Experiences of Three States in Developing Social Media Strategies for Employment Assistance Programs

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Executive Summary

The country's workforce system is continually in need of effective strategies to connect job seekers to job openings and to facilitate rapid entry into suitable employment. One promising tool is social media. 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 U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is examining social media strategies to improve Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants' access to employment services provided at its American Job Centers (AJCs) with support from the Wagner-Peyser and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs.

As part of its State Demonstration Projects in Providing Reemployment Services to UI Claimants (commonly known as the UI Workforce Connectivity Project), DOL provided grants in 2011 to three states to develop and use social media tools for the workforce system. These three-year 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 the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL). The initiative focused on social media activities that would be implemented at the state level and used by local workforce agencies.

DOL sponsored an implementation study of the social media initiatives developed by the three grantees, which is being conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with Capital Research Corporation and George Washington University. This 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.

This summary 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.

Launching the Social Media Grants

During the initial phase, all three grantees focused on planning and staffing their social media efforts. The initial efforts of two grantees (Idaho and Minnesota) focused on understanding how key stakeholders (job seekers, employers, and workforce staff) use social media tools, particularly regarding workforce- and employment-related activities, and then building their knowledge of the tools.

Setting goals for the social media initiatives. While all of the grantees had begun to integrate social media into their operations in the early- to mid-2000s, the state agencies hoped to organize and expand their use of social media tools, something they reported was needed given the rapid expansion in both the nature of social media tools and their usage by both job seekers and employers. Despite the origins of the grant, which focused on UI claimants, all grantees aimed to expand their target populations to job seekers generally. Overall, the three grantees intended to expand both the awareness and use of social media tools among job seekers, employers, and staff and to implement new social media initiatives.

Staffing the grant activities. All grantees established a planning group of state and local workforce agency staff at the outset of the grant to oversee implementation of the social media activities. In addition, each grantee designated grant-funded staff to oversee and manage the development of the social media activities. As discussed further below, having dedicated staff was critical to the social media operation.

Assessing stakeholder knowledge of social media. In the early stages of their grants, Idaho and Minnesota conducted surveys of their customers to determine how job seekers and employers were already using social media tools and how they were using such tools to facilitate job search and placement (or hiring). These states also conducted a survey of workforce agency staff to assess their knowledge of social media and the potential need for staff training. These surveys established that many

> **Social Media Grant Activities at Idaho's Department of Labor**
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> Idaho's Department of Labor surveyed employers and job seekers on their use of social media; conducted social media training workshops for employers, job seekers, and agency staff across the state; and increased its emphasis on social media measurement.
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> A series of social media training workshops were held at various locations throughout the state for employers and job seekers to improve awareness, understanding, and appropriate use of social media. The workshops were tailored to topics of interest to employers and job seekers, including social media law governing use in public and private employer sites, social media account ownership and terms of use; use of social media for hiring; appropriate use of social media within the workplace; privacy settings on various social media; and using social media in career planning and job searching (including "branding" yourself and using social media tools to follow companies and identify job openings). In addition to an expanded and consistent presence on Facebook and Twitter, Idaho is using YouTube to provide information to customers. Through a partnership with Idaho public television, Idaho DOL has uploaded nearly 50 videos to its YouTube Channel aimed at informing job seekers and employers about how to search for a job and develop resumes and describing services available online and through the state's network of AJCs.

job seekers, employers, and staff were already familiar with and using social media tools, but the surveys also indicated areas where additional training was necessary. In particular, the survey findings suggested that workforce staff had some knowledge of social media, but they needed training on how best to assist job seekers in using the tools.

Providing training on social media. The Idaho and Minnesota survey findings facilitated grant-funded planning and targeting of social media strategies. In Minnesota, the training focused on agency staff and provided information on a range of topics including creating an online brand; how to maintain an online presence; networking through social media; and how to use Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn for job search. In an effort to improve awareness, understanding, and appropriate use of social media among employers and job seekers, Idaho DOL used grant funding to hold a series of

workshops on a range of topics across the state. Staff tailored the workshops to each customer group, highlighting topics and areas of interest as indicated in the surveys.

Grantee Use of Social Media Tools

The three grantees developed and used a range of social media tools to enhance communication between workforce agencies, job seekers, and employers. These included "off-the-shelf" established social media tools, particularly, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. In most cases the grantees had begun using these social media tools before they received the grant and used the grant resources to expand and enhance their work. In addition, several social media and online efforts were specifically developed as part of the grant.

All three grantees increased the use of and information provided through established social media tools. These included the following:

- *Facebook*. All emphasized the use of Facebook and posted a range of information on their state agency Facebook page. Information disseminated through this social media tool includes agency announcements, upcoming job fairs, company recruitments, training opportunities, available workforce services, as well as job openings, press releases, and links to other social media tools (the agency website, YouTube, and blogs).

- *Twitter.* All three grantees used Twitter extensively as a method to disseminate messages to the stakeholder community quickly and to direct individuals to their websites and blogs for additional information. Common topics for "tweets" included information on programs and services available at the AJCs, policy changes, and job seeker information such as job postings, job fair schedules and locations and job search tips.

- *YouTube.* All three grantees established YouTube channels to disseminate informational videos on topics such as preparing for job interviews, conducting an effective job search and developing a high-quality resume, and accessing available AJC services. To facilitate development of high-quality videos for uploading to their state's YouTube channels, New York used an in-house video production studio while Idaho contracted with a local public television station.

- *LinkedIn*. Unlike what they did with the other social media tools, grantees did not seek to expand their use of or presence on LinkedIn but rather focused on helping job seekers and businesses improve their use of it. These efforts included workshops for job seekers on effective use of LinkedIn, particularly with respect to enhancing networking and job search efforts.

- *Workforce agency websites and blogs*. All the grantees used their agency websites and blogs to provide comprehensive information, including official press releases, information on programs and services (such as UI and employment services available through AJCs), policy updates, and links to the state job bank. Blogs were used to inform job seekers and employers about workforce issues, provide updates on available workforce services, and generate discussion and engagement. Often grantees used other social media tools to "drive" interested parties to the state websites or blogs for more detail on a particular topic.

- *Pinterest/Instagram*. Although not used to the extent of the other social media tools, some grantees found Pinterest and Instagram useful for developing the "brand" of the state workforce agency and AJCs.

Grantees also developed specialized social media initiatives specifically focused on workforce services and employment issues. These included the following:

- *Electronic Calendar.* New York developed an electronic events calendar for all state agency and AJC events and activities statewide. Housed on the state workforce website, the calendar had an interactive selecting and sorting feature and allowed job seekers and employers to search events across the state by type of event, type of workshop, career center, and the day/week/month of the event.

- *Live Chat*. New York purchased Website Alive software to support a live chat capability to enhance online interaction with employers, job seekers, and other interested individuals. The tool provided a number of benefits beyond a standard hotline, including enabling a single operator to communicate simultaneously with multiple customers and allowing operators to quickly send prepared responses to frequently asked questions and other materials directly to customers (e.g., brochures, links, enrollment forms, workshop fliers).

- *Virtual Career Fair*. New York developed a virtual career fair to recreate a traditional job fair environment with both job seekers and employers but without the time and costs associated with travel and hosting an event. These virtual career fairs allowed job seekers to upload their resumes

> **Social Media Grant Activities at the New York State Department of Labor**
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> New York State Department of Labor expanded its use of various social media applications (including Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter) to increase customer awareness of New York workforce services and to encourage use of social media by job seekers during the job search process. Additionally, New York aimed to engage employers using social medial tools to help them better understand workforce services available through local workforce centers, as well as to encourage employers to list jobs and participate in job fairs. New York also added several new social media tools under its grant, including live chat and a virtual career fair. The live chat feature allows an agency operator to have up to 10 "chats" ongoing at one time with customers, and operators can quickly send out already prepared responses on questions/topics that come up frequently. New York is also piloting online, virtual career fairs using software that allows the state to bring together up to 50 employers and up to 5,000 job seekers during the scheduled event. The software has features such as presentation and media sharing, customizable event promotion, interactive Q&A, and video chat. Job seekers are able to upload their resumes and profiles for viewing by employers attending the job fair, as well as browse job orders posted by employers.

and profiles to be reviewed by employers, while also exploring job orders and brochures loaded by employers. The virtual career fair also included an online chat capability, which allowed employers and job seekers to send electronic text messages, which could either be shared with all attendees or be private conversations between a job seeker and an employer.

- *Talent Communities.* Minnesota DEED used the social media grant to develop "talent communities"—an online tool to link job seekers and employers in specific industries. These are similar to a virtual career fair, however, employers pay a nominal fee to join the community and within the talent community employers can create "circles," smaller communities focused on a specific skill or job title. While still in the pilot phase, employers will be able to conduct interviews online, which will be easier for candidates who are not geographically close by. Features of the talent community will also allow employers to correspond in

> **Social Media Grant Activities at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development**
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> Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) conducted a survey of job seekers and workforce staff/partners to assess familiarity with social media and help guide the design of future training efforts. DEED delivered a series of "train the trainer" webinars to train staff in American Job Centers so that they could better assist job seekers on how to use social media for job search. DEED has expanded their presence on social media by hiring a staff member in the communications division to monitor and post information regularly on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Later in the grant period, DEED shifted its focus to the piloting of a statewide "talent community." The talent community is designed as a virtual meeting place for job seekers and employers, where employers can find applicants with the skillsets they are looking for and manage their talent pipeline, and job seekers can explore job openings and communicate directly with multiple employers in a single venue.

real time in a multitude of ways, including private messaging, completing applications, viewing where candidates are in the pipeline moving through the interview process, and "tagging" candidates to communicate impressions to other internal staff.

Overall, all three states integrated key social media outlets into their day-to-day workforce system operations, making social media tools part of the package of employment-related services available and used to link job seekers to services or to provide services directly. While developed at the state level, the tools were made available to customers throughout the state, either through information provided at the AJCs or by customers accessing the Internet on their own.

Costs of the Social Media Initiatives

All three grantees reported that social media tools were not expensive to implement. The main social media tools used (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn) were available free of charge and required little programming or state staff assistance to implement. There were some exceptions, such as the software for the talent communities in Minnesota and subscription fees for the virtual career fair and the Website Alive live chat software in New York, which grantees had to purchase with grant resources.

The main costs incurred under the grant were staff time associated with coordinating the effort, creating substantive content for uploading, and responding to customer inquiries. Some content took substantial time to develop (e.g., blogs, state website announcements of new regulations and policies) and responding to customer inquiries was time-sensitive and, depending on the type of question, could be time-consuming. In particular, any tool that required two-way communication, such as responding to inquiries on Facebook or any online chat, required a commitment of staff resources.

Grantees, though, also reported that social media tools can result in time and cost savings for agency staff in other areas. Specifically, they reported that social media tools can help reduce reliance on

staff-assisted services and can be used to address common questions and challenges that job seekers might have concerning available workforce services. Facebook, Twitter, and a range of other social media tools enabled grantees to quickly and inexpensively make announcements of available workforce services to job seekers (e.g., job fairs and employer recruitments) and at times replaced in-person services (e.g., virtual job fairs).

Measuring Improvement in Customer Outcomes

All three grantees demonstrated increases in the use of their social media tools during the grant period, particularly in their Facebook "likes" and Twitter "followers," and also for YouTube and LinkedIn. While this information provides insight into how customers are using the social media tools adopted by each state, an implementation study cannot connect customer outcomes to increased use of these tools. Measuring outcomes resulting from the initiative is particularly difficult given the inherent nature of social media and Internet use, where it is virtually impossible to track which customers used social media tools and then determine how the services affected their subsequent employment outcomes. It is also challenging to discern how increased use of tools was driven by the social media grants or would have occurred in their absence as more workforce customers learned about and felt comfortable using social media. Because of these challenges, the effect of the initiative on job seekers' use of workforce services and employment outcomes cannot be determined as part of this study. Moreover, the grant did not require a quantitative evaluation component and no grantees attempted to design an evaluation to examine the direct effect of social media on service use and employment outcomes.[1]

Factors Affecting Social Media Grant Implementation

Generally, grantees' implementation of the social media initiatives proceeded smoothly. State administrators noted a number of factors that facilitated and hindered implementation.

Several factors promoted implementation of the grants. First, the timing of the grants was advantageous—social media tools have been growing rapidly in popularity and use in recent years, and the grantees were able to build on this momentum. Second, as noted earlier, many tools were already in existence and in use by state workforce agencies and, for the most part, were not complicated or expensive to implement or adapt. Third, the grant provided a common focus and impetus for moving forward statewide with expanded use of the social media tools and provided resources to fund staff needed to coordinate and maintain the various social media tools. Finally, the initiatives had high-level support within their state agencies and across local workforce agencies, which was important for facilitating grant start-up and ongoing implementation of social media tools within the state.

State staff also identified a few challenges to implementation of the grants and the challenges were somewhat unique to each state. New York staff noted the numerous "moving parts" within the state's workforce system because the state is large and diverse. There are more than 90 AJCs in New York, and it was challenging to obtain input and engagement from so many local areas, as well as to design and implement social media tools that would be of interest and respond to widely varying local office

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[1] An appendix to the report discusses options for more rigorous evaluation designs for future social media initiatives.

environments (e.g., a virtual job fair or electronic calendar may be of interest for some local workforce areas but not others). To facilitate planning and implementation, the state established five workgroups that included representation from the AJCs: (1) a workgroup to increase penetration of social media tools within the state; (2) a workgroup to increase virtual services at AJCs; (3) a workgroup focused on expanded use of mobile applications; (4) a workgroup to create social media policy at the state and local levels; and (5) a workgroup to plan and implement virtual career fairs.

In Idaho, state administrators reported some issues in the planning and early implementation phases of the grant, including having to compete with other initiatives and priorities, adjust to the changing nature of the social media tools, address variation in local staff awareness and capabilities with social media, and consider the lack of Internet access in some areas of the state. In response to these challenges, Idaho developed realistic and appropriate strategies. In response to the low priority of the project, the staff understood the state's structure of priorities and did their best to push the project forward as quickly as possible. To address the changing nature of social media tools, Idaho hired a full-time staff person with experience using social media as a promotion and marketing tool. To make sure local staff were all adequately aware of social media tools and capable of using and teaching customers, the state held a number of staff training sessions across the state. Finally, to address the lack of Internet in some areas of the state, staff made sure all content and social media tools were accessible and fully functional on cell phones and other portable electronic devices. Staff said that while not every customer had Internet access as home, almost everyone now has a smartphone.

Minnesota staff noted challenges that emerged in piloting the talent community. Staff had to coordinate across multiple agency stakeholders to develop business requirements for the talent community system, which would be included in the request for proposals released to secure a vendor. The fact that talent communities were a relatively new idea also slowed the timeline, as it took time to educate stakeholders about the initiative. As a result, the talent community was not fully operational at the end of the grant period. Another challenge that emerged in Minnesota included gaining agreement on a statewide social media policy governing how much autonomy to give to the local AJCs in developing their own Facebook or Twitter accounts. Currently, local AJCs (except for those that are contracted out to private entities) are required to share information through the state agency's social media accounts rather than operate their own social media applications.

