

**MAPPING AND IMPROVING STATE WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS:
LESSONS FROM FIVE STATES**

A Report to the Rockefeller Foundation

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Background

In 2002, Fred Dedrick, then director of The Reinvestment Fund, a Philadelphia-based community organization, took the unusual step of portraying the workforce development system of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in graphic, easy-to-read form rather than the typical mind-numbing listing of agencies, programs, and services.¹ He was able not only to effectively capture the complex and multifaceted system, but also to link it to narrative statements and policy recommendations in a way that caught the attention of policymakers, practitioners and advocates in Pennsylvania.

Dedrick's workforce development "map" also got rave reviews and no small amount of attention from the workforce community at large, including the Rockefeller Foundation, which subsequently funded a number of state advocacy and research organizations to develop state workforce development maps of their own later that same year. Several of these maps were produced in 2003 and may be revised and updated in the near future. (These are described briefly below.) Some of the early starters are considering the merits of producing sub-state maps as well. Additional state maps will be produced in 2004-2005 (e.g., California, Florida).

A number of organizations also have been involved in the multi-year Working Poor Families Project with funding from the Ford, Annie E. Casey and Rockefeller Foundations. The Working Poor Families Project used a four-part framework of indicators to assess whether state policies and program practices are effectively positioned to help working poor families to achieve economic self-sufficiency.² The framework included characteristics of the working poor families, and state policies and practices concerning education and training, employment opportunities, economic development, and conditions of employment and support.³ In a number of instances (e.g., California, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas), the states and

¹ The Reinvestment Fund and the Regional Workforce Partnership, *Workforce and Economic Development: An Agenda for Pennsylvania's Next Governor* (Philadelphia, PA: 2002).

² Annie E. Casey Foundation, *The Working Poor Families Project*. Online. Available: <http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative/workingpoor.htm> Accessed: August 13, 2004.

³ Ibid.

participating organizations involved in workforce mapping and the Working Poor Families Projects were one and the same.

In 2003, the Rockefeller Foundation approached the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs' Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at the University of Texas at Austin, a center with a long history of research, demonstration and evaluation in workforce development and related policies at the national, state and local level, to both synthesize what has been learned from these efforts and to outline some of the more productive next steps that might be taken at the national, state and local level as a result. This end-of-year report is one step towards doing so.

Approach

Over the past year, researchers from the Ray Marshall Center twice brought together lead staff from past, present and future workforce mapping organizations from 7 states — i.e., California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Tennessee, and Texas— for all-day meetings to discuss important challenges, opportunities and lessons learned from preparing and using their workforce maps, as well as to share insights on productive future directions. (The first meeting was convened in Austin, Texas in late January 2004; the second was held in conjunction with a meeting of the Working Poor Families Project states in New York City in mid-May 2004.) Other workforce and economic development policy experts also participated in these meeting, including representatives from the Center for Law and Social Policy, The Workforce Alliance, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, and the Minnesota Workforce Investment Board, among others. Center researchers also participated in meetings of the Working Poor Families Project as well as The Workforce Alliance.

Pursuant to the discussions from our meetings, the Center also scheduled a series of telephone interviews with lead staff from the various workforce mapping organizations to elicit more detailed responses to questions about challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned, as well as possible future directions. These interviews were conducted in July and August 2004.

This brief report summarizes the results of the meetings, discussions and interviews with the five current workforce mapping states.

Participants

The goals of the mapping projects were to 1) create graphic representations of each state workforce development system complete with details on funding streams, programs, services, and participants, and 2) explore ways workforce system maps can be used to effect positive policy changes. To date, at least eight states have engaged in mapping exercises. This report draws on the experiences of organizations and individuals who participated in mapping projects in five states: Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Tennessee, and Texas:

