for states to integrate their systems with its goal of providing comprehensive, integrated and streamlined services by linking and aligning different one-stop partners. Both the IWR and WIPP were designed to enable integration of multiple partner programs. States currently implementing the tools are demonstrating the potential to use these tools for purposes of integration as envisioned under WIOA.

Future efforts may also be informed by the challenges encountered in the UI Reemployment Connectivity Project. State administrators identified two main challenges with their UI Workforce Connectivity grants:

- **The design process for the grant-funded states was substantially complicated and delayed by the need to take into consideration IWR system requirements and varying IT mainframe systems in each of the grant-funded states, as well as the requirements of the Department and other states that might implement the IWR prototype in the future.** State administrators in Mississippi and New York indicated that it would have taken substantially less time and the design process would have been considerably less complicated had each state been designing an IWR that would meet only its own requirements and not those of other stakeholders. Many discussions over an extended period of time were conducted to come up with the desired data elements and structure of the IWR that would meet grantee states' and the Department's requirements, as well as anticipate the requirements and system capabilities of other states that might be interested in implementing the IWR in the future.
- **The change in the original scope of work under the grant to include development, pilot-testing, and implementation of a WIPP as a feature of the IWR resulted in a significant delay in implementing the IWR.** The original scope of the project did not include incorporation of a WIPP, but once the design work was underway the participating states, the Department, and NASWA/ITSC determined that the WIPP was a critical feature that would bring real-time job leads, training opportunities, and messaging capability that would make the IWR substantially more user-friendly and valuable to claimants and other customers. NASWA/ITSC and the participating states spent much additional time and effort in designing, developing, and pilot-testing the WIPP.

The time it will take states to implement the mature IWR moving forward will not include the time to develop the actual application and will depend on the number of programs a state wants to integrate, existing state systems, the time and staff capacity to adapt and integrate the tool with its IT infrastructure for the workforce system, business user acceptance testing, staff training, and other implementation activities.

Overall, there appear to be benefits to states implementing the IWR and WIPP applications to support common registration, the skills transferability capability, and real time triage. However, further evaluation is recommended to determine if the impacts of providing these services result in an expedited return to work, increased earnings and job retention, and a decreased duration of UI benefit receipt among UI claimants.

More information on the Reemployment Connections IWR and WIPP tools can be found on the NASWA/ITSC website at <http://itsc.org/Pages/IWRWIPP.aspx>. IWR and WIPP are now referred to as Workforce Connect tools.

Social Media Project

The Social Media grantees reported that their grants provided impetus and resources for expanding their use of social media tools in state and local workforce operations. The experiences of these grantees provide a number of lessons about the use of social media tools by state and local workforce agencies:

- State and local workforce agencies should consider integrating social media tools into their service delivery systems and using them to help job seekers.
- Social media tools are generally not expensive to acquire and implement, though staff resources are needed to maintain and update them.
- Social media tools can be useful for reaching out to subpopulations that might not otherwise engage with the workforce system or visit an AJC, though social media tools are not for everyone.
- With regard to social media tools, one size does not fit all.
- Social media provides opportunities for state and local workforce agencies to better engage with employers.
- Social media tools can result in time savings and productivity gains for agency staff, job seekers, and employers.

4. Inquiries. To view an abstract of these publications, as well as to download the full reports of the two studies, please visit the ETA Research Publication Database Web site at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/research/keyword.cfm>. If there are any questions, please contact Wayne Gordon (Gordon.Wayne@dol.gov).