Sustainability and Future Funding of Social Media Tools

Overall, the grants provided a solid base for the state agencies to continue their social media activities. State administrators and staff in the three states anticipated continuing to use all the social media tools implemented during their grants and, except for the talent communities in Minnesota, had not sought out new grants or state funding to support the continued use and development of the social media tools once their grants ended. They noted that these tools had experienced rapid change and development in recent years, and they expected the pace of change to continue and even accelerate, with the introduction of new and improved versions of the existing tools as well as the emergence of new tools. All three states were fully committed to future use, refinement, and expansion of social media tools aimed at providing enhanced customer services.

In terms of future funding and sustainability, state administrators in the three states were mainly concerned about ongoing costs related to (1) development of substantive content to be uploaded to social media tools, (2) staffing costs for overseeing use of social media tools and responding (where

there is two-way communication) to customer inquiries in a timely and appropriate manner, and (3) ongoing staff training in using social media tools appropriately and optimally. Without new grants targeted towards social media, states planned to use other resources to continue funding staff time for maintaining social media applications.

Lessons for Using Social Media in the Workforce System

The grantees reported that their grants provided impetus and resources for expanding their use of social media tools in state and local workforce operations. The social media grants were used for a variety of purposes including educating stakeholders (i.e., job seekers, employers, and state and local workforce staff) on how to use social media, particularly with regard to effective job search and increasing awareness of the full range of employment services, training, and other services offered by state and local workforce agencies. Additionally, states used the grants to plan and substantially expand use of social media tools already in use before receipt of their grants (including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn), as well as to initiate use of (and in some instances, acquire) new tools (such as virtual job fair, electronic chat, and electronic calendar software). 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 have been growing rapidly in popularity and use in recent years. Across the three grantees, state administrators observed that job seekers and employers are increasingly familiar with and using social media tools—particularly, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. These tools can play important and varying roles in enhancing communication with state and local workforce agencies, job seekers, UI claimants, employers, and the general community. Social media tools can be an important element of the package of employment-related services available to customers and can be used to link customers to services or to directly provide services***.***

Social media tools are generally not expensive to acquire and implement, though staff resources are needed to maintain and update them. State workforce agency staff in each of the states emphasized that the social media tools used were inexpensive from an agency perspective, with the main costs incurred under their grants associated with coordinating the effort, creating substantive content for various tools, and responding to customer inquiries. The costs of ongoing staffing varied considerably depending on the social media tools and the types of activities involved in producing content for tools and responding to customer inquiries. In particular, social media tools requiring two-way communication and development of new substantive content can be labor intensive and, in some instances, costly.

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. While the initial focus of the DOL grant program was connecting UI claimants with the workforce system, the social media tools helped the grantees connect to and network with a broader range of customers including job seekers and employers. All grantees reported that they were able to use a variety of social media tools to connect with and inform job seekers and employers that they might otherwise have missed (e.g., job seekers that might be uninterested in visiting or unaware of the agency's website or a local AJC). However, state workforce agency administrators and staff

acknowledged that social media tools also miss substantial numbers of job seekers, including those not connected to the Internet and others who are not familiar with or uncomfortable with or unwilling to use social media tools for job searching. Because of this, staff in all three states noted that state and local workforce agencies cannot exclusively use social media tools or the state's website to communicate with job seekers or employers. All noted that workforce agencies need to use a blended approach involving social media and other traditional outreach and communication methods.

With regard to social media tools, one size does not fit all. State officials noted that use of tools varies by subpopulation and shifts can occur in the types of customers who use certain tools. For example, while Facebook initially attracted a largely youthful population, its use has expanded in recent years to a wider population. It is therefore important for workforce agencies to use multiple tools and have some duplication in messaging and substantive content to reach the widest audience. In addition, keeping up with rapidly changing trends in usage among specially targeted populations is critical. Finally, certain social media tools, such as LinkedIn, virtual job fairs, and talent communities, require users to be able to "present" themselves well online. This may be difficult for some customers without specific guidance or training, thus workforce agencies should consider how to provide workshops (as one grantee did) or other platforms to help individuals develop their online employment image.

Social media provides opportunities for state and local workforce agencies to better engage with employers. Most employers, like many job seekers, already have a social media presence and many use LinkedIn and other social media tools for recruitment purposes. Specifically, grantees used several tools to engage and inform the business community about potential job candidates, the types of occupational training and job search workshops available to job seekers, and other workforce services. For example, the New York and Minnesota virtual job fairs and talent communities focused on connecting employers to the workforce system and job seekers. Additionally, several of the tools used included tabs and posts established specifically for engaging and informing the business community. Finally, Idaho engaged a large number of employers in a series of workshops focusing on effective and appropriate use of social media tools within the workplace and for recruitment of workers.

Social media tools can result in time savings and productivity gains for agency staff, job seekers, and employers. Data collection by state grantees on productivity gains or cost savings resulting from expanded use of social media was very limited. However, while the tools do require an investment of staff time to maintain, state workforce officials indicated that social media tools can lead to cost savings, particularly at local workforce agencies because such tools can be used as a substitute for in-person services. Job seekers or employers may save time and resources because they can view a video or quickly get an answer to a frequently asked question from the state's website, or potentially be interviewed for a job online without traveling to a local workforce office.

Overall, the three grantees implemented a range of social media tools under the DOL grant, building on earlier work as well as expanding the use of established tools and developing new tools and applications. The grantees plan to sustain and build on these activities, and their experiences provide important lessons for other workforce agencies interested in developing and expanding their use of social media tools for workforce customers.

1.   Introduction

The country's workforce system is continually in need of effective strategies to connect job seekers to job openings and to facilitate rapid entry into suitable employment. One promising tool is social media. 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 U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is examining social media strategies to improve Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants' access to employment services provided at its American Job Centers (AJCs) with support from the Wagner-Peyser and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs. As part of its State Demonstration Projects in Providing Reemployment Services to UI Claimants (UI Workforce Connectivity Project), DOL provided grants to three states (Idaho, Minnesota, and New York) to develop and use social media tools to provide new opportunities and improve existing service delivery processes for job seekers, including engaging job seekers, connecting job seekers and employers, and networking among job seekers. The initiative focused on social media activities that could be developed and implemented at the state level but that could be used by local workforce agencies.

DOL sponsored an implementation study of the social media initiatives developed by the grantees, which is being conducted by Abt Associates in partnership with Capital Research Corporation and George Washington University. The goal of the study is to document grantees' experiences in developing and using social media to improve employment outcomes for job seekers and to provide information to program administrators and policymakers interested in increasing their use of social media to improve their job search assistance programs.

This report documents the operational experiences and implementation of these three-year grants, which were awarded in 2011, in each of the three states. It begins with a description of the UI Workforce Connectivity Project sponsored by DOL, which includes the social media grants, and the evaluation of the project. The report then describes: (1) goals and staffing of the social media grants, (2) how the grantees assessed social media knowledge and needs, (3) the types and use of different social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and others), (4) the outcomes and costs of grantee initiatives, and (5) factors that facilitated and hindered grant implementation. The report concludes with a summary of key findings and lessons learned from grantees' experiences. Appendix A provides a summary of each state's social media activities under the grant. Appendix B provides a discussion of potential research designs for evaluating social media tools.

2. Background on the UI Workforce Connectivity Project and Evaluation

The State Demonstration Projects in Providing Reemployment Services to Unemployment Insurance Claimants were established and funded by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) at DOL in partnership with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) and NASWA's Information Technology Support Center (ITSC). Often referred to as the UI Workforce Connectivity Project, the goal of the demonstration projects is to help connect UI claimants with employment services provided through the publicly funded workforce system. This includes the Employment Service (ES), which traditionally provides job search assistance to UI claimants, and the American Job Centers (AJCs) established by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), now reauthorized as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

2.1 Impetus for and Design of UI Workforce Connectivity Project

The UI Workforce Connectivity Project grew out of several changes in the workforce system that began in the mid-1990s. First, the UI system began to transition from requiring in-person filing for UI benefits at local UI and ES offices to allowing applications to be filed over the phone or Internet. In addition, the workforce system transitioned from focusing on staff-provided assistance and services to focusing on self-directed job search and self-service tools. As a result, UI claimants became physically disconnected from the workforce system and often were not aware of how to access the range of reemployment, job search, career counseling, and training services that were available. While some programs are attempting to reestablish linkages—primarily the Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services, the Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment program, and the Reemployment Services grants provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act— many UI claimants do not have a clear connection to the employment and training services provided through the AJCs or other parts of the workforce system.

A final trend driving the UI Workforce Connectivity Project is advances in Internet-based technologies, including the use of social media as a means of communication and coordination. Websites and other social media tools that connect job seekers and employers and provide job search tools have expanded beyond the publicly funded workforce system, and they provide a range of options for individuals to quickly access employment information without going to an AJC or other location offering employment assistance.

To improve the connections between UI and workforce systems, ETA established a workgroup composed of workforce leaders at the local, state, and national levels, and partnered with NASWA to develop an "Emerging National Vision" for improved systems coordination.[2] This group identified four "transformational" elements to improve connections between job seekers and the workforce system. One element was developing and using social media tools to enhance current workforce

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[2] *A National Call for Innovation: Rethinking Reemployment Services for UI Claimants, A Report of the Unemployment Insurance and Workforce System Connectivity Workgroup*. U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, September 2010.

service delivery strategies and processes.[3] The goals of the social media initiative were to build a framework for implementing social media tools to complement traditional outreach and job search methods; to raise awareness of the benefits and services available through the workforce system; to provide a platform to exchange information regarding job opportunities, service offerings, training programs, labor market trends, and links to employers, labor groups, and community-based organizations; and to support state and local innovation in these areas.

To develop and pilot the national vision, ETA and NASWA issued a call for expressions of interest in launching pilot projects in April 2011, with awards issued in October 2011. The Idaho Department of Labor (Idaho DOL), the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) received grants to implement pilots on the social media "transformational" element. [4]

2.2   Evaluation of the UI Workforce Connectivity Project

The UI Workforce Connectivity Project implementation study has two components, the first, which focuses on the experiences of the social media grantees, is the subject of this report. The second component of the study documents the experiences of grantees implementing the other three transformational elements; these findings will be reported in a forthcoming report. This report describes the goals and context for the social media pilots, documents and assesses the implementation of grant-funded activities, examines challenges workforce systems encountered during implementation, and provides lessons for practitioners and policymakers.

The research team conducted in-person interviews with state-level program staff in summer 2014, the final year of the grants. Topics addressed included the goals and purpose of the initiative, planning and start-up activities, use of and experience with specific social media tools, changes made over time, plans for continuing beyond the grant period, and overall lessons and challenges in developing and using the tools. The following sections of this report draw on the information gathered from these interviews.

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[3]   The other three elements of the "National Vision" were an integrated workforce customer registration system, real time triage, and transferability of skills.

[4]   Mississippi, Oregon, and New York received separate grants to implement pilots of the other elements. As part of this evaluation, we will also be examining the implementation of these components of the UI Workforce Connectivity Project. Results are forthcoming in a separate report.

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3. Goals and Staffing of the Social Media Grants

This section examines the goals of the grantees' social media initiatives and describes how the project was staffed.

3.1 Project Goals

All three grantees reported multiple project goals. They applied for the funds to expand awareness and use of social media tools among a range of stakeholders, including job seekers, employers, and staff, and they aimed to implement new social media initiatives. The grantees reported that they needed to organize and expand their use of social media tools because of the rapid expansion in both the nature of social media tools and their usage by both job seekers and employers. While the grant as awarded was designed to focus on UI claimants, all grantees expanded their target populations to include job seekers generally.

The three grantees saw social media tools as inexpensive ways of rapidly announcing employment-related and training services available to job seekers (e.g. availability of job openings, job readiness and other workshops held by the AJCs) and as effective ways of addressing frequently asked questions (FAQs) that job seekers and employers might have regarding workforce services available through state and local workforce agencies.

All of the grantees began to integrate social media into their operations in the early- to mid-2000s and used grant resources to build upon and expand their presence on social media. NYSDOL's interest also stemmed from the 2008 recession, which resulted in high demand for workforce services. NYSDOL was looking for opportunities to reduce the reliance on staff-assisted activities, while still providing important services to job seekers and employers.

3.2 Planning Structure and Staffing

Each grantee established a planning group at the outset of the grant to oversee implementation of the social media activities. The planning groups included representatives from state and local workforce agencies. The specific structure of the planning groups and their exact role varied somewhat by grantee, as described below. In addition, each grantee designated grant-funded staff to oversee and manage the development of the social media activities.

- The Communications and Research Unit within the Idaho DOL was responsible for planning and implementing that state's grant-funded activities. With support from the highest levels of the state agency, the unit established an Outreach Team to help facilitate planning and coordinate input. The Outreach Team consisted of over a dozen state and local staff across the state, including urban and rural areas. In terms of staffing, the grant provided resources to enable the state workforce agency to bring on one full-time administrator and one part-time intern to oversee and expanded use of all social media tools, as well as to develop new substantive content for sites and respond to inquiries generated by each social media tool.

- Minnesota DEED used a similar approach, with a planning group consisting of both state and local AJC staff. DEED worked with an advisory group made up of volunteer representatives from a mix of large and small local workforce agencies. The advisory group provided a local perspective on the current level of social media use among customers and challenges that job

seekers may face in using social media for a job search. DEED hired a full-time specialist for this grant to focus on posting social media content and monitoring. The grant allowed Minnesota to centralize all social media accounts in the communications division, allowing for more consistency in the content shared via social media.

- NYSDOL established five workgroups to address special areas of interest: (1) increasing the usage of social media across the state, (2) increasing "virtual" services at AJCs, (3) expanding the use of mobile devices, (4) developing a social media policy for the state and localities, and (5) implementing "virtual" career fairs. In addition, eight NYSDOL staff shared responsibilities for posting announcements and responding to customer inquiries on the social media platforms. Responsibilities for maintaining the social media tools rotated among staff and were mixed in with other tasks.

As described in Section 6, having dedicated staff was critical to maintaining and operating the social media tools.

4. Building Knowledge About Social Media Among Key Stakeholders

To facilitate planning and implementation of the social media grants, Idaho and Minnesota focused on first understanding what key stakeholders—including job seekers, employers, and workforce staff—understood about social media tools and how they used them, with a specific focus on how they related to workforce- and employment-related activities. As discussed below, these grantees then used this information to develop social media training tailored to the specific needs of the stakeholders.

4.1 Surveys to Assess Knowledge of Social Media

In the early stages of their grants, Idaho and Minnesota conducted surveys of their customer base to determine the extent to which job seekers and employers were already using social media tools and how they were using such tools to facilitate job search and placement. These states also conducted a survey of workforce agency staff to assess their knowledge of social media and the potential need for staff training.

Idaho's surveys of job seekers, workforce staff, and employers indicated that many job seekers across the state had Internet access (often within their own homes, at nearby public libraries, or via smartphones) and were increasingly familiar with using a range of social media tools (particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn). However, knowledge and use were not universal. The job seeker survey revealed that some job seekers, especially those in more remote and rural areas, did not have ready access to the Internet and were unwilling or unable to use social media tools. Finally, responses to the surveys suggested that even frequent users of social media tools—including agency staff, employers, and job seekers—were in need of training on appropriate and effective use of social media tools for job search (job seekers) and recruitment (employers).

