

INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: FRAMING THE ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Integrated Performance Information Project is to provide the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) with input from the states on what is required to support integrated information on the results of workforce investment programs and the One-Stop system (Saunders and Wilson 2003). This paper surveys the existing performance measurement and management landscape for workforce development programs in the United States. It then presents key issues that need to be addressed in the effort to develop an integrated approach and briefly lists some important challenges and caveats.

THE LANDSCAPE

The existing landscape for measuring and managing the performance of workforce investments is complex and highly varied. It's useful to consider the landscape metaphor briefly. Currently, if we scan the principal federal funding streams as well as the intergovernmental system that has emerged to operate and oversee them at the federal, state and local levels, what we find is neither a tidy, well tended garden, nor a natural environment of native plants and shrubs. Instead, we encounter an artificial and ad hoc set of "plantings," many of which are ill suited and even ill advised for the environment they've been placed in. Measures and management mechanisms have been established without the benefit of any serious planning for the system as a whole. It's as if these were "planted" not because they were appropriate but because they might have been on sale at the local outlet. This unruly landscape calls for thoughtful planning, selective pruning, and careful tending if it is going to be productive and fruitful over time.

This section characterizes major elements of the existing workforce measurement and management landscape, including recent developments and trends emerging in leading states.

Workforce Development Performance Measurement and Management

Many federal funding streams could be characterized as a form of “workforce development.” A narrow focus might only include services supported by Wagner-Peyser Act funding and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I funds. However, our focus is on a much broader conception that includes ES and WIA, but also encompasses related services under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Food Stamp Employment and Training programs, as well as secondary and postsecondary career and technical education under the Perkins Act, adult and family literacy programs under WIA Title II, vocational rehabilitation under WIA Title IV, and various state-supported education and training services. As described below, a significant handful of states, including Florida, Oregon, Texas and Washington, already approach measurement and management with this broader workforce development conception clearly in mind (e.g., O’Shea et al. 2003).

Measurement and Management Frameworks

Workforce performance measurement and management frameworks have gone from virtually non-existent to very well developed in just a few decades, though some programs have gone farther than others. Frameworks for job training programs evolved considerably, while other federal programs (e.g., adult and vocational education, Food Stamp E&T, voc rehab, and welfare employment programs) also received far greater scrutiny from Congress and began creating their own measures and management approaches.¹

In addition, the service delivery context changed dramatically, much more so than their performance-related mechanisms (see King et al. 2002). There is a real and growing disconnect between service delivery and performance mechanisms that has yet to be addressed. Key contextual changes include:

- *Policy and program devolution*, from federal to states and from states to localities, including the shift to greater personal responsibility for workforce and career development decision-making.

¹ This discussion draws heavily on King (2003).

- The *emergence of more encompassing state and local workforce-related entities* that envision their role as extending well beyond traditional federal workforce development. One-Stop Centers are only one element of this trend.
- *Economic and labor market shifts* that have increased the demand for postsecondary education and training and the need for portable certificates that demonstrate competency attainment to employers. They also suggest the need for improved links to ongoing economic development efforts.
- *Technological developments*, including the rise of Internet-based workforce services (e.g., job search, job matching, E-learning).

Rhetoric notwithstanding, however, the accountability paradigm for publicly funded workforce efforts remains largely unchanged. Key WIA provisions suggest a fundamental shift to a market-based accountability paradigm, yet the reality is much closer to the traditional public administration paradigm of the early 1900s.

Major changes in the measurement and management framework for federal workforce development in recent decades include:

- *Broader Scope.* Performance standards only applied to ES and job training programs initially, but by the late 1980s had spread to Food Stamp E&T, Perkins, and welfare employment programs. Some states established overarching human resource investment councils to oversee performance *across* program ‘silos’ prompted by the 1992 JTPA Amendments. Subsequent efforts in a handful of states (e.g., Illinois, New York, Texas, Washington) led by the National Governors Association began developing performance accountability systems that included common definitions and core measures (see Trott and Baj 1996). And, the 1998 WIA and Perkins provisions now require states to exceed standards for three distinct programs in order to qualify for incentive bonuses.
- *More Comprehensive Measurement.* Initially, the focus tended to be only on participation, cost, and a limited set of outcomes. Now, there is growing interest in measures that cover not only a full range of employment, earnings and educational credential measures, but also competencies, i.e., individual

knowledge, skills and abilities required by employers, customer satisfaction, and program impact.