- The Illinois map was developed by the Chicago Jobs Council (CJC), a 23-year-old coalition of community-based employment and training organizations, advocacy groups, businesses, and individuals that works to ensure access to employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals in poverty.
- New York's map was created through a partnership between the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP) and the Center for an Urban Future. NYATEP promotes, enhances, and serves the interests of local workforce investment agencies and system partners in New York State. The Center for an Urban Future is a New York City-based think tank that fuses journalistic reporting techniques with traditional policy analysis to produce in-depth reports and workable policy solutions on the critical issues facing American cities.
- The Massachusetts map was created by the Massachusetts Workforce Alliance (MWA), an organization comprised of ten coalitions representing more than 250 community-based and other nonprofit organizations that provide low-income residents with adult basic education, skill training, and employment in decent jobs with family-sustaining wages.
- Tennessee's map was developed through a joint venture between the Peabody Center for Education Policy and the Leadership Development Center at Vanderbilt University. The Peabody Center works to improve education by promoting policy, practices, and professional and public understanding of challenges facing education in the United States. The Leadership Development Center works with school leaders to understand and apply professional practices, concepts, and values in learning, leadership, organizations, and policy.
- The Texas map was developed by the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP; Austin, TX), a non-partisan, nonprofit policy research organization committed to

improving public policies and private practices to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans.

The following section describes the map development process with an emphasis on best practices and common challenges.

Stage One: Mapping the State Systems

All of the workforce organizations studied in this project were inspired by the work of their peers in Pennsylvania and/or Massachusetts. Some organizations encountered the maps at conferences or through professional networks and began looking for ways to utilize the model in their own state. Others were introduced to the map through their relationships with the Rockefeller Foundation.

Following the initial excitement of discovering what they understood to be a useful tool, all of these organizations faced the daunting task of pulling together a vast quantity of disparate information, sorting through it, and massaging it into an eight-page foldout report.

Visioning

Developing a vision for their state workforce system map was a crucial first step for every organization. In the words of the Massachusetts Workforce Alliance's Geoff Beane, "good process makes good products." Two elements shaped the vision developed for each map: audiences and goals.

The target audiences for the maps varied across organizations. In Illinois and Tennessee, CJC and the Vanderbilt group developed maps to coincide with the transfer of power to new governors. As such, the new governors, agency heads, and workforce policy advisors were key audiences for their maps. In New York – which has a ten-year incumbent governor – the state legislature and local workforce investment boards were the primary audiences. The Massachusetts Workforce Alliance considered the membership of its partner organizations – practitioners – to be its primary audience. The Center for Public Policy Priorities targeted a more general audience of people connected to the Texas workforce system, including both recommendations for policymakers and

recommendations for community leaders and workforce system stakeholders in its final report.

Interestingly, the maps tended to be used by wider audiences than originally anticipated. Practitioners found the maps useful even in states where they were designed with policymakers in mind and vice versa. CPPP reported that their map became a de facto media guide to the Texas workforce system. Massachusetts found that elected officials in Washington, D.C. were also interested in the maps.

Regardless of audience, three goals were common to all five organizations: educating others about the workforce system, increasing the visibility of workforce issues, and suggesting changes in policies and priorities.

In the future, other organizations that consider engaging in a mapping project are advised to give ample consideration to their vision for the project. Interview participants emphasized that this process helped them immensely when it came time to decide what data to request from state agencies and departments for inclusion in the actual map, and what the content of the text section of their map reports should look like. They also found that discussing the map-making process with experienced organizations in other states helped them narrow their focus. Interview participants strongly recommended that future projects take advantage of their predecessors' expertise.

Funding

Rockefeller funded four of the five groups participating in this effort, thus this project provided little insight into the availability of funding to support mapping initiatives. The Massachusetts map predates the other maps and was privately funded by The Boston Foundation, Fleet Charitable Trust Services, The Hyams Foundation, and MWA's member coalitions. MWA financed the printing of extra maps by charging \$2.50 per copy to organizations requesting additional copies.

In addition to Rockefeller funding, the Chicago Jobs Council also received support from Bank One. The support of Fleet and Bank One suggests that corporations may be promising targets for future initiatives.

Data Collection

Creating the maps required organizations to obtain information on state agencies' and programs' state funding, federal funding, services, and – in Tennessee's case – performance measures. Data gathering was reportedly the most labor-intensive part of the mapping process since the U.S. workforce system is spread across a variety of agencies and programs and in most states these programs reside in a large number of agencies, each with its own hierarchy and data management system. Each organization typically assigned one or two staff members to data collection.