In Minnesota, workforce centers across the state administered a survey to every newly unemployed person attending a Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program meeting in one month. Almost 3,000 job seekers completed the survey. The survey indicated there was more familiarity with social media than had been anticipated by state workforce officials, with 45 percent of job seekers stating they knew how to use social media for a job search. DEED also conducted a survey of local workforce agency staff and partnering agencies, which affirmed general familiarity with social media, though indicated a need for additional training to improve and expand on the use of such tools (with agency staff in rural areas indicating somewhat more need for training). While many staff felt comfortable using social media, responses showed that they wanted assistance from DEED in helping job seekers use social media.

4.2 Training on Social Media

The Idaho and Minnesota survey findings facilitated grant-funded planning and targeting of social media strategies. The findings established that many job seekers, workforce agency staff, and employers were already familiar with and using social media tools but also indicated areas where training was necessary. In particular, the findings suggested that workforce staff had some knowledge of social media, but they needed training on how best to assist job seekers in using the tools.

DEED provided training to local staff through two five-hour webinars. Additionally, DEED developed PowerPoint presentations that local staff could use in their own classes for job seekers. The training covered several topics including: creating an online "brand," appropriate online behavior, networking through social media, introduction to Facebook, introduction to Twitter, advanced Twitter for job search, introduction to LinkedIn, and Advanced LinkedIn for job search. The training was posted to DEED's website and was also available on YouTube.[5] Through a series of workshops held across the state, Idaho also developed training for staff on how to use social media for job search activities, with the expectation that staff would use their increased knowledge to help train customers.

In an effort to improve awareness, understanding, and appropriate use of social media among employers and job seekers, Idaho DOL used grant funding to hold a series of workshops on a range of topics across the state. A total of 144 employers and 99 job seekers attended workshops at six locations. Idaho DOL staff tailored the workshops to each customer group, highlighting topics and interest as indicated in the surveys. Topics for employers included social media laws governing use in public and private employer sites; social media account ownership and terms of use; use of social media for hiring; developing a workplace/company social media policy; and the importance of providing workers with social media training. Topics for job seekers included understanding appropriate use of social media within the workplace; knowing your rights with respect to use of social media; privacy setting on various social media; hiring practices of employers; increasing use of social media for recruitment; and using social media in career planning and searching for a job (including "branding" yourself, choosing platforms and privacy settings carefully, and using social media tools to follow companies and identify job openings). Idaho DOL staff reported that job seekers and businesses found the workshops valuable and they were exploring the idea of additional workshops, both in new locations and focused on new topics of interest.

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[5]   https://www.youtube.com/user/deedminnesota

5. Grantee Experiences With Social Media Tools

The three grantees developed and used a range of social media tools to enhance communication between workforce agencies, job seekers, and employers. As shown in Exhibit 1 and discussed below, these included "off-the-shelf" established social media tools, particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. In most cases the grantees had begun using these social media tools before they received the grant and used the grant resources to expand and enhance this work. In addition, this section describes social media and online efforts that were specifically developed as part of the grant.

Exhibit 1: Social Media Tools Used and Developed by Grantees

Grantee	Social Media Tool[6]						
	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	LinkedIn	Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest	Blog	Other
Idaho DOL	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Minnesota DEED	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	• Talent Communities
NYSDOL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	• Electronic Calendar • Virtual Career Fair • Live Chat

This section first discusses the grantee activities related to expanding and maintaining established social media tools, including a brief overview of the social media tool and grantee activities. It then describes the specialized social media and online tools developed using grant funding.
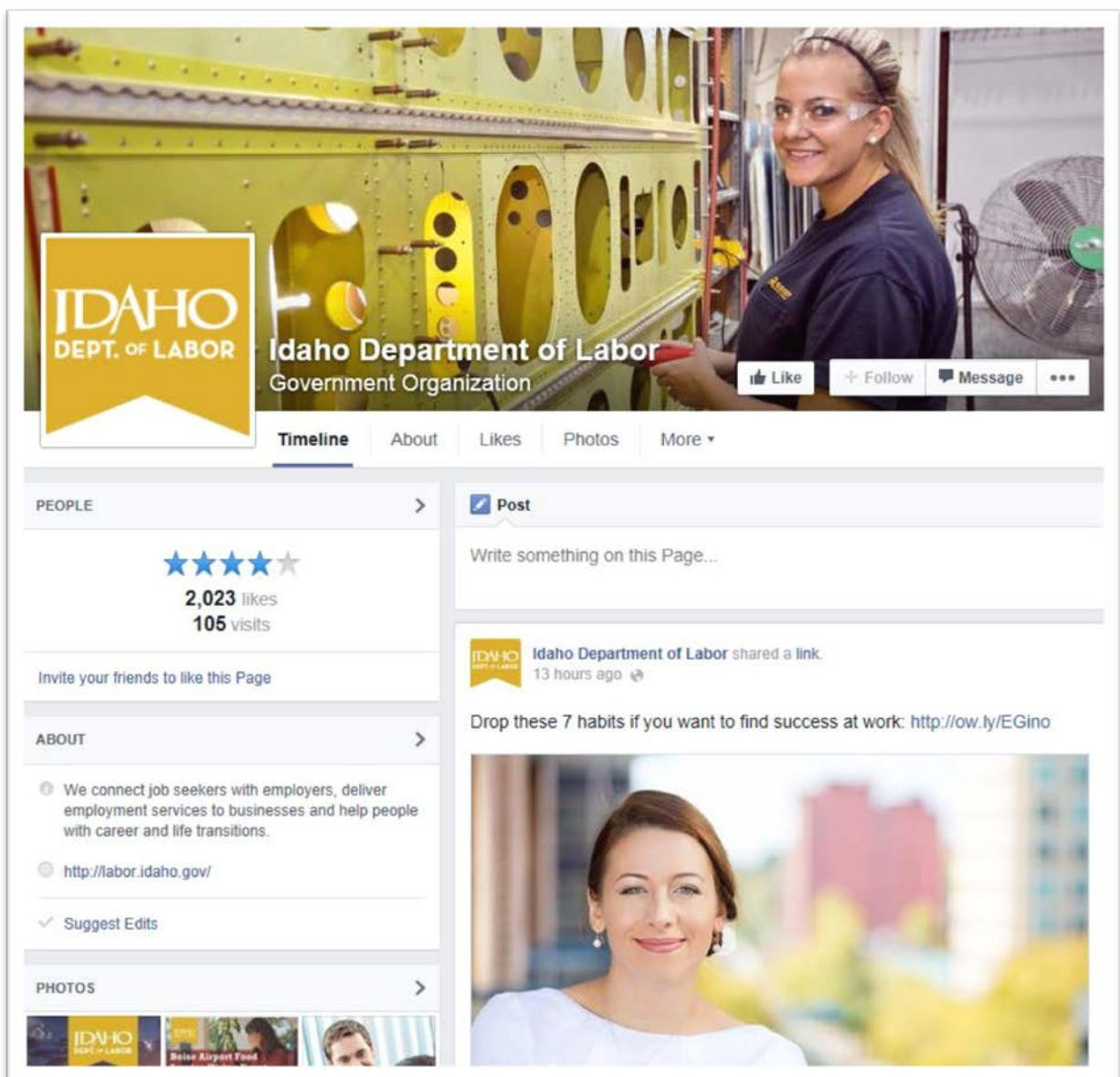
5.1 Facebook

Facebook, an online social networking tool launched in 2004, focuses primarily on personal networking and communication, with users creating personal profiles and posting pictures, discussing interests, and communicating with other users. As of September 2014, there were 1.35 billion active users worldwide.[7] Within Facebook, individuals have "friends" who send and receive information and updates, creating networks of friends. Businesses or organizations have slightly different Facebook pages, where users can choose to "like" that business or organization. The action of "liking" the business or organization will allow updates from that entity to feed into the information displayed on the user's Facebook home page.

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[6]   Note that this chart only indicates social media tools developed or upgraded as part of the grant.

[7]   "Facebook Newsroom-Company Info." Facebook, Inc., Accessed November 13, 2014, https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/.

As the largest and most wide-reaching social media tool, Facebook received a great deal of emphasis from all three grantees. All the grantees viewed Facebook as a quick and cost-effective way to communicate important information on employment opportunities and workforce services directly to customers, particularly to customers who may not go to an AJC or other workforce agency for services, and to respond directly to customer inquiries. And while Facebook was not viewed originally as a tool associated with job search or business communication, that trend has been changing over the past few years. Even though all three workforce agencies had launched Facebook pages before the grant award (New York and Minnesota in 2009 and Idaho in 2006), the grant provided an opportunity to increase usage (both in views and "likes") and to explore new opportunities to connect job seekers and businesses to the workforce system.

Idaho Department of Labor's Facebook Page

One of the tasks to which staff working on the grant dedicated their time was increasing usage and communication on Facebook. There were several aspects to this work:

- *Redesigning Facebook pages.* Due to the changing nature of social media tools, grantees dedicated staff time to redesigning their Facebook pages to ensure they included all the latest features and tools. As noted above, all three grantees had a Facebook page before being awarded the grant but used grant funding to improve the design and content of their Facebook pages.

- *Developing and updating Facebook postings.* All grantees reported that continually posting and updating their Facebook page was important to keep customers engaged and to grow the agency's Facebook page as a place for customers to get important information. Among the grantees, the most frequently reported Facebook subject matter included state and agency announcements, videos, job listings, and links to other social media tools (i.e., agency website, blogs, YouTube), information on upcoming job fairs, companies recruiting, and training opportunities. In addition to distributing information, grantees reported that Facebook was important for quickly and easily communicating with customers. Both New York and Idaho said that Facebook allowed them to communicate workforce information to individuals who had never used the workforce system.

- *Responding in real-time to inquiries and comments on Facebook.* Another important feature of Facebook was two-way communications, and all three grantees reported that a critical part of Facebook management was responding to posts on the agency's page. All grantees dedicated grant-funded staff to this activity. While the number of posts to a Facebook page in response to inquiries varied across the grantees, from a couple per week in Idaho to 60 to 80 on a very busy day in New York, all the grantees emphasized the importance of quick response times.

To keep information on Facebook current and to ensure timely responses to inquiries, grantees reported that having staff time dedicated to maintaining this social media tool was important. All the grantees emphasized that staff time was needed to specifically focus on Facebook and generate topics, respond to comments, post new information, and keep all information up-to-date.

5.2   Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short, 140-character, messages called "tweets." Individuals "follow" other users to receive information from that individual or organization as it is posted. Unlike Facebook, "following" is not reciprocal, so Twitter accounts can have a large number of followers (accounts that get their information) but only follow a small number of accounts (accounts they get information from), or vice versa. As of July 2014, there were 271 million active users on Twitter[8].

As with Facebook, the large size and public awareness of Twitter resulted in all three grantees placing a heavy emphasis on this social media tool. And as with Facebook, all three grantees had Twitter accounts before the grant was awarded. Due to the limitation on characters in a tweet, the grantees saw Twitter as a way to get messages to large groups of people quickly and to draw customers to their websites and blogs, where more detailed information was available. Both Idaho and New York

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[8]   "Twitter Reports Second Quarter 2014 Results." Twitter, Inc. Accessed November 13, 2014, https://investor.twitterinc.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=862505.

described Twitter as a good tool for creating a positive "face" or image for the agency. The quick and programmable nature of Twitter made it a cost-effective and easy method to communicate important information to job seekers, employers, and the community as a whole. These grantees reported that the fact that tweets can be retweeted by followers made Twitter an especially powerful tool for getting the word out about important events.

Both Idaho and Minnesota managed two Twitter accounts, and both implemented very similar divisions between the two accounts. In each case, the primary Twitter account was used to distribute news about policy changes, communicate with the media, and announce new programs and services available at AJCs. The secondary Twitter accounts were aimed specifically at job seekers tweets about job fair information, job search advice, job openings, and workshops. Rather than have two Twitter accounts, New York elected to consolidate the types of information found in Idaho's and Minnesota's two Twitter accounts into a single NYSDOL Twitter.

Minnesota DEED and MinnesotaWorks.net Twitter
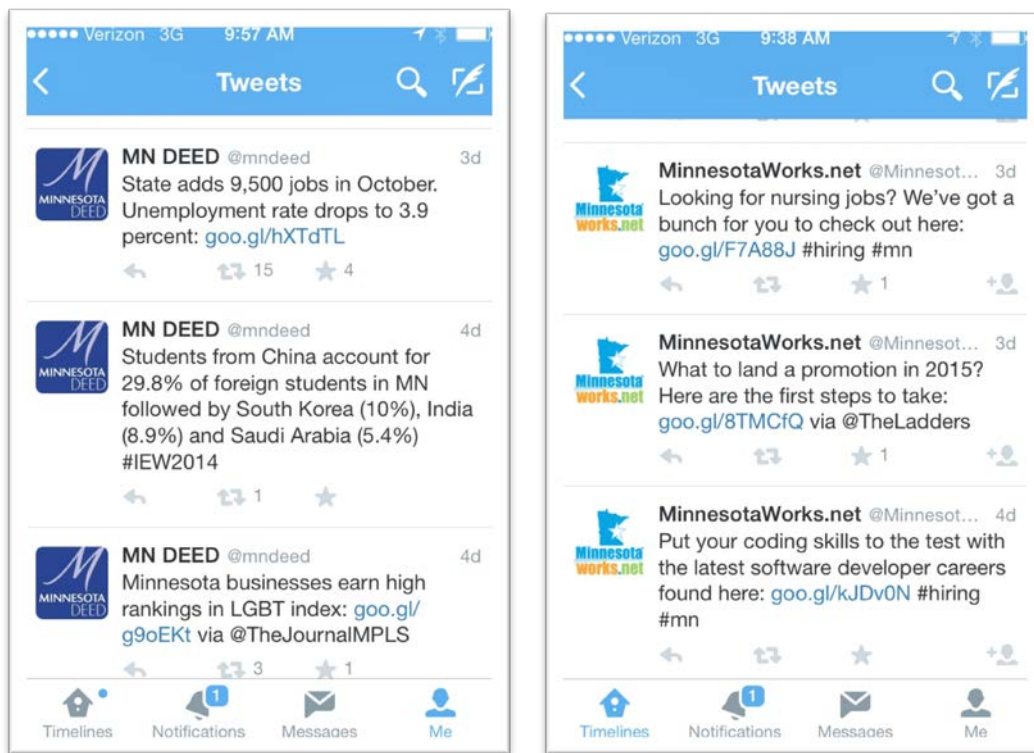
Another important aspect of Twitter is its ability to reach specific customer populations. Representatives from New York found evidence that Twitter can be a good tool for engaging certain demographic groups, such as young black and Hispanic males, that might normally miss or be non-responsive to messages issued through other social media platforms.

All three grantees reported that they tried to post two to three tweets per day, per account. The time it took to generate these tweets varied from 30 seconds to 15 minutes, depending on what the tweet was about. The job postings, for example, usually took the shortest amount of time and were often posted multiple times, making the average time to generate a tweet very low.

5.3   YouTube

YouTube is a video-sharing website that allows users to easily upload, view, and share videos. Users create "channels" through which other users can access and play videos developed by the individual or organization. Other users can elect to "subscribe" to the channel, which means they are notified when new videos are posted. Like a number of other social media tools, users can "like" and comment on what's posted, in this case the videos. But unlike most social media tools, users can also "dislike" videos.