- *Longer Time Horizon.* Starting in the mid-1980s the U.S. Department of Labor began establishing national standards based on *post-program* labor market outcomes, based on participant surveys. WIA now mandates the use of UI wage records for this purpose, as do OMB’s proposed common measures.
- *More Market-Oriented Approaches.* The last decade also saw growing interest in market-oriented approaches. By the 1990s, initiatives such as the Baldrige Award began to spread rapidly as the “excellence” framework and principles were applied to public programs (see Osborne and Gaebler 1992). Customer satisfaction measures gained currency and eventually became required federal measures. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), provider certification and consumer report cards are also market-oriented elements (see Barnow and King 2003).
- *State Experimentation.* States have lived up to their reputation as “laboratories of democracy,” continuing to experiment with innovative measurement and management approaches, as discussed in the next section.

Leading-edge State Practices: Common Themes, Emerging Patterns

A significant handful of states are actively pursuing innovative performance accountability and measurement approaches that are more encompassing and comprehensive than those that are federally required, each grappling with the process in a different way in response to shifts in their own policy and service delivery contexts.² In many states, these efforts are concentrated within the state Workforce Investment Board.

Several states started with developing *common measures*—measures discretely applied to each of the funding streams related to common goals—as a basis for getting to *system measures*—measures that assess the combined performance of all funding streams, while most are moving toward using a combination of the two. Other non-federal measures that these states are using include market- or population-level measures, self-service

² This section draws upon the recently completed report by O’Shea et al. (2003).

measures, and day-to-day program management indicators. Business measures, particularly market share or penetration, also are increasingly being developed. Several states have begun to move beyond common and system measures toward multi-tiered measurement models linked to statewide strategic goals, workforce system-building, and continuous improvement. These tiered approaches vary considerably.

Data collection and management have proven to be time-consuming and challenging, even when states relied primarily on UI wage and other administrative records. Data collection was constrained by the decentralized and varied nature of states' data systems, as well as varying geographic boundaries and reporting cycles for the affected funding streams. States are also relying on a variety of data collection tools, including surveys and swipe cards, and Website monitoring, particularly for automated labor exchange placements, as well as "mystery shoppers" for monitoring service quality.

Four trends dominated in these leading-edge states. First, all of the states are struggling with developing and implementing accountability systems and associated mechanisms that are appropriate to their unique contexts and structures. Second, states are also attempting to institute performance management approaches that lead to continuous program and service improvement. Third, states are also engaged in workforce development system-building that extends beyond the bounds of traditional employment and training programs. And, finally, these states are working to provide the institutional support needed to maintain enhanced performance measurement and management systems. Leading-edge states are in very different stages of development for their systems. With few exceptions (e.g., Florida, Washington),³ states have not yet tied incentives and sanctions to results for non-federal performance measures.

Common Measures and Reauthorization Provisions

The workforce performance framework is likely to feel the effects of two forces that are still unfolding. First, in the Fall of 2002 the Office of Management and Budget announced that it was going to push for the creation of a series of common performance measures for a wide array of federally funded workforce development programs spanning

seven federal agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (e.g., the Food Stamp E&T program), Education (e.g., adult education/family literacy, career and technical education), Health and Human Services (e.g., TANF work programs, vocational rehabilitation), and Labor (e.g., ES, WIA, Job Corps).⁴ The initial intent was to layer these as added measures on top of the ones already authorized by the various laws and to look for opportunities to embed them as opportunities arose in upcoming reauthorizations (e.g., WIA, Perkins). The proposed common measures for adults and youth are:

ADULT	YOUTH
Entered Employment	Placement in Employment or Education
Retention	Attainment of Degree or Certificate
Earnings Increase	Literacy and Numeracy Gains
Efficiency	Efficiency

A federal Interagency Workgroup conducted further work on these measures and fashioned a plan for implementing them in FY 2004. At this point, only USDOL and possibly Vocational Rehabilitation appear to have fully embraced the common measures, which may give rise to a serious policy imbalance affecting data collection and reporting and other important issues. Note that there are many areas of contention in OMB's proposed measures. State and local program administrators as well as some policy researchers have expressed the greatest concern over the proposed efficiency measure, in large part due to the unintended and adverse consequences of implementing a similar measure under JTPA in the mid-1980s (see Dickinson et al. 1988).