Two elements proved to be crucial to the data collection efforts of all five states. First, participants emphasized that the staff of the authoring organization must have a solid understanding of their state workforce system. Second, at least one person working on the report needs to have good working relationships with staff from state agencies and programs who can help put their organization in contact with the people they need to reach in order to obtain the information needed for the map. Tennessee participants emphasized that it is important to cultivate ongoing relationships in order to avoid being treated as outsiders. Organizations that cannot muster these resources should expect their maps to take much longer to produce and may have difficulty accurately depicting their state systems.

For the most part, participants reported only minor resistance from state agencies, most likely because of strong previously existing relationships and because much of the information is covered by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Interview participants advised future mapping projects to ask for as much information as they may possibly need in their first request. Repeatedly returning to the same agency with additional requests can diminish their willingness to make the data available. CJC used a FOIA request when one state agency failed to provide needed data.

All five of the organizations interviewed for this project used Microsoft Excel to organize their data. Once data collection was complete, the organizations were next faced with the task of writing up the supporting text and deciding what should be included in their final map.

Writing the Report

Every organization we studied used the report format developed by Pennsylvania: an eight-page foldout where the four inside pages displayed the graphic ‘map’ and the outside pages discussed the map and provided policy recommendations. As previously mentioned, the content of the text was largely shaped by the intended audience and policy goals of the authoring organization.

The graphic map contents were relatively consistent across all five states, depicting federal agencies, state agencies, individual programs, funding, services, customers, and service providers. Tennessee was the only organization to include performance measurements in their map. Some states included additional graphics in their reports such as a breakout of spending by program category (NY), a graph of workforce system investments over time (MA), or organizational charts depicting their state workforce systems (MA and IL). The text portion of the reports typically consisted of an introduction, explanation of the map, and one or two pages of policy recommendations.

One process that was especially challenging for all of the organizations was deciding what information to include/exclude, both on the map and in the accompanying text. For example, some contributors to the New York map felt that the state K-12 system should be included while others felt that the large budget for public education would skew the message the map was intended to provide. Illinois intentionally left performance indicators off their map after deciding they were too complex to adequately explain given the limited space available for text.

Each organization developed a strategy to address these and other content issues. MWA solicited input from its ‘convener’s group’ to ensure that they had the support of all their coalition members. CPPP turned to a few trusted allies in state government for suggestions. Other states set up advisory boards. CJC’s advisors included board members, academics, state agency representatives, and advocacy organizations. New York’s team set up two advisory boards – one representing New York City and one representing upstate New York, reflecting both the political split between New York City and the rest of the state and the different constituencies of the two authoring

organizations. Membership in the New York groups included representatives from government, community leaders, and organized labor. Tennessee conducted focus groups with relevant officials in Nashville and Memphis to solicit feedback.

Clearly, the nature of each organization influenced its approach to content selection. Some groups considered accuracy their primary purpose for review while other organizations also used the review process to obtain buy-in from partners. Once again, organizations reported that it was very helpful to solicit feedback from organizations that had already completed the mapping process during this stage.

Participants from New York and Massachusetts offered two additional suggestions regarding the content of the reports. First, brevity is key. New York suggested that organizations work with their advisory boards to decide what content they want to include, draft up their report, and then have a good editor work with the text to make it crisp and concise. New York and Massachusetts both noted that audiences appreciated text that provided concrete proposals for action. MWA suggested that authors address the “what, who, and hows” of recommendations.

When the content was ready, all of the organizations used a graphic design contractor to create the layout. Developing an eye-catching, polished, professional product was important to all the authoring agencies.

Completing the process from the planning/visioning stage through finalizing the final layout typically took six months to one year. One organization suggested that this project probably could have been accomplished more quickly if they’d had the staff and financial resources to dedicate more staff time exclusively to this project.

Stage Two: Advocacy

Creating the maps, while labor intensive, was only the beginning of the mapping projects. The other part of the mapping projects – exploring ways workforce system maps can be used to effect positive policy changes – is equally if not more important.