Idaho, Minnesota, and New York all had YouTube accounts and they all reported they saw value in creating informative videos to help both job seekers and businesses. Some examples of YouTube videos across the grantees included instructions on how to file a UI claim, job search tips, interviewing techniques, hiring information for businesses, and public service announcements. Unlike Facebook or Twitter, where the tool is often used for open communication with customers or to direct them to industry expert articles or FAQs on other platforms, YouTube is exclusively a place to house and access videos. Also unique to YouTube, there is a significant cost to developing content. Idaho and New York both found inventive ways to get around these barriers. Minnesota did not make YouTube a focus of its grant activities, but the DEED YouTube account included videos for a number of audiences, including recordings of the webinar trainings on how to use social media for job search.

NYSDOL put the most emphasis on YouTube during the grant period and as a result developed the most informational videos among the three grantees. By partnering with other government agencies, NYSDOL was able to gain access to the equipment necessary to produce and upload videos to YouTube. The easy access to this expensive equipment made video development less costly and allowed the agency more control over the number and content of the videos. State representatives said they were able to keep the expenses down by using "state-of-the-art" video production equipment and relying on another state agency that already employed in-house videographers and production staff.

New York State DOL's YouTube

Idaho lacked access to high-quality video production resources, requiring it to look outside the state government for assistance. In Idaho, the Communications Division forged a partnership with Idaho Public Television to produce videos for the agency's YouTube channel. To keep costs low, the Idaho DOL staff wrote all the scripts and used staff for the videos. Idaho DOL administrators reported that they planned to purchase new video equipment in the coming months, which would allow them to lower costs by doing all video production in-house.

While Minnesota DEED had a YouTube channel, the majority of its videos were added several years before the grant was awarded and developing new videos was not a focus of grant activities. Still, staff reported that a number of the videos were popular, including "How to Hire a Veteran in 3 Easy Steps" and "Navigating LinkedIn for Job Search." In Minnesota, the YouTube channel had three categories, "Help for Businesses," "Job Search Help," and "Programs and Services."

Despite the varying levels of emphasis, all three grantees said that YouTube can be a good tool to attract potential customers to the resources available and to provide important information, particularly to individuals who might never come into an AJC. YouTube videos also saved time for customers (they did not have to come to an AJC) and staff (they did not have to explain topics to as many customers). Like other social media tools, grantees reported that it was important for all social media sites to keep the subject matter fresh to maintain interest, and doing so was most expensive for YouTube.

5.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a business-oriented social media tool used for professional networking. As of June 2013, LinkedIn reported more than 259 million users in more than 200 countries and territories.[9] Through LinkedIn, individuals can create profiles with their educational and work history, along with other important professional skills or certificates. Users (both businesses and individuals) can also create and join groups to communicate with others who share similar industry interests.

Grantees reported that an increasing number of customers were coming to AJCs already aware of LinkedIn, with many of them having profiles. However, staff reported that most lacked knowledge on how to effectively use LinkedIn to expand their job search and take advantage of the social media tool for the job-seeking or business needs.

As a result, unlike other social media tools, grantee activities around LinkedIn were not about expanding the workforce agency's presence but rather helping job seekers better utilize the tool for their own individual goals. Both Idaho and New York expanded the number of LinkedIn workshops offered at their AJCs. These workshops taught customers to effectively use LinkedIn to expand their job search networks, search for jobs at firms of interest, learn about industries and employers, and prepare for job interviews. Minnesota also offered workshops on using LinkedIn for job search at a number of its AJCs, covering topics ranging from introductory to advanced. Workshop offerings included "LinkedIn–Getting Started," "LinkedIn to Networking," and "LinkedIn–Advanced Strategies."

The Idaho and Minnesota grantees stressed the importance of using LinkedIn to develop a "marketable promotional brand" by staying on message and developing the right image. In New York, staff reported that the workshops were not only helpful in improving social media skills but also in increasing the willingness of users to embrace LinkedIn as an important tool in their job search. AJCs in New York have used LinkedIn to create job club networking groups specific to the local area (i.e., "RochesterWorks! Job Strategy Group").

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[9]   Jessi Hempel. "LinkedIn: How It's Changing Business.". *Fortune* (July 2013): 69–74.

Idaho Department of Labor's LinkedIn
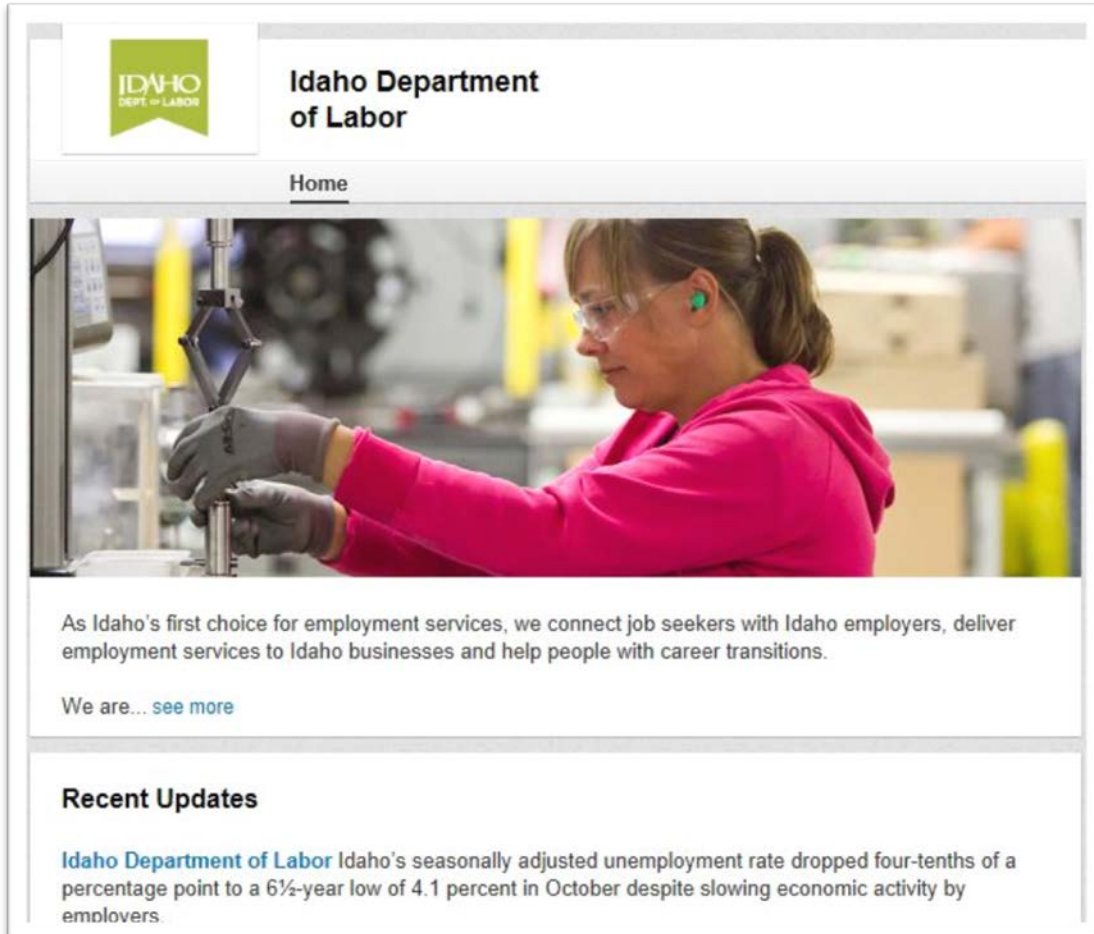
Idaho developed specialized LinkedIn sites to focus on specific workforce strategy areas. One example was the development of the "Choose Idaho" LinkedIn account. This site was aimed at those living outside the state who might be interested in or considering returning to the state for work. The site was geared toward disseminating information about the advantages of living in Idaho and the variety of job opportunities across the state. The site also allowed job seekers the opportunity to post their resumes so potential employers could see them. The state workforce agency also set up an aerospace LinkedIn group, which was recently taken over by a nonprofit organization, to facilitate discussion around the growing aerospace industry in Idaho. The site allowed aerospace businesses to connect with each other about resources, staffing, and other issues.

5.5   Flickr, Pinterest, and Instagram

Flickr, Pinterest, and Instagram are all photo-centric social media tools. Flickr was developed primarily as an image and video hosting website, but an online community developed as many bloggers began using it as a place to search for photos. As of March 2013, Flickr users were
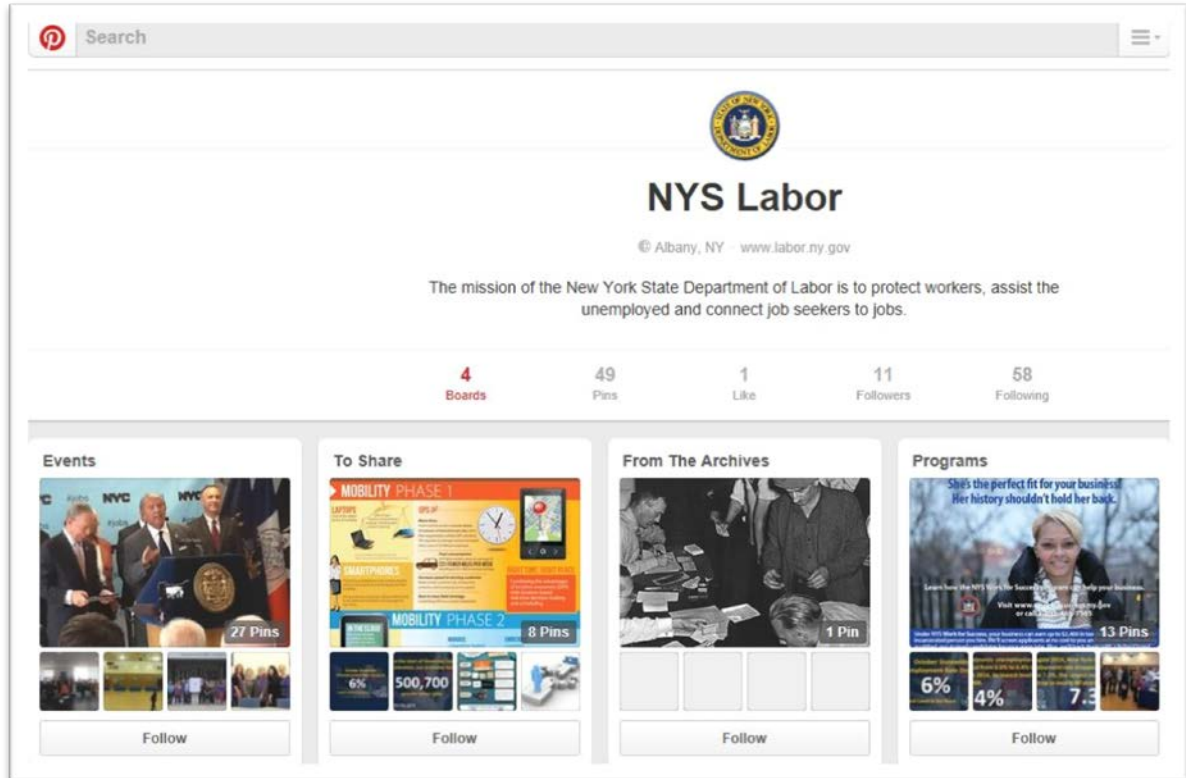
uploading approximately 3.5 million images per day.[10] Pinterest and Instagram are two of the newer social media tools, both launched in 2010. Pinterest allows users to create visual bookmarks, called "boards," and fill them with images, websites, and other content based on their interests. The act of selecting something to put on your board is called "pinning." Instagram is a mobile photo and video sharing application and social networking service. As with Twitter, accounts have "followers," who elect to automatically receive images posted by the individuals they are following into their Instagram feed.

While Pinterest and Instagram are two of the fastest-growing social media tools, only NYSDOL reported using any of the photo sharing social media tools, and as of November 2014 they still had fewer than 100 followers each in both platforms. NYSDOL used Flickr, Pinterest, and Instagram to post photos chronicling workforce activities across the state. While all three tools were used, NYSDOL recently started moving away from Flickr and was putting more event photos on Pinterest and Instagram. Although not as frequently used as Facebook or Twitter or as central to their dissemination strategy, staff reported that these types of tools were good for continuing to develop the "brand" of the state workforce agency and local AJCs. Staff explained that Instagram can be a good tool for projecting a more "casual" or "warm" image of the agency and the various programs and services available to customers. These tools can also be used to introduce new programs and "product lines." Staff said that showing the more "human side" of the agency and AJCs through pictures has been helpful in creating a more inviting atmosphere.

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[10]   "The man behind Flickr on making the service 'awesome again.'" *The Verge.* March 20, 2013, accessed November 13, 2014, http://www.theverge.com/2013/3/20/4121574/flickr-chief-markus-spiering-talks-photos-and-marissa-mayer.

New York State DOL's Pinterest

5.6 Websites and Blogs

Idaho, Minnesota, and New York all used their agency websites and workforce blogs to house more detailed and comprehensive information than Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn. All three noted that they "drove" users to blogs and agency websites by providing links on the social media tools described above (such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).

Idaho Department of Labor Website Links to Social Media

Both Idaho and New York used their websites as the main hub for all official information on policies, programs, and services. Both websites had specific sections for job seekers and businesses, as well as information about unemployment insurance and the latest job listings. In an effort to improve functionality and connectivity with customers, NYSDOL redesigned its existing website as part of its grant activities. The redesign was adapted using known search patterns to redirect targeted customer

groups (such as veterans, dislocated workers, youth, businesses) towards program information tailored to their specific needs.

While the main website was the formal online face of the workforce agency, all three states have used workforce specific blogs to keep customers up-to-date on important policy information and services. The agencies saw blogs as a good way to push out agency announcements, job search tips, address FAQs, and advertise upcoming events.

In Idaho, staff members saw the blog ("Idaho@Work") as an important component of its online presence. Grant-funded staff members put significant effort into developing timely and beneficial blog posts that both informed and generated discussion. The agency tried to post eight to ten new blog entries per month. To continually generate new posts, policy experts from other divisions in the agency along with workforce professionals and subject matter experts outside government were pulled in to write posts.

Minnesota operated a job-seeker focused blog through MinnesotaWorks.net, the state's online job bank. A grant-funded staff member managed the blog ("Tips and Techniques for Finding the Perfect Job") and developed the content either by taking advantage of existing online resources or by coordinating with other agency staff to write posts as guest bloggers. The agency posted every Wednesday (starting in 2013) covering topics such as resume advice, preparing for a career fair, how to stand out on LinkedIn, and proper email etiquette.

MinnesotaWorks.net Blog

The time and energy commitment required to maintain a blog is one of the reasons NYSDOL decided to discontinue its blog. Staff members said they put a lot of work into the blog ("Labor Buzz"), and were forced to discontinue it because it was too time-consuming to identify topics for new blog posts. During the time period that it was active, the blog existed in the form of a weekly newsletter, which was overseen and drafted by one agency staff person. NYSDOL believed there was less need for a blog as more emphasis has been placed on other social media tools, which have proven more effective in reaching a larger audience and responding to customer questions.

5.7   Grantee-Specific Social Media Tools

While all three grantees used the most popular and well known social media tools described above, Minnesota and New York each also placed a great deal of emphasis on developing additional tools.