Second, the ongoing WIA reauthorization process has yielded movement on performance measures, though with differing results in the House (H.R. 1261) and

³ Florida applies incentives across various programs using clusters of federal measures. Washington State is using its core measures, with those for WIA, to determine incentive allocations to local areas for WIA Title I programs, as well as for Perkins and adult education.

⁴ These measures are presented and critiqued by Bryan Wilson in [Washington] Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (2002). For in-depth discussions of issues and challenges associated with instituting common measures, see King (1988) and Trott and Baj (1996).

Senate (S. 1267, as amended). Among other provisions, the House version combines the existing funding streams, including Wagner-Peyser Act funds, and essentially adopts the common measures including the cost-efficiency measure. The Senate version maintains the existing funding streams, adopts many of the core measures except for the efficiency one. There is as yet no clear sense of what the ultimate outcome of the WIA reauthorization discussions may be in terms of funding streams or measures.

Advocacy-based Workforce Initiatives

Numerous advocacy groups also have begun focusing their attention on ‘mapping’ state workforce development systems and establishing their own performance indicators, both in order to better understand these systems and to improve their effectiveness for disadvantaged and other under-served groups. This is a new feature of the performance landscape. Efforts, such as those by the Center for Public Policy Priorities (2003) in Texas, the Chicago Jobs Council (2003) and the Michigan League for Human Services (2003), have been initiated and funded by the Annie E. Casey, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations.⁵

Michigan and Texas offer illustrative examples of what these advocacy groups are striving for. Michigan created and publicized wide-ranging sets of indicators that are “benchmarked” against the performance of all other states plus the District of Columbia. The indicators range from program-specific (e.g., WIA, TANF) ones to population- and market-based measures (e.g., adults with high school or college diplomas). Groups in both Michigan and Texas stress the importance of training for high-skill, high-wage jobs and encourage the use of economic self-sufficiency standards. Exactly *how* these advocacy-based efforts to create performance indicators for various subgroups of interest will affect measures and approaches driven largely by federal law and state and local policy is not clear, but they will surely have noticeable effects over time.

⁵ States with advocacy-based mapping and indicator projects include California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin.

Emerging Accountability Concepts and Varying Audiences

The dominant accountability paradigm for workforce and other public programs in the U.S. remains that of *public administration*, an approach that emerged around the turn of the last century based on research on bureaucracy by Max Weber, scientific management by Frederick Winslow Taylor, and public administration by Woodrow Wilson and others.⁶ This paradigm emphasizes administrative control, clear lines of responsibility, authority within hierarchical program structures, and stressed accountability for finance and fairness, rather than for performance or results. This paradigm clearly shaped our approaches to performance measurement and management in the 1970s and 1980s and has persisted into the present.

Two new paradigms have begun to emerge and should be considered for use in the 21st Century. The accountability paradigm developed by Harvard's Bob Behn (2001) stresses "*answerability*" for performance through the use of mutual, collective responsibility compacts among the key community-level entities. This has particular appeal and applicability when measures and mechanisms are geared toward system-level performance and an audience of elected officials, business leaders and the wider community. Robert Sheets (2001, 2002) and others advocate adopting a "*market-based paradigm*" in which workforce development is viewed as an "industry" with various actors on the supply side (e.g., schools, training providers) and the demand side (e.g., employers, job seekers). The workforce industry should have world-class performance goals, adopt market rather than bureaucratic principles, and measure performance from the perspective of employers, workers, and labor markets.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

This section presents an initial listing of key issues that states participating in the Integrated Performance Information Project should consider in the months to come. Our ability to address these and other issues will determine the structure and

⁶ For an expanded discussion, see King et al. (2002).