Each organization printed anywhere from 1,000 to 20,000 copies of their map, depending on their audience and the size of their state. Most organizations also placed a

copy of the map on the Internet, although the layout of the map made it difficult to create a useful online version. Every organization reported that they still had not resolved this issue satisfactorily. CJC was able to format the map with page breaks so that it could be printed in sections then taped together.

The most popular first step for distribution was a mass mailing. This mailing typically included all of the coalition members, partners, and supporters on an organization's mailing list, in addition to target audiences such as governors, agency heads, workforce investment boards and legislators.

Most organizations also found that presenting the map at conferences was useful for educating people about the interconnectedness of workforce activities and encouraging systems thinking. The Center for Public Policy Priorities felt that their work on the map actually led to an increased number of speaking invitations. Audiences for the five states interviewed included practitioners, policymakers, advocates, and the business community. To facilitate conversations at presentations, MWA had their map blown up as a large banner.

Interview participants indicated that one of the most effective ways to utilize the map was sitting down with people one-on-one or in small groups and walking people through the report. This was especially viewed as one of the most valuable ways to talk to elected officials about the map and its policy implications.

New York used a media campaign to draw the public's attention to issues highlighted by their map and to take advantage of the agenda-setting attributes of the press. Their team hired an outside organization, E-3 Communications, to help them develop their media strategy.

Reactions

Reactions to the maps were overwhelmingly positive. All of the participants spoke of a 'wow factor': most people who received the map had never been able to visualize the entire system before. The CPPP noted that the factual nature of the map helped them avoid being dismissed as a partisan organization. Several states noted that

their maps were so well received that they didn't have to do much publicity following the initial mailing: people sent requests to them.

There were a limited number of less enthusiastic reactions to the maps and their related advocacy campaigns. Some people simply found the volume of information contained in the maps overwhelming unless they had someone readily available to walk them through the graphic and explain the system. In New York, a write-up on their map in New York Newsday article brought public attention to their efforts but had critical things to say about the State Department of Labor, which displeased the Labor Commissioner. Reportedly, there were also some agency heads who were nervous that the authoring organizations were making them vulnerable to budget cutbacks by increasing the visibility of their budgets at a time when several states faced substantial deficits. Across the board there was a sense that transparency was sometimes unsettling for agencies unaccustomed to so much visibility. Most interview participants felt that transparency was, nevertheless, valuable because it helps draw policymakers' attention to the fragmented nature of state workforce systems and because it can help win public support for initiatives.

Early Results

Interestingly, the state workforce maps had both internal and external impacts. For example, the process of developing the maps strengthened the authoring organizations. The maps themselves increased the organizations' capacity to function as workforce advocates and enhanced their reputations. Additionally:

- New York found that the process of developing the maps helped cement a stronger partnership between the two authoring organizations, the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP) and the Center for an Urban Future.
- CJC felt that the writing process increased the capacity of their organization to serve as a reliable source of information to Illinois policymakers.

- Several states mentioned that the maps were a useful ‘Workforce 101’ tool to educate current and potential partners who were unfamiliar with the structure of the workforce system.
- Massachusetts found that their map helped them provide advocates with a common message about state problems and priorities, which they expect will boost the efficacy of their advocacy efforts.
- The maps expanded the access of several groups to new audiences. In Tennessee, for example, the Vanderbilt group was invited to present the map to the state Workforce Development Board and Jobs Cabinet. The map may have also played a role in a CJC representative’s invitation to participate in the state transition team on workforce issues by increasing the visibility of their efforts and increasing their value as a source of sought-after data.