Minnesota

A major emphasis of grant activities for Minnesota was to develop the "talent communities" online tool to link job seekers and employers in specific industries and for specific occupations. In a talent community, employers and job seekers can communicate in multiple ways in real time, including online interviewing, private messaging, uploading a video introduction, and completing a questionnaire. Staff at Minnesota DEED first learned of the talent community concept through Blue Cross Blue Shield, one of several companies that use a single-employer talent community to recruit new employees. After conducting additional research, staff found that talent communities were a fast-growing concept in HR for large companies, such as Target and Best Buy. Before the current DOL grant, DEED used resources from another grant to pilot three regionally based, multi-employer talent communities in Northwest Minnesota. The statewide talent community concept that DEED piloted under the DOL social media grant was developed to build upon these regional efforts but with the goal of bringing together employers and job seekers from across the state and tapping into the existing MinnesotaWorks.net job bank to supply the job openings.

DEED is working with a vendor (TalentCircles) to develop its statewide talent community, and employers will pay to purchase a "seat" in the talent community and communicate with job seekers. Within the talent community, employers will be able to create "circles," smaller communities focused on a specific skill or job title. For instance, if an employer needed both welders and plumbers, the talent community would allow the employer to have a separate "circle" for each job category with customized postings related to specific jobs. Job seekers will be able to join circles that are of interest to them, and employers will be able to control the circle settings to either allow any job seeker to join, or invite only specific job seekers.

Minnesota DEED's Talent Community

As described by DEED staff, the benefit to the employer is that they will get to find out more about a job seeker before conducting an interview, and the talent community will help them manage the HR process and talent pipeline. Employers will be able to conduct interviews online, which will be easier for candidates who are not geographically close by. Features of the talent community will allow employers to view where candidates are in the pipeline moving through the interview process and "tag" candidates to communicate impressions to other internal staff.

At the time of the evaluation team's visit in June 2014, Minnesota's statewide talent community was not operational but was anticipated to be fully launched by the end of the year.

New York

In addition to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn and the other free, off-the-shelf, social media tools, New York used grant funds to develop three distinct tools, an electronic calendar for all workforce events across the state, a virtual career fair, and a live chat feature.

Electronic Calendar. In June 2014, NYSDOL launched an electronic events calendar for all agency and workforce center events and activities. Every AJC in the state had its own calendar, but staff said the calendars were often hard copies that were not always easily accessible, especially outside the AJC. The new electronic calendar was generated by staff at local job centers who submitted events to the NYSDOL Communications Unit who then reviewed and posted the event (with additional details) on the calendar. The electronic calendar, housed on the NYSDOL website, had an interactive selecting and sorting feature that allowed customers to search events across the state by type of event, type of workshop, career center, and the day/week/month of the event. This allowed customers to look for every time a certain workshop was offered across all the job centers or get a list of all the job fairs. Like other tools, maintaining the calendar took staff resources, with about one-half of a staff member's time devoted to reviewing calendar submissions and uploading events to the electronic calendar.

Virtual Career Fair. The virtual career fair recreated a traditional job fair environment (connecting job seekers and employers) without the travel and costs associated with the standard, physical events. These virtual career fairs allowed job seekers to upload their resume and profile to be reviewed by employers, all while exploring job orders and brochures loaded by employers. The fairs also included an online chat capability that allowed employers and job seekers to send electronic text messages, which can either be shared with all attendees or a private communication between a job seeker and an employer. At the time of the site visit, the agency was preparing for its first virtual career fair, scheduled for July 2014. Using a special software platform developed by Expos2, NYSDOL planned to bring together up to 50 exhibitors (i.e., employers) and up to 5,000 job seekers. In addition to eliminating travel time and transportation costs, the fairs reduce printing costs for employers and expenses associated with renting a venue and staffing an event (both employers and agency staff). The virtual career fairs also enable NYSDOL to draw employers and job seekers from a wide geographic area (e.g., a region of New York or statewide), and/or target a specific geographic area (e.g., by zip code), and/or focus on specific subpopulations (e.g. veterans, older workers, health workers).

New York State DOL Virtual Career Fair
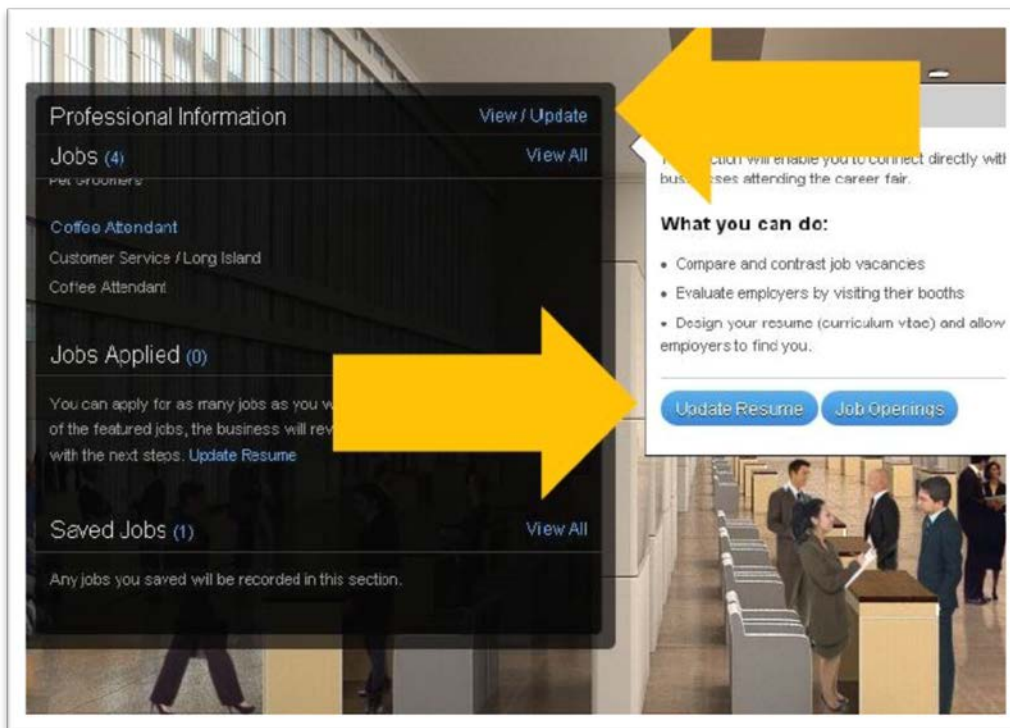
Live Chat. New York purchased Website Alive software to support a live chat capability to enhance online interaction with employers, job seekers, and other interested individuals. The tool provided a number of benefits beyond a standard hotline, including enabling a single operator to communicate with multiple customers simultaneously, giving operators the option to quickly send pre-screened responses to frequently asked questions (FAQs), and allowing operators to send online materials directly to customers (such as brochures, links, enrollment forms, workshop fliers). The software enabled up to 10 agency operators to each have up to four "chats" with customers at one time. Early tests indicated that the system was relatively easy to use, with operators needing only a day of training on system use and appropriate procedures/protocols for responding to questions. Beyond the purchase of the software, the main ongoing cost of the live chat system was staffing costs associated with operators responding to messages and preparing responses for FAQs.

5.8   Using Social Media Tools in Service Delivery

All three states integrated the key social media tools into the day-to-day operations of their workforce system. These tools became part of the package of employment-related services available to customers and were used to link customers to services or to directly provide services. All three states viewed social media as a means to an end, connecting job seekers and employers, not as end products. While developed at the state level, the tools were made available to customers throughout the state, either through information provided at the AJCs or directly by customers accessing the Internet on their own. Some examples of how four forms of social media were integrated into the workforce service delivery system are discussed below.

- *Facebook***:** All three states were able to effectively integrate Facebook into agency operations, primarily using this tool to inform customers about available services and upcoming events, and to engage in dialogues with customers. As discussed above, examples of information disseminated via Facebook included agency announcements of upcoming job fairs, company recruitment opportunities, training opportunities, and available workforce services. Facebook also provided the opportunity for two-way communication between a workforce agency and customers, allowing customers to ask questions and get quick responses from agency staff.

- *Twitter***:** Similar to Facebook, states were able to integrate Twitter into agency operations as a method to disseminate (brief) messages to the stakeholder community quickly, and to redirect individuals to their websites, Facebook page, and blogs for additional detailed information. Common topics for "tweets" included information on programs and services available at the AJCs, as well as dissemination of job seeker information, such as links to new job postings (on the state's automated job bank), announcements of upcoming job fairs and employer recruitments, and job search tips. Twitter also allows for customers to retweet agency announcements to potentially reach Twitter followers and customers that might not ordinarily interact with state and local workforce agencies. Additionally, Twitter allows for Twitter followers to comment on tweets issued by the state agencies, providing feedback that could potentially be useful for enhancing or better targeting service delivery. Overall, Twitter is a way to distribute small packets of information to customers, and the states recognized that Twitter could transmit information that is also transmitted by email, Facebook, or posted on Internet sites.

- *YouTube:* States found they could make instructional content easily and widely available to job seekers and other customers by uploading videos to YouTube on a wide range of topics (e.g., how

to file a UI claim, how to develop an effective resume, and how to network and search for a job). By uploading such videos, many (but not all) customers are able to access information on a particular topic of interest without having to visit or contact a local workforce center. Additionally, during customer visits (or calls) to local workforce centers, agency staff could save time by pointing job seekers, claimants, employers, and others to YouTube videos (or other websites) that provide more in-depth instruction or information on a topic of interest. However, despite each state uploading a substantial number of instructional videos to YouTube, state and local offices found that such videos did not eliminate the need for offering a range of workshops on job readiness, resume development, and job search and providing one-on-one consultation with job seekers, claimants, and other workforce customers at the AJCs.

- *LinkedIn*: Unlike with the other social media tools, with LinkedIn states primarily focused grant-funded efforts on helping agency staff, job seekers, and businesses to improve their use of it for job search, networking, and other employment-related activities. For example, in one state, local workforce agencies offered workshops for job seekers on effective use of LinkedIn, especially in terms of expanding networking opportunities. LinkedIn is used differently than the other social media tools discussed above. Job seekers and businesses are taught how to use LinkedIn to gather information on jobs and customers and to present themselves more appealingly to others. Thus, LinkedIn is viewed as a tool for agency customers rather than a tool for getting information to customers; that is why the states had workshops for customers to learn how to effectively use LinkedIn.

Grantees also developed and integrated several specialized social media tools into agency operations, including electronic calendars, live chats, and virtual career fairs. As discussed above, New York implemented a virtual career fair software application to recreate a traditional job fair environment connecting job seekers and employers but without the time and costs normally associated with travelling to and hosting an event. The virtual career fair application allows job seekers to upload their resumes and profiles to be reviewed by participating employers, while also exploring job opportunities and company brochures at each participating employer. The virtual job fair is one example of a social media tool being used as a potential substitute for an existing workforce agency activity (i.e., a physical job fair).

Overall, when integrating social media tools into both state and local agency operations under their grants, states had to take into consideration the specific features and functionality of each tool. These tools, when properly integrated into agency operations and service delivery, helped state and local workforce agencies to increase productivity of agency staff by reducing time and costs associated with providing customers with information and/or direct services. States indicated that such tools could be effectively integrated into everyday agency operations but cautioned that considerable care is needed in planning and implementing each tool to obtain maximum benefit for the agency and customers served. Additionally, states indicated that because of rapid innovation and frequent updates in capabilities and uses of the various tools, it is critical to frequently assess how tools are being used and integrated into agency operations.

6. Outcomes and Costs of the Social Media Initiatives

This section of the report discusses customer outcomes and costs associated with the social media activities. Customer outcomes are particularly difficult to measure since it is virtually impossible to track who used the social media tools and determine how the services affected their subsequent outcomes. Moreover, the grant did not require a quantitative evaluation component, and none of the grantees attempted to design an evaluation to examine the direct effect of social media on service use and employment outcomes. Costs are also difficult to measure given that the use of social media tools may result in efficiencies, such as changes in use of staff resources at the AJCs, that are difficult to measure. This section reports on available information on grantee outcomes and the nature of the costs associated with the intervention.

6.1   Measuring Improvements in Customer Outcomes

As noted above, due to the unique nature of social media tools, it is difficult to measure the outcomes and/or effect of the grantee activities, particularly in terms of their effects on job seeker employment outcomes. That being said, all three grantees demonstrated increases in the use of social media monitoring tools during the grant period.

- *Facebook.* All three grantees experienced significant growth in their Facebook presence during the grant period. The NYSDOL Facebook page experienced rapid growth and had accumulated a total of 12,953 "likes" as of November 2014, an increase of 33 percent since November 2013 and an increase of 51 percent since December 2012. In Idaho the number of "likes" grew to 2,022 as of November 2014, representing an increase of over 44 percent since the end of second quarter of 2013. Minnesota also increased their number of Facebook "likes." As of November 2014, the DEED Facebook page had 2,224 "likes," while the more recently created MinnesotaWorks Facebook page had 639 "likes."

- *Twitter*. As was the case with Facebook, all the grantees experienced noteworthy growth in the Twitter "followers" over the course of the grant period. Idaho's main DOL Twitter account accumulated the largest number of Twitter followers, reaching 13,600 followers by November 2014 compared with 2,000 in 2012. While not nearly as large, the job seeker Twitter account in Idaho also experienced substantial follower increase, resulting in a total of approximately 910 followers by November 2014. In New York, the number of Twitter followers reached 5,302 in November 2014, an increase of approximately 53 percent from December 2012. Finally, in Minnesota from October 2012 until November 2014, the MinnesotaWorks Twitter account saw a 118 percent increase in followers to 1,646. Over the same period, the larger Minnesota DEED Twitter account also increased its followers by 89 percent, from 2,541 to 4,810.

- *LinkedIn.* Both NYSDOL and Idaho DOL also saw steady increases in LinkedIn followers over the course of the grant. As of November 2014, New York had a total of 3,848 LinkedIn followers, representing a 76 percent increase over a year earlier and a 135 percent increase from December 2012. Idaho experienced a very similar growth pattern with a 42 percent increase from second quarter 2013 to November 2014 (from 1,100 to 1,561 followers). This also represents a more than two-fold increase from the same quarter in 2012, when the LinkedIn account had only 600 followers.

While useful for understanding how customers are using and expanding their use of the social media tools adopted by each state, it is difficult to discern if the increases in use were driven by the social media grant—that is, the types of tools adopted and increased use may have occurred in these states even if they had not received the grant. The grantees also observed that many customers were familiar with social media tools and used them for job search purposes before the grant activities. Finally, it is difficult to track use of social media tools and determine whether they resulted in subsequent employment improvements, further complicating evaluation efforts.

Because of these challenges, the effect of the initiative on job seekers' use of workforce services and employment outcomes cannot be determined as part of this study. Appendix B discusses how future projects using social media interventions could establish more rigorous evaluation designs.

6.2   Costs of the Social Media Initiatives

All three grantees reported that social media tools were not expensive to implement. The main social media tools implemented by states (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn) were available free-of-charge and required little programming or state staff assistance to implement. There were some exceptions, particularly the software packages for the talent communities in Minnesota and subscriptions to the Expos2 event (career fair) software in New York that grantees had to purchase directly with grant resources.

The main costs incurred under the grant were staff time associated with coordinating the effort, creating substantive content for uploading, and responding to customer inquiries. Some content took substantial time to develop (e.g., blogs, state website announcements of new regulations/policies) and responding to customer inquiries was time-sensitive and, depending on the type of question, could be time-consuming. In particular, any tool that required two-way communication, such as responding to Facebook inquiries (that may require locating or verifying information) required a commitment of staff resources.