applicability of the measures we design.⁷ Most of these issues revolve around the Who, What, Where, When, and How of designing measures that are inextricably linked with the multiple levels and types of interest and applications for integrated workforce information. A comprehensive workforce system is comprised of “positioned” actors with various needs and perspectives. Federal, state, and local policy makers and practitioners, as well as business and other community stakeholders will have different approaches to valuing their investments in workforce services. In part this depends on the extent to which the measures are used as drivers for accountability and continuous improvement, as well as mechanisms for building support for those investments and strengthening systemic workforce development. A first consideration is whether integrated performance information can be embraced by stakeholders without disrupting their commitment to their mission, target customers, and policy and program objectives, as well as the constraints and expectations set by their funding sources and operational contexts.⁸

Program Equity and Fairness

The contribution of a program’s processes or outcomes to an integrated measure may benefit from upfront considerations in support of equity and fairness. Little benefit can be realized from holding a program accountable for measures that are not central to its particular efforts. For example, it may be inappropriate to compare employment entry rates from Adult Education participants intent on merely improving their literacy with those for a welfare employment training program. Nevertheless, adjustments can be made, such as only including leavers from Adult Education programs with occupational components or determining at the point of registration whether the individual’s objective is literacy or employment. At the same time, it may be beneficial to recognize a program’s or agency’s unique contributions to the workforce system, such as educational achievement of disadvantaged populations.

⁷ Other issues will arise from our ongoing discussions; several are likely to surface in response to unfolding changes in the policy and programmatic environment.

⁸ Our exercise will ultimately provide a road map for the federal government to limit constraints and provide opportunities for better integrated information.

Frequency of Measurement and Reporting

When to measure and report is another issue that is affected by several conditions. For example, UI wage records have a well known time lag, rendering them useless for measuring immediate outcomes. In addition, labor force attachment or human capital development strategies have considerably different employment and earnings impact profiles over time: labor force attachment strategies produce sizeable early effects that then tend to decline, while human capital development strategies only start to yield large and lasting returns three to five years after the period of investment. So, only comparing short-term results has serious shortcomings. Other conditions that influence frequency of measurement and reporting include data costs, availability, comparability, and accuracy. Other concerns include varying categorical reporting requirements and divergent funding, planning, and legislative cycles.

Levels of Aggregation/Disaggregation

Those who design integrated measures must also consider the level of aggregation/disaggregation that is useful and feasible. State-level strategists may pursue “big picture” scopes that are seen as less useful at the local level. Reporting for some data elements may produce cells that are so small that disaggregation and disclosure at the local level may raise confidentiality concerns. Disparate data management systems—for example, county-based welfare employment programs with different data collection and reporting systems—may present barriers to statewide aggregation. Pursuing return-on-investment (ROI) measures also raises cross-program aggregation concerns that most states and localities have yet to confront (for example, see Workforce Leadership of Texas 2003). There are difficult choices to be made when considering which services ROI should be computed for and at what level.

Measure Hierarchies and Scalability

Measure hierarchies and tiered measurement systems have considerable potential for fostering integrated system capacity, outcomes, program management, and other measures, as well as linking them to strategic planning for the workforce system as a whole. As indicated above, states have pursued widely varying approaches to establishing their own measure hierarchies, each with its own advantages.

In addition, as integrated performance information approaches are being designed, we will need to consider whether the measures are “scalable” at different levels of the workforce system and the implications for data collection and reporting. Is the performance on a given measure at the local board level appropriately viewed as a multiple of that at the service provider level?

Core and Common Information

In many instances, it may be appropriate to collect and link similar, common, or regularly reported information across programs and agencies in order to communicate the results of efforts and accomplishments of collaborating entities. To observe comprehensive system output in which discrete efforts are melded in deference to some measure of overall value to the community (at any selected scale), core or basic measures are better mechanisms, e.g., employment entry, retention, or wage gains for completers of education, training, or employment programs. But, it may not be appropriate or productive for agencies and programs to share or link *all* information. For example, demographic information is helpful in framing supporting performance adjustment processes, while the vast majority of individual health information is highly confidential. Rather, programs and agencies should share that which contributes to measuring and managing systemwide accomplishments, whether common or core.

Information Integration or Coordination

Similarly, agencies and programs at times may benefit from integrating key information in a data warehouse or centralized data bank (e.g., The Workforce Information System of Texas or TWIST). In other instances, it may be more economical and more appropriate for agencies or programs to internally produce and externally share key data elements, coordinating their efforts with the broader array of workforce partners. We will likely revisit more traditional issues of “turf” as we attempt to advance the process of workforce and economic development system capacity-building through integrated information and measures.