The maps had numerous impacts beyond the authoring organizations as well. The maps satisfied their original purpose by creating a visual representation of the system, which subsequently stimulated broader thinking and educating people about the systems’ structure, gaps, and problems. Illinois, for example, found that one state agency was unable to provide them with the data they requested because it was not being tracked. The map allowed them to draw attention to this issue and that agency is now collecting the data needed to provide this information in the future. The Illinois map may also have played a role in the consolidation of several state agencies that were carrying out very similar activities. In New York, advocates successfully lobbied policymakers to direct \$100,000 to each workforce investment area for strategic planning, an achievement facilitated by the timing of the maps and the fact that they provided visual evidence of fragmentation. As previously mentioned, the New York group also found that the map was a useful tool for their media campaign. In some states – especially Massachusetts – the map is used as a quick reference chart by frontline practitioners and commonly seen on cubicle walls at state agencies. CPPP found that pairing the map with their Working Poor Families indicators report was especially useful.

Despite these uses, all of the organizations emphasized that translating people's excitement over the map into action continues to be a significant challenge.

One state experienced an unanticipated attempt to use their map to justify the desire of a state community college director to absorb other agencies. The map's authors noted that future projects should anticipate these kinds of scenarios and be aware that you cannot control how the map is used once it is made public.

Future Directions

In addition to continuing to use the maps to lobby for improved policies and increased funding, several organizations are planning or have already launched related initiatives. Among their current activities:

- The CJC is already working on a similar map focused specifically on the City of Chicago. Local Workforce Investment Boards are very interested in following suit in their own communities so CJC may train representatives of the WIBs on how to create their own maps if they are able to secure funding for such an endeavor.
- The Tennessee group is looking at ways to connect spending information to GIS information in order to determine whether there is a mismatch between where funding is being allocated and where it is most needed.
- MWA has already developed a second map, *Workforce Development: A Diverse Provider Network Meets Diverse Workforce Needs*. Building on the success of their first mapping project, this map graphically depicts the geographic distribution of workforce services across Massachusetts.
- The two New York organizations continue to work closely together on advocacy strategies designed to promote a better integrated system.
- The authors of the Texas report have recently accepted positions with other organizations. The Center for Public Policy Priorities continues to consider workforce development a key priority. CPPP is looking at ways to place a simplified version of the map online.

All of the states indicated that they would consider updating their current maps in a few years if funding becomes available. Several organizations suggested that they were interested in further exploring how the map can be used in tandem with workforce performance measures. Neil Kleiman of New York's Center for an Urban Future suggested that advocates think of the system maps as a measure of inputs and performance indicators as a measure of outputs. Together, these two components provide a valuable overview of state workforce initiatives.

Conclusions

Based on our interviews with representatives from the Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Tennessee, and Texas mapping projects, several key findings stood out:

- *Having a clear vision from day one is essential.* Understanding your organization's rationale for developing a state workforce map is crucial to the writing process.
- *Authoring organizations must have a solid understanding of their state system.* Organizations that do not have well-established professional contacts at state agencies should expect their maps to take much longer to produce and may have difficulty accurately depicting their state systems.
- *Veteran mapmakers are invaluable resources.* Soliciting feedback from organizations that previously created maps can provide important feedback and help organizations avoid making the mistakes of their predecessors.
- *The writing process can foster new relationships.* The writing process can help cement strong relationships between workforce advocacy organizations that partner to create the maps. The writing process can also lead to new relationships with state agencies that are responsible for operating the programs.
- *Advisory committees offer distinctive advantages.* Advisory committees can help secure the support of partner organizations for mapping initiatives. Advisory committees can also provide important feedback when organizations decide what information should be included or excluded from the final report.
- *Reports must be responsive to the political circumstances of states and the authoring organizations.* The content and tone of the text in mapping reports must be suitable for the unique political circumstances (i.e., incumbent or new administration? Hostile or friendly policymakers?) of the state it describes.

Independent, third-party authors have the advantage of objectivity and increased freedom to critically assess their state systems and offer creative solutions.

- *Translating enthusiasm into action is challenging.* Organizations need political and public relations savvy to fully take advantage of opportunities created by the map.

All of the participating organizations felt that the mapping projects were a worthwhile endeavor and encouraged advocacy organizations in other states to consider developing their own maps if they have the necessary resources. Mapping projects represent valuable opportunities to strengthen advocacy organizations internally while increasing their external influence at the same time. While the maps do not represent a silver bullet for effective workforce development advocacy, they show promise as a valuable element of a larger advocacy strategy.

Sources

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