While requiring some staff commitment, grantees also reported that social media tools can result in time and cost savings for agency staff in other areas. Specifically, they reported that social media tools can help reduce reliance on staff-assisted services and can be used to address common questions and challenges that job seekers might have concerning available workforce services. Facebook, Twitter, and a range of other social media tools enabled grantees to quickly and inexpensively make announcements of available workforce services to job seekers (e.g., job fairs and employer recruitments) and can at times be a substitute for in-person services. For example, an online webinar or video on YouTube (e.g., how to apply for UI, effective resume preparation) can save agency staff time by limiting the need to make presentations in group workshops or working one-on-one with job seekers. Job seekers may save time and money because they can view a video or get an answer to a question without coming into a local office. While it is not known whether the services are as effective when provided via social media, using social media for these services allows states to reach large numbers of individuals in a cost-effective way.

7. Factors Affecting Social Media Grant Implementation

A number of issues facilitated and hindered implementation of the social media grants in the three states. Overall, however, state staff reported that implementation proceeded smoothly with relatively few hurdles encountered. Several factors promoted implementation of the social media grants.

- *Timing of the grants was good.* Social media has grown rapidly in popularity and use in recent years, and the grantees were able to build on this momentum. In each of the three states visited, state administrators observed that the population served, including older workers and longer-term unemployed, had in recent years increasingly gravitated toward use of social media tools——particularly, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. As noted, in the early stages of their grants, two of the three states conducted surveys of their customer base to determine how job seekers and employers were already using social media tools generally and how they were using such tools to facilitate job search and placement in particular. These surveys not only facilitated planning and targeting of social media strategies but also established that many job seekers, workforce agency staff, and employers were already familiar with and using social media tools.

- *Many tools were already in existence and, for the most part, not complicated or expensive to implement.* With the exception of the electronic calendar, live chat, and virtual career fair software (NYSDOL) and the talent communities (DEED), the main social media tools implemented by states (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn) were available free-of-charge and required little to no programming or state IT staff assistance to implement. The social media companies had absorbed the cost of developing the various tools and the tools resided (externally) on social media company servers. IT staff involvement was needed only for working out system security requirements for agency staff and for determining how content would be uploaded to social media applications via state computers. State workforce agency staff in each of the states emphasized that the social media tools used were inexpensive from an agency perspective, with the main costs incurred under the grant associated with coordinating the effort, creating substantive content for uploading, and responding to customer inquiries.

- *The grant provided a common focus and impetus for moving forward with expanded use of social media tools and provided resources to fund staff needed to coordinate and maintain them.* In New York, for example, state workforce administrators indicated that the grant established goals and provided motivation for incorporating social media into state and local workforce operations. When obstacles were encountered in expanding the use of social media tools, the grant funds and state commitment to meeting the requirements of the grant helped to keep efforts moving and encouraged state and local administrators to reach consensus. In New York, state officials also noted that the social media grant provided much needed funds to purchase proprietary social media software (such as the Trumba electronic calendar, Expos2 virtual career fair, and the Website Alive chat software applications), as well as to develop substantive content to be disseminated across the state's website and other social media tools.

- *Higher-level support within their agencies and across local workforce agencies was important in facilitating grant start-up and ongoing implementation of social media tools within the state.* For example, administrators heading up the effort in New York indicated that they received strong support from the highest levels of NYSDOL, as well as ongoing engagement and interest from most of the more than 90 AJCs across the state. In Idaho, to facilitate grant planning and

engagement of state and local workforce officials, the state established an outreach team (discussed above), which included representatives of the state agency and over a dozen staff members from AJCs throughout the state. This team helped collect ideas about how to move forward on social media tools (with some ideas coming from local workforce officials and others coming from the state level), as well as how to gain buy-in from local workforce officials/staff during the planning and early implementation phases of the grant. In Minnesota, DEED worked with an advisory group made up of volunteer representatives from a mix of large and small local workforce agencies. The advisory group provided a local perspective on the current level of social media use among customers and challenges that job seekers might face in using social media for job search. The group also helped design Minnesota's social media training webinars based on trainings already being offered at some of the AJCs in the state. During the early stage of the grant period, the advisory group participated in weekly working calls with DEED and attended the social media grantee conference convened by DOL in Baltimore.

- ***Bringing the three states receiving grants together at DOL sponsored in-person conferences and on regular conference calls and webinars helped generate ideas for moving forward on their grants***. The interaction among grantees facilitated by DOL and NASWA was helpful in planning grant activities and overcoming challenges. This interaction allowed grantees to share information about how social media tools had been used in the past and plans for expanding use and implementing new tools under the grant.

While state staff identified these factors as important in facilitating implementation of their social media grants, they identified relatively few issues that hindered implementation of the grants. The challenges faced were somewhat unique to each of the three states.

In New York, the main challenge cited by state administrators was the number of "moving parts" within the state's workforce system because the state is large and diverse. More than 90 AJCs are spread across the state, and it can be a challenge to plan and implement new initiatives in widely varying local office environments (e.g., ranging from AJCs serving highly concentrated urban areas such as New York City to smaller towns and sparsely populated rural localities in upstate New York). Additionally, as for any new application or initiative, the sheer size of the state's workforce agency staff spread across so many AJCs made it difficult to provide training in a timely and consistent manner. As discussed above, to facilitate planning and implementation, the state established five workgroups consisting of representatives from the AJCs: (1) a workgroup to increase penetration of social media tools within the state; (2) a workgroup to increase virtual services at AJCs; (3) a workgroup focused on expanded use of mobile applications; (4) a workgroup to create social media policy at the state/local levels; and (5) a workgroup to plan/implement virtual career fairs.

In Idaho, state administrators reported some challenges in the planning and early implementation phases of the grant. First, the state workforce agency had a number of other initiatives and priorities that competed for the attention of state and local workforce administrators and staff. These included the state agency's participation with the consortium of states involved in America's Job Link Alliance. In addition, based on the initial survey the state conducted, staff reported that social media tools and customers' use of the tools appeared to be in flux meaning that the project team had to keep up with changes and incorporate new design features into some of the tools being used. Next, state administrators found that local workforce agencies across the state had staff with widely varying social media awareness and capabilities, which had to be accommodated during training and roll-out.

Finally, some of the job seekers served in rural areas were found to be without ready access to the Internet within their homes and needed to rely upon mobile applications (i.e., smartphones) or public venues to obtain access to the Internet and social media tools.

In responding to each of these challenges, Idaho developed realistic and appropriate strategies. In response to the low priority of the project, the staff recognized the state's priority structure and did their best to push the project forward as quickly as possible. To help address the changing nature of social media tools, Idaho hired a full-time staff person with experience using social media as a promotion and marketing tool. To ensure local staff were aware of social media tools and capable of using them and teaching customers to use them, the state held a number of staff training sessions across the state. Finally, to address the lack of Internet access in some areas of the state, staff made sure all content and social media tools were accessible and fully functional on cell phones and other portable electronic devices. Staff said that while not every customer had Internet access as home almost everyone now has a smartphone.

In Minnesota, implementation of social media tools under the grant generally went smoothly, but some challenges emerged in piloting the talent community. One challenge was coordinating with multiple agency stakeholders to develop business requirements for the talent community system, which would be included in the request for proposals (RFPs) released to secure a vendor. The process of developing business requirements was time-intensive and required coordination among the social media grant team, other DEED staff from the labor exchange and economic development, and the state's IT department. Because the talent community was a relatively new idea, it took time to educate stakeholders about the initiative. Before releasing the RFP for vendors, the agency wanted to gauge employers' understanding of and interest in the talent community concept, and they contracted with a business analyst to conduct interviews with industry representatives and administer an employer survey. As a result of these issues, the talent communities were not fully operational at the end of the grant period.

Other challenges that emerged in Minnesota included gaining agreement on a statewide social media policy to determine how much autonomy to give to the local AJCs for developing their own accounts on Facebook or Twitter. The issue was whether the state agency should maintain a uniform approach and message or allow local AJCs to use the tools to meet local needs. Currently local AJCs (except for those that are contracted out to private entities) are encouraged to share information through the state agency's social media accounts rather than operate their own social media applications.

8.   Sustainability and Future Funding of Social Media Tools

State administrators in the three states anticipated continuing use of all the social media tools implemented during their grants, though none had sought new grants or state funding to support continued use or development once their grants ended. Staff in all three states indicated that the social media tools (including the talent communities in Minnesota) would continue to operate as they had during the grant period and that they planned to build on, expand, and refine use of each tool to the extent possible. They noted that the tools had experienced rapid change and development in recent years (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter) and they expected the pace of change to continue and even accelerate, including introduction of new and improved versions of the existing tools, as well as emergence of new tools (such as the virtual career fair software that New York was pilot-testing as its grant was coming to an end). Staff in all three states were fully committed to future use, refinement, and expansion of social media tools aimed at providing enhanced customer services, often at lower cost for both the customer and the agency.

In terms of future funding and sustainability, state administrators in the three states were mainly concerned about ongoing costs related to (1) development of substantive content to be uploaded to social media tools; (2) staffing costs for overseeing use of social media tools and responding (where there is two-way communication) to customer inquiries in a timely and appropriate manner; and, (3) ongoing staff training in how to use social media tools appropriately and optimally. State administrators and staff emphasized the importance of keeping substantive content disseminated through social media sites up-to-date, relevant, informative, and interesting to customers. Staff emphasized the need for ongoing postings to Facebook, Twitter, state websites, and other social media applications to drive customers to these applications by keeping content fresh and interesting. For example, announcements of job fairs, job openings, job readiness workshops at AJCs, and so forth change frequently, and so new postings are needed (often on a daily basis) to electronic calendars and state websites, as well as on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn sites. When workforce policies and regulations change—such as the change from WIA to WIOA—the state website and other social media applications (including Twitter and Facebook) need to be updated quickly to reflect changes and notify employers and job seekers of changes in program requirements, application processes, and services.

Additionally, the use and success of social media tools are not only related to the freshness of content but also to appropriate, accurate, and timely responses to customer inquiries. For example, when UI claimants post questions concerning their potential eligibility for UI benefits or when and where upcoming employer recruitment events or job fairs are being held, social media staff must respond quickly (typically within hours or a day) and correctly. Finally, state administrators noted that unlike other proprietary software packages and in-house mainframe automated systems, most social media applications (like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn) do not have annual subscription fees, and costs of further development and refinement of these tools are borne by social media companies. Hence, while concerned about ongoing staffing costs, state administrators were not worried about ongoing costs associated with hosting, development, or programming that they might have with large mainframe IT systems operated by the state.

Without new grants targeted to social media, states plan to continue to fund staff to maintain social media applications. For example, in New York state administrators indicated that they would be able

to maintain existing applications and keep substantive content fresh on the full range of their social media tools with existing staff continuing to devote a portion of their time to developing new content and responding to customer inquiries (e.g., perhaps spending an hour or several hours a day on such activities). Some of these activities take relatively little time (several minutes), for example, tweeting (and re-tweeting) messages about the number of jobs listed in the state's automated job bank and how to access the job bank from the job seeker's home or adding a new event to the state's electronic calendar, such as an upcoming job fair. Other activities may take considerably more time to develop and require careful reviews by other state administrators and legal staff, such as responding to inquiries about program eligibility requirements or developing a post describing new regulatory requirements.

In Idaho, state administrators expressed some concern about finding resources to maintain a full-time coordinator and part-time intern who reportedly were critical during the grant period for keeping the various social media tools fresh with new content and responding to inquiries from job seekers, employers, and the media. Idaho administrators (like those in the other two states) indicated that over the past several years social media tools had become an essential and important way to communicate with its customer base—especially job seeker and employers—and, therefore, the state would find a way to continue to use and expand its presence on social media.

9. Lessons for Using Social Media in the Workforce System

As described in this report, the New York, Idaho, and Minnesota grantees reported that DOL's social media grant provided impetus and resources for expanding their use of social media tools in state and local workforce operations. The social media grants were used for a variety of purposes, including educating stakeholders (i.e., job seekers, employers, and state and local workforce staff) on how to use social media, particularly with regard to effective job search and increasing awareness of the full range of employment, training, and other services offered by state and local workforce agencies. Additionally, states used the grants to plan and substantially expand the use of social media tools already in use before the grant award (including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn), as well as to initiate use of (and in some instances, acquire) new tools, such as virtual job fair, electronic chat, and electronic calendar software. The experiences of these grantees provide a number of lessons about how social media tools can be used 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 facilitate employment among job seekers. Social media tools have been growing rapidly in popularity and use in recent years. Across the three grantees, state administrators observed that job seekers and employers are increasingly familiar with and using social media tools—particularly, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. These tools can play important and varying roles in enhancing communication with state and local workforce agencies, job seekers, UI claimants, employers, and the general community. The key social media tools can be integrated into the day-to-day operations of the workforce system as part of the package of employment-related services available to customers and used to link customers to services or to provide services directly, as in the following examples:

- **Facebook** can be an effective tool for making agency announcements and providing job listings, as well as for responding directly and quickly to customer inquiries. It can be an important device for prompting two-way communication between a state agency and job seekers.

- **Twitter** can be a useful tool for making announcements to the stakeholder community, such as the number of job openings in the state's automated job bank or about an upcoming job fair. The grantees also found Twitter effective for driving job seekers and other interested parties to the state's or a local workforce agency's website or Facebook page to obtain more detailed information.

- **YouTube** can serve as a readily accessible repository for videos to inform job seekers or employers about workforce programs, policies, or procedures. Videos also can demonstrate how to effectively access and use specific workforce services—for example, depicting how to file a UI claim, what claimant job search responsibilities are, and how to file a continuing claim. Videos targeted to employers can include information on how to submit a job vacancy listing to a state job bank. Job seeker information can focus on how to use social media tools such as LinkedIn to effectively network, how to "dress-for-success" for a job interview, or how to handle certain types of questions during a job interview.

These tools, when properly integrated into agency operations and service delivery systems, can help state and local workforce agencies to increase productivity of agency staff by reducing time and costs associated with providing customers with information and/or direct services. Because many

workforce system customers increasingly use such tools, state and local agencies can capitalize on these patterns of use and carefully consider which tools to use.

Social media tools are generally not expensive to acquire and implement, though staff resources are needed to maintain and update them. State workforce agency staff in each of the states emphasized that the social media tools used were inexpensive from an agency perspective, with the main costs incurred under their grants associated with coordinating the effort, creating substantive content for various tools, and responding to customer inquiries. The main social media tools (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn) implemented by states were available free-of-charge. The cost of start-up and ongoing maintenance of the tools were generally viewed as low, with minimal IT staffing costs.

Ongoing staffing, which is viewed as the major cost item, can vary considerably across social media tools and types of activities involved in producing content for tools and responding to customer inquiries. For example, tweeting and re-tweeting using Twitter is typically not time consuming (i.e., it can take as little as 30 seconds to write and send a tweet if the content is approved) and communication is one-way so staff do not need to be available to respond directly to customer inquiries generated by a tweet. However, social media tools requiring two-way communication and development of new substantive content can be labor intensive and, in some instances, costly.

- The online chat capability being implemented in New York requires training staff on use of the system and agency policies having several operators available to "chat" with customers (responding interactively to customer questions and discussions whenever the online chat system is live).