Capitalizing on New Information Technologies

Rapid advancements in IT may prove to be the “wild card” in efforts to design and implement integrated information systems. Entities saddled with legacy platforms have become a thing of the past. Information technologies continue to rapidly evolve, offering workforce systems the opportunity to store, link and manage data in innovative ways, particularly via Web-based reporting. Other developments will likely provide further innovations for data assemblage and information sharing. Federal and state governments may benefit from better orchestrating efforts for data management to possibly take advantage of emerging options, minimize duplication, and reduce costs. Again, technology investments are expensive and time consuming. These are just a few of the issues, we will encounter in this project. Other issues, challenges, and opportunities will surely arise as we proceed.

CHALLENGES AND CAVEATS

While there are surely rewards for doing so, efforts to develop an integrated performance measurement and management approach face numerous challenges, some of which are listed below. In addition, such efforts must proceed with caution given the pitfalls that surely lie ahead. Caveats are in order.

Challenges

Challenges to developing and implementing an integrated performance information approach include the following, among others:

- *Federal legislation and policies* present barriers to states and localities that want to push forward with a more integrated approach. For example, federal authorizing legislation for various workforce development programs not only establishes silo-based performance measures and stand-alone management structures, but also may preclude the use of other non-federal measures. In addition, U.S. Department of Education interpretations of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (or FERPA) makes it difficult for state and local

workforce officials to link WIA, education and UI wage records at both the secondary and the postsecondary levels.

- *The lion's share of workforce development funding is at the state level*, which further complicates efforts to develop and implement comprehensive approaches to performance measurement and management. This is an issue for in-state, inter-state and national efforts alike.
- *Adapting to or establishing common measures* pursuant to policy direction provided by the Office of Management and Budget will also be challenging. Part of the problem lies with the proposed measures themselves, especially the efficiency measure (see WTECB 2003) and part with the process for adopting and implementing them. At this point, USDOL and Vocational Rehabilitation have expressed support for the common measures effort. The support of the other federal agencies and the Congress will be required to make real progress at the federal, much less the state and local levels.
- *Limitations of the Wage Records Interchange System (WRIS) and the National Directory of New Hires* also present challenges to consistent and comprehensive measurement of labor market outcomes. WRIS has enlisted the voluntary participation of some 46 or 47 states, but its UI wage records can only be used for a few quarters to support WIA performance reporting.⁹ National Directory data has its own limitations. With modification, both could be used to support improved performance measurement nationally.

Caveats

It is appropriate to close with a few caveats. We have placed increasing emphasis on the use of performance measures and standards for improving both the effectiveness and efficiency of workforce and other publicly funded services and communicating the contributions of program investments to meeting state and national needs. We should be cautious about this, particularly as we proceed from measuring and managing the performance of specific programs targeted to particular target populations to doing so on

⁹ Author's December 8, 2003 interview with WRIS director Rich Hobbie in Austin, Texas.

a systemic scale and assessing comprehensive returns on our investments (for example, see Blalock and Barnow 2001, Workforce Leadership of Texas 2003). While we have learned many helpful lessons from our experiences and made considerable progress in adapting our approaches over the past few decades, there is still much to be done. As skeptics and supporters alike have pointed to performance management caveats, including the “principal-agent” problem, that is, the difficulty of getting programs to pursue the goals and objectives of the funding source in an intergovernmental system (Marschke 2001) and reliably measuring true longer-term program impacts with near-term outcome indicators (e.g., Blalock and Barnow 2001, King 2002), among others. Finally, we should heed Schick’s admonition (2001, p. 43):

“The great mistake of the performance measurement industry is the notion that an organization can be transformed by measuring its performance. ... Performance information can affect behavior only if it is used, and it is used, only when there are opportunities and incentives to do so.”

Our efforts to measure and manage workforce services more on a comprehensive, systems basis are still very much in the developmental stages and are likely to be for some time to come. We have yet to reach a consensus on the best way or ways to approach these difficult tasks (for example, see Heinrich and Lynn 2000). But, we’ll surely never get there if we fail to start out on the path.

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