- Developing content for YouTube videos and professionally producing them can be costly (e.g., requiring either an in-house or contracted video production facility).

- Responding to questions posted to the state's website or Facebook page, depending on their complexity and whether they have been asked in the past, can be time-consuming and require agency approval.

- Some types of postings can take substantial amounts of time to develop (e.g., blogs, state website announcements of new regulations/policies).

State administrators and staff emphasized the importance of keeping substantive content disseminated via social media sites up-to-date, relevant, informative, and interesting to customers (i.e., emphasizing that use diminishes if content gets stale).

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. While the initial focus of the DOL grant program was connecting UI claimants with the workforce system, the social media tools helped the grantees connect to and network with a broader range of customers including job seekers and employers. All grantees reported being able to use a variety of social media tools to connect with and inform job seekers and employers who they might otherwise have missed (e.g., job seekers who might be uninterested in visiting (or unaware of) the agency's website or a local AJC). However, state workforce agency administrators and staff acknowledged that social media tools also miss substantial numbers of job seekers, including those not connected to the Internet and others who are not familiar with or are uncomfortable with or unwilling to use social

media tools for job searching. Because of this, staff in all three states noted that state and local workforce agencies cannot use social media tools or the state's website as the only way to communicate with job seekers or employers. All noted that workforce agencies need to use a blended approach involving social media and other traditional outreach and communication methods.

With regard to social media tools, one size does not fit all. State officials noted that use of tools varies by subpopulation and over time the types of customers who use certain tools can shift. For example, while Facebook initially attracted a largely youthful population, its use has expanded in recent years to a wider demographic. It is therefore important for state and local workforce agencies to use multiple tools and some duplication in messaging and substantive content in order to reach the widest audience. For example, a certain social media tool (e.g., Facebook or Twitter) may be somewhat more effective in reaching women or youth than other tools. It is important for state and local workforce officials to keep up with rapidly changing trends in usage among specially targeted populations. Finally, certain social media tools, such as LinkedIn, virtual job fairs, and talent communities, require users to be able to "present" themselves well online. This may be difficult for some customers without specific guidance or training, thus workforce agencies should consider how to provide workshops (as one grantee did) or other platforms to help individuals develop their online employment image.

Social media provides opportunities for state and local workforce agencies to better engage with employers. Most employers, like many job seekers, already have a social media presence and many use LinkedIn and other social medial tools for recruitment purposes. Grantees specifically used several tools to engage and inform the business community about potential job candidates, the types of trainings provided to job seekers, and other workforce services. For example, the New York and Minnesota virtual job fairs and talent communities, respectively, focused on connecting employers to the workforce system and job seekers. Additionally, several of the tools used (LinkedIn, Idaho@Work, and the state's website) included tabs and posts established specifically for engaging and informing the business community. Finally, Idaho engaged over 100 employers in a series of workshops focusing on effective and appropriate use of social media tools within the workplace and for recruitment of workers. These workshops proved to be valuable in engaging some new employers with the workforce system and expanding their effective use of social media tools.

Social media tools can result in time savings and productivity gains for agency staff, job seekers, and employers. The state grantees collected very limited data on productivity gains or cost savings resulting from expanded use of social media. The evidence provided was mostly qualitative and anecdotal. However, while the tools do require an investment of staff time to maintain, state workforce officials indicated that social media tools can lead to cost savings, particularly at local workforce agencies, because the tools can be used as a substitute for in-person services. For example, an online webinar or video uploaded to YouTube on how to apply for UI benefits or how to prepare an effective resume can save agency staff time that would be used to make presentations at group workshops or to meet one-on-one with a claimant or job seeker at an AJC resource room. Job seekers or employers may save time and resources because they can view the video or quickly get an answer to a frequently asked question from the state's website without traveling to a local workforce office.

Overall, the three grantees implemented a range of social media tools under the DOL grant by, variously, building on earlier work, expanding the use of established tools, and developing new tools and applications. The grantees plan to sustain and build on these activities, and their experiences

provide important lessons for other workforce agencies interested in developing and expanding their use of social media tools for workforce customers.

Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of DOL Grantee Social Media Activities

Appendix B: Evaluation Design Options for Future Social Media Initiatives

Appendix A: Summary of DOL Grantee Social Media Activities

Below are summaries of each state's grant-funded social media activities.

Idaho Department of Labor

Overview

The Idaho Department of Labor (DOL) substantially enhanced and expanded its use of social media applications (including Facebook, YouTube, WordPress, LinkedIn, and Twitter) to increase customer awareness of workforce services and encourage the use of social media by job seekers during the job search process. Additionally, social medial tools were aimed at engaging employers to help them better understand workforce services available through Idaho's 25 AJCs, as well as to encourage employers to list job openings with the ES. The state workforce agency also used the grant funds (1) to conduct social media training workshops for employers, job seekers, and agency staff across the state; (2) to survey employers and job seekers on their use of social media; (3) to increase emphasis on social media measurement/analytics (through use of Hootsuite social media analytics and scheduling software); and (4) to develop a revised approach to sending out mass emails to job seekers and employers.

Background

Idaho DOL oversees and administers workforce programs, including the UI, Wagner-Peyser, WIA, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs. The state is one of several states in the nation that has a single-state workforce investment area under its WIA program. Staff providing Wagner-Peyser, UI, WIA, and other workforce development services (e.g., older worker, TAA, and Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) programs) are state DOL employees. During the period of the social media grant, the unemployment rate within the state steadily decreased (from 7.8 percent in December 2011 to 4.7 percent in July 2014), and as a result of improving economic conditions, the numbers of new filings for UI have declined dramatically over the past few years. The social media grant for Idaho from DOL totaled $750,000.

Project Goals

Idaho DOL sought a U.S. Department of Labor UI Workforce Connectivity grant to expand awareness to and use of social media tools among its state/local workforce agency staff, employers, job seekers, and specially targeted groups of job seekers (including UI claimants, youth/students, and veterans) served by its 25 AJCs across the state. Idaho DOL officials viewed Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social media tools as potentially effective ways to quickly and inexpensively communicate with job seekers about available employment and training services (e.g., availability of job openings, job readiness and other workshops held by AJCs, and upcoming job fairs and employer recruitments).

The state workforce agency had embraced use of various social media tools (including Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and YouTube) beginning in the mid-2000s and was looking to expand and improve use of various tools across the state with grant funds. According to one state agency administrator, the grant was viewed as an opportunity to identify and expand use of the most effective social media tools given the structure of the state workforce agency. State administrators were

concerned about being able to respond to rapid changes in social media tools and rapid expansion in use of such tools by employers and job seekers.

Grant Planning, Start-up Activities, and Staffing

In planning for the grant, the state workforce agency surveyed employers and job seekers about their awareness and use of social media tools. The agency found that many job seekers across Idaho had Internet access (often within their own homes or at nearby public libraries, or via smartphones) and were increasingly familiar with and using a range of social media tools (particularly Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn). Yet, other job seekers (especially those in more remote and rural areas) did not have ready access to the Internet and were unwilling or unable to use social media tools. Even those within the state who are frequent users of social media tool—including agency staff, employers, and job seekers—were often found to be in need of training on appropriate and effective use of social media tools for job search (job seekers) and recruitment (employers).

The Communications and Research Division within the Idaho DOL was responsible for planning and implementing the various social media tools/components that were the focus of the grant. The agency was already working with various social media tools, but the grant provided a framework for bringing together state workforce administrators and staff (including those staffing the 25 AJCs across the state) to discuss further development and use of social media tools. To facilitate grant planning and implementation, the state established an Outreach Team, which included representatives of the state agency and over a dozen staff from AJCs throughout the state both those located in urban areas such as Boise as well as in sparsely populated towns and rural areas.

The grant provided resources for the state workforce agency to hire one full-time administrator and one part-time intern to oversee and expand use of social media tools, as well as to develop new substantive content for social media sites and respond to inquiries generated by the tools.

Social Media Tools Developed Under the Grant

Key components of the social media tools and activities performed under Idaho's grant are highlighted below:

Facebook. In 2006, Idaho DOL developed and implemented the agency's Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/Idahojobs) and so experience and expertise in managing the agency's Facebook page before the grant was awarded. Under the grant, the agency's Facebook page was enhanced and used to disseminate more content, and links to the agency's other social media tools and its website were added to the Facebook site. Also under the grant, training was provided for agency staff, employers, and job seekers on appropriate/effective use of Facebook. Several staff were dedicated (on a part-time basis) to uploading content to the agency's Facebook page, editing content for Facebook (and other social media tools) provided by other Idaho DOL units (such as UI) and local workforce agency staff, and addressing questions/comments from Facebook users in real-time. Staff also posted announcements about upcoming job fairs, company recruitments, training opportunities, available workforce services and job openings, and policy/regulation changes.

The agency's Facebook site has grown rapidly since its creation in 2009. Staff reported that Facebook also enabled the state workforce agency to reach customers that might not normally walk into or be aware of workforce services available at the 25 AJCs. The state agency has found that about 65

percent of the customers going to its Facebook page are women and that a majority of users live in the Boise metropolitan area. As November 2014, the state's Facebook site had about 2,022 "likes," which is about a 44 percent increase over the number of "likes" it had in second quarter 2013.

Twitter. Idaho DOL uses two Twitter accounts to make announcements about workforce services and upcoming events: (1) a main (DOL) Twitter account aimed particularly at media and businesses but also the general public (https://twitter.com/IDAHOgov) and (2) a job seeker Twitter account (https://twitter.com/IdahoJob). The main Twitter account, which has one or two tweets a day, is principally aimed at getting messages out about policies and programs/services offered by the state and local workforce agencies and driving Twitter users to more detailed information available on the state's main webpage. The specialized job seeker Twitter account aims its two or three tweets a day at informing claimants and other job seekers about upcoming job fairs, employer recruitments, and the numerous job openings in the state's automated job bank. There is also some re-tweeting of tweets made by other workforce professionals, employers, or media. As of November 2014, Idaho DOL's main Twitter account had 13,600 followers and nearly 2,500 tweets, and the Twitter job seeker account had just over 910 followers and 21,600 tweets.

YouTube. Idaho DOL's YouTube channel is another social media outreach and informational tool (https://www.youtube.com/user/IdahoDeptofLabor). The state workforce agency posts videos on YouTube to attract and inform job seekers and employers to the services and resources available through its website and AJCs. Idaho DOL, which does not have an in-house video production capacity, has forged a partnership with Idaho public television to produce videos for its YouTube channel. Idaho DOL has uploaded nearly 50 videos to its YouTube channel aimed at informing job seekers and employers about how to search for a job and develop resumes and describing services available online and through AJCs.

The agency plans to purchase video equipment so that it will soon be able to produce videos in-house. As of the November 2014, the Idaho YouTube channel had about 22,167 total views.

LinkedIn. Idaho DOL and AJCs encourage job seekers to create their own LinkedIn profile, although staff report that an increasing number of job seekers coming to the workforce system already have LinkedIn profiles and have some working knowledge of the tool. However, job seekers were often unaware of how to effectively use LinkedIn. Many AJCs offer workshops focused on the basics of using LinkedIn, particularly creating an online professional LinkedIn profile and effectively using the networking and job board tools.

Idaho DOL has created its own LinkedIn company profile page (https://www.linkedin.com/company/idaho-department-of-labor). One of the purposes of the LinkedIn site (similar to the state agency's Twitter feed and its Facebook site) is to direct employers, job seekers, workforce professionals, media, and the general public to the state agency's website for more detailed information. The state agency's LinkedIn site also provides "recent updates" such as agency announcements of new polices, regulations, and services, as well as labor market information and conditions. The state agency is also developing a specialized aerospace LinkedIn group to help local aerospace businesses connect and collaborate about manufacturing resources and staffing. As of the November 2014, the state's LinkedIn site had a total of 1,561 followers, which represented a 42 percent increase over the end of second quarter 2013.

Idaho@Work–A Blog for Job Seekers and Employers. In 2011, using WordPress software, the Idaho DOL established a blog to publicize agency announcements, labor market information, and upcoming state and local workforce development events. This blog (http://idaholabor.wordpress.com/) has separate sections for different audiences and subjects including job seekers, students, employers, employment news, FAQs, and UI. Other social media tools help direct customers to this blog site. Since its inception in December 2011, over 200 posts have been uploaded to the agency's blog. The agency typically blogs 8 to 10 times per month and posts are primarily drafted by DOL staff. In some instances, workforce professionals and other subject matter experts outside of the state agency draft and submit blog posts for the site. The blog's page views have grown steadily, growing from about 1,000 in second quarter 2013 to about 4,000 in second quarter 2014.

Idaho DOL Website. The Idaho DOL website (http://labor.idaho.gov) is the hub for a wide range of information for job seekers and employers. The website has dedicated sections for job seekers, businesses, career info, wages and stats, calendar, and news. All marketing and public relations efforts, including various social media tools developed under the grant, direct viewers to the website for specific information about workforce programs and services. The site includes a section that provides the newest 25 job openings listed with the ES. It also has a local office directory providing contact information for each AJC; links to news about workforce issues and stories generated by the agency; and a listing of upcoming workshops and events offered throughout the state. A detailed monthly calendar on the site lists as many as 10 to 15 events daily that are sponsored by local workforce agencies throughout the state, with links offered for more detailed descriptions of each event.

Social Media Workshops for Job Seekers and Businesses. Idaho DOL held a series of workshops for employers and job seekers to improve awareness, understanding, and appropriate use of social media. A total of 144 businesses and 99 job seekers attended workshops held in six locations across the state. The workshops focused on topics of interest to employers and job seekers, including social media laws governing use in public and private employer sites, social media account ownership and terms of use, use of social media for hiring, appropriate use of social media within the workplace, knowing your rights with respect to use of social media, privacy setting on social media, and searching for a job using social media (including "branding" yourself, choosing platforms and privacy setting carefully, and using social media tools to follow companies and identify job openings).

Links to Idaho's Social Media Tools

- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Idahojobs
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/IDAHOgov; http://idaholabor.wordpress.com/YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/IdahoDeptofLabor
- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/idaho-department-of-labor
- Blog (Idaho@Work): http://idaholabor.wordpress.com/
- Website: http://labor.idaho.gov

Minnesota DEED

Overview

Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) has conducted a number of activities to encourage expanded use of social media by job seekers. Early in the grant period DEED conducted a survey of unemployed job seekers and workforce staff/partners to assess familiarity with social media and help guide the design of future training efforts. DEED delivered a series of "train the trainer" webinars to train AJC staff s in teaching job seekers how to use social media for job search. DEED has expanded its presence on social media by hiring a staff member in the Communications Division to monitor and post information regularly on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. DEED also created a new YouTube channel for workforce-related videos and established an online community of practice for interested staff to discuss best practices. Later in the grant period, DEED shifted its focus to piloting a statewide "talent community." The talent community is designed as a virtual meeting place for job seekers and employers, economic developers, and industry associations. Using the talent community, employers can find applicants with the skill sets they need and manage their talent pipelines and job seekers can explore job openings and communicate directly with multiple employers in one venue. As part of the design effort, DEED executed a statewide employer survey to gauge acceptance and use of talent communities. DEED also modified the state labor exchange, MinnesotaWorks.net, so job seekers could share jobs on social media and added DEED social media links to the six weeks of emails sent to new UI claimants.

Background

DEED, Minnesota's principal economic development agency, oversees and administers workforce programs, including UI, Wagner-Peyser, WIA, and TAA programs. DEED oversees the operation of 48 American Job Centers across the state. The agency received a DOL social media grant of $750,000 to implement social media strategies to connect job seekers to workforce system services. Before receiving the UI Workforce Connectivity grant, DEED had a presence on social media, but staff in the Workforce Services Division felt that social media platforms were not being used effectively and that the department lacked an overall social media strategy. The state's presence on social media was overseen by the Communications Division.

Project Goals

Minnesota DEED's goals for the grant included increasing the department's presence on social media, raising the level of expertise among state and local staff and DEED's customers in using social media to find employment and to improve the linkage between employers and job seekers through the development of talent communities. The original target population for the grant was UI recipients ages 40 to 55, but as grant activities proceeded the focus shifted to job seekers and workforce system customers more broadly.

Grant Planning, Start-up Activities, and Staffing

One of the first activities conducted under the grant was a survey to determine how familiar DEED's customers were with social media. DEED conducted surveys of UI recipients and workforce staff and partners to assess their familiarity with social media and access to technology. The workforce centers

around the state administered this survey for about one month to every newly unemployed person going through a Reemployment Eligibility Assessment (REA) meeting, resulting in almost 3,000 job seekers completing the survey. The survey results showed more familiarity with social media among both job seekers and staff than anticipated. Most of those surveyed said that they had computers are home and were comfortable with basic social media use. DEED staff acknowledged, however, that newly unemployed UI recipients may have greater comfort with social media than customers who return repeatedly to job centers for services. Staff and partners also expressed familiarity with social media in the survey, but DEED found differences between staff located in rural and urban areas, with those in rural areas demonstrating greater need for training. While many staff and partners felt comfortable using social media, responses showed that they wanted training from DEED in how to help job seekers use social media. The survey changed some of DEED's previous assumptions and guided DEED to focus less on the basics of social media and more on advanced tips for using social media.

DEED hired a full-time digital information specialist for this grant to focus on posting social media content and monitoring responses on Minnesota DEED and MinnesotaWorks.net accounts. The grant allowed Minnesota to centralize all social media accounts in the Communications Division, allowing for more consistency in the content shared via social media. The digital information specialist produces weekly and monthly reports on social media statistics. After examining the statistics to determine which content is most popular, the digital information specialist focuses on generating similar content in the following week or month.

Social Media Tools Developed Under the Grant

Key components of the social media tools and activities performed under Minnesota DEED's grant are highlighted below:

Facebook. The Minnesota DEED Facebook account was launched in 2009, and a MinnesotaWorks.net account was added in 2013 (https://www.facebook.com/mndeed and https://www.facebook.com/minnesotaworks). Initially the DEED account focused on the economic development side of the agency's mission by posting, for example, information on why Minnesota is a great place to work. When the UI Workforce Connectivity grant work began in 2011, the account focus shifted to providing job seeker advice. That period lasted for about a year and a half until a new communications director came on board and decided to focus the DEED page on press releases. As of November 2014, the page had 2,227 "likes."

At the time of the latest strategy shift in May 2013, the separate MinnesotaWorks.net account was created to focus on job seeker content. As of November 2014, the page had 641 "likes." On the job seeker Facebook page, DEED posts links to job openings in specific categories (pharmacist, RN, civil engineer) in the MinnesotaWorks.net job bank, information on job fairs, links to the agency's job seeker blog, and links to other sources of career and job search advice (e.g., articles on careerrealism.com). The digital information specialist interacts with customers who post questions on the Facebook page. For instance, occasionally a customer will post "I'm from X region, can you help me find a job?" In these instances the digital information specialist either provides the customer with information about the nearest workforce center, or provides a link to a list of jobs in the MinnesotaWorks.net job bank.

Twitter. As with Facebook, Minnesota DEED and MinnesotaWorks.net have separate Twitter accounts. The Minnesota DEED account (https://twitter.com/mndeed) is more focused on press releases and aimed at the media and other agencies. It is the bigger of the two accounts, with 4,810

followers as of November 2014, an increase of 2,269 from October 2012. The MinnesotaWorks.net account (https://twitter.com/MinnesotaWorks) is focused on job seekers. This account posts job seeker advice, job links, career fairs, and workshops. The content is similar to Facebook in that a post will promote a certain type of job. For instance, a tweet may say "Looking for a construction job?" and post a link to the MinnesotaWorks.net job bank construction jobs. The digital information specialist puts together a weekly Twitter agenda to map out the content that will be posted that week, and he typically tweets about 10 to 15 times per week. The MinnesotaWorks.net Twitter account had 1,646 followers as of November 2014, an increase from 755 in October 2012.

YouTube. The Minnesota DEED YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/user/deedminnesota) has videos in three categories: Help for Businesses, Job Search Help, and Programs and Services. Most of the videos are several years old, and staff noted that they do not develop a lot of new content for YouTube. The most popular business-oriented video is "How to Hire a Veteran in 3 Easy Steps," which has 948 views. The most watched video on programs and services is "Dislocated Worker Program Overview for Employees," which has 10,123 views. Other videos provide an overview of Vocational Rehabilitation services and the Senior Community Services Program. The videos posted in the Job Search Help category are the training webinars recorded by DEED to train workforce center staff. There are also videos captured from a panel of speakers discussing jobs in the IT field. The most popular of job seeker videos is "Navigating LinkedIn for Job Search," which has 2,355 views.

Blog–Tips and Techniques for Finding the Perfect Job. MinnesotaWorks.net has a blog focused on job search with a new blog entry posted every Wednesday. The digital information specialist manages the blog and comes up with topics that are pulled from a variety of sources and includes other agency staff as guest bloggers. The blog covers topics such as resume advice, preparing for a career fair, how to stand out on LinkedIn, and proper email etiquette (http://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/social-media/blogs/mnw-blog/index.jsp).

Minnesota DEED Website. The Minnesota DEED website (http://mn.gov/deed/) provides categories of information organized by the intended audience—job seekers, business, and local government. Based on analytics, most visitors to the site click a link that takes them to the MinnesotaWorks.net job bank. In November 2013 the Minnesota DEED website was redesigned for a new "look and feel."

Social Media Training. To better equip staff at local job centers to advise customers on using social media, DEED implemented a "train the trainer" approach, producing about 14 hours of training on social media for local staff. DEED staff designed the training with review and input from local staff who were already offering their own social media trainings. The training was delivered via webinar by DEED staff in two five-hour sessions. The PowerPoint presentations were then provided to local staff and posted on the online community of practice so that they can run their own classes for job seekers, either by adopting the materials as-is or incorporating them into other curricula. The training covers the following topics: Creating an Online Brand; How to Act Online; Networking Through Social Media; Introduction to Facebook; Advanced Facebook for Job Search; Introduction to Twitter; Advanced Twitter for Job Search; Introduction to LinkedIn; and Advanced LinkedIn for Job Search. The PowerPoint presentations for the training modules are now available on the DEED website as a customer resource.. The training modules were also recorded and posted on DEED's YouTube channel, under the Job Search playlist.

Talent Communities. Later in the grant period, DEED shifted the focus of the grant to developing a statewide "talent community." A talent community is an online, virtual community where businesses with jobs connect with people looking for jobs. Within the community, employers and job seekers can communicate in multiple ways in real time, including online interviewing, private messaging, uploading a video introduction, and completing a questionnaire. At the time of the research team's visit in June 2014, Minnesota's talent community was not yet operational. A pilot was launched in October 2014 and full implementation was planned to take place after the end of the grant period. DEED expected to recruit employers to join the talent community through contacts at local workforce centers, economic development partners, and business-focused organizations like chambers and associations.

Staff at Minnesota DEED first learned of the talent community concept through Blue Cross Blue Shield, one of several major companies that uses a single-employer talent community to recruit new talent. After doing some additional research, staff found that talent communities were a fast-growing concept in HR for large companies. Other companies using talent communities include Target and Best Buy. In 2013, DEED was awarded a Bremer grant to pilot three regionally based, multi-employer talent communities in Northwest Minnesota in Fergus Falls, Brainerd Lakes, and Crookston. Regional economic developers partnered with state workforce developers to support talent communities as a way to identify and attract talented job seekers to the region. The statewide talent community concept was developed based on these regional efforts, but with the goal of bringing together employers, economic developers, and industry associations with job seekers across the state and tapping into the existing MinnesotaWorks.net job bank to supply the job openings that appear in the talent community.

DEED first had to develop business requirements for the talent community system. The IT department and the UI Workforce Connectivity grant team, labor exchange staff, and economic development staff worked together to determine what was important in system design. Before putting out a request for information for the vendor, DEED contracted with a business analyst starting in January 2014 to assist with the operational side of the talent communities design. The business analyst conducted interviews with industry representatives who work for the agency, and conducted an employer survey to define talent communities for employers, understand employers' previous exposure to the talent community concept, and gauge whether the cost-benefit created an attractive opportunity. Through the survey, DEED found that employers hoped that talent communities would lead to improved communications, better job candidates, improved understanding of what the employer had to offer (on the part of job seekers), an opportunity for job seekers to meet with current and former employees, an opportunity for employers to highlight specific aspects of their company, better job matches, and ultimately better employee retention.

TalentCircles is the vendor DEED chose to develop its statewide talent community. A "circle" refers to a smaller community that an employer can create, similar to a LinkedIn group. For instance, an employer might need both welders and plumbers, and would have a separate circle for each with customized postings on the feed for each circle. Job seekers can join circles that are of interest to them. The employer can control the circle settings either to allow any job seeker to join or to invite only specific job seekers. Employers will have to pay for a seat in the talent community. The cost will start at $100 per month for an employer to have one administrator seat, with the price increasing depending on the features the employer wants to have available.

Links to Minnesota's Social Media Tools

- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/mndeed; https://www.facebook.com/MinnesotaWorks.net

- Twitter: @mndeed; @MinnesotaWorks.net

- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/deedminnesota

- Blog: http://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/social-media/blogs/mnw-blog/index.jsp

- Website: http://mn.gov/deed/

- Minnesota Talent Network pilot: http://mn.talentcircles.com.

New York State Department of Labor

Overview

Under the social media grant, the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) expanded use of various social media applications (including Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter) to increase customer awareness of NYSDOL workforce services and to encourage use of social media by job seekers during the job search process. Additionally, social medial tools were aimed at engaging employers to help them better understand workforce services available through local workforce centers, as well as to encourage employers to list jobs and participate in job fairs. The state workforce agency also added several new social media tools under its grant, including live chat, an AJC locator mobile phone application, a virtual events/career fair software application, and a statewide electronic calendar.

Background

The New York State Department of Labor oversees and administers workforce programs, including the UI, Wagner-Peyser, WIA, and TAA programs. The WIA program within the state is administered by 33 local workforce investment boards (serving single or in some cases multiple counties), featuring a total of 94 New York State Career Centers with co-located Wagner-Peyser and WIA staff. One interesting aspect of New York State's workforce system is that nearly all Wagner-Peyser and UI claimants are co-enrolled in WIA. Claims for unemployment compensation can be submitted either via telephone to NYSDOL's Telephone Claims Center, or via the Internet to the NYSDOL's Online Claims system.

NYSDOL was one of the first New York State government agencies to embrace social media tools to improve its outreach efforts to job seekers and businesses, disseminate information to the public, and engage in direct dialogue with its customers. According to state agency administrators, the development of social media tools was stimulated in part by necessity, as a result of the deep recession beginning in late 2007 that resulted in escalating demand for employment and training services provided through the AJC system. With unemployment rates more than doubling in the state, from 4.3 percent in January 2007 to 8.9 percent in January 2010, NYSDOL looked for opportunities to reduce reliance on staff-assisted services and at the same time deliver high-quality and timely services to claimants and other job seekers NYSDOL's UI Workforce Connectivity grant totaled $2.75 million, of which $750,000 was focused on development of social media tools within the state.[11]

Project Goals

In applying for its UI Workforce Connectivity grant, NYSDOL was interested in expanding job seeker and UI claimant use of social media applications to enhance job seeker networking and job search success, as well as to be able to concentrate AJC staff time on those most in need of staff-

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[11] The remaining $2.0 million under the grant was for three other "transformational elements" covered by the UI/Workforce Connectivity grants: (1) Integrated Workforce Customer Registration, (2) Real Time Triage, and (3) Transferability of Skills/Job Match. NYSDOL was the only state to receive a grant covering the four transformational elements.

assisted services. NYSDOL officials viewed Facebook, Twitter, and a range of other social media tools as having potential to quickly and inexpensively make announcements of available workforce services to job seekers (e.g., job fairs and employer recruitments) and to address common questions and challenges that job seekers might have concerning available workforce services.

The social media portion of the UI Workforce Connectivity grant provided impetus to expand use of social media within the workforce system, and it made resources available to purchase software and offset other developmental costs of planning and implementing social media tools. This allowed NYSDOL to offer multiple ways to access their services, staying current with customers' needs and preferred methods of contact. Additionally, at the time, the state and local workforce agencies were serving many unemployed job seekers who had ready access to the Internet (often within their own homes or at libraries) and were increasingly familiar with and using a range of social media tools (particularly Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn).

Grant Planning, Start-up Activities, and Staffing

The Communications Unit within NYSDOL and the Division of Employment and Workforce Solutions (DEWS) were responsible for planning and rolling out the various social media tools and components that were the focus of the grant. While NYSDOL was already familiar with social media tools, the grant provided a framework for bringing together state and local workforce officials to further develop the use of social media tools, and also provided mutual goals for such an effort that helped to "keep things moving forward." To facilitate planning and implementation, the state established five workgroups that included representation from AJCs. The workgroups were: (1) a workgroup to increase penetration of social media tools within the state; (2) a workgroup to increase virtual services at AJCs; (3) a workgroup focused on expanded use of mobile applications; (4) a workgroup to create social media policy at the state and local levels; and (5) a workgroup to plan and implement virtual career fairs.

The eight members of the NYSDOL Communication Unit share responsibilities for posting announcements and responding to customer inquiries on the various social media platforms. Though staff costs are low, no firm estimates are available of the amount of staff time expended in maintaining the NYSDOL's social media presence. Responsibilities for maintaining the social media tools rotate among staff from day-to-day and are mixed in with other tasks.

Social Media Tools and Initiatives Developed Under the Grant

Key components of the social media tools and activities performed under NYSDOL's grant are highlighted below:

Facebook. Facebook provides a "public face" for the state's workforce agency, allowing it to post announcements about upcoming job fairs, company recruitments, training opportunities, available workforce services and job openings, and press releases (https://www.facebook.com/nyslabor). NYSDOL has dedicated staff that continuously monitors the agency's Facebook page, providing comments and answering questions from customers in real time. The NYSDOL's Communications Unit also posts agency announcements, videos, and pictures on Facebook. The Facebook page has grown into one of the top locations for job seekers in the state to ask questions regarding workforce services and unemployment insurance. An estimated 80 percent of the Facebook traffic is UI-related. Typically, statewide, agency staff respond to a half-dozen to a dozen comments a day (although on a

busy day, for example after an agency announcement, it may be necessary to respond to as many as 60 to 80 comments). In some instances subject matter experts or the legal counsel within NYSDOL must be consulted to provide detailed responses to questions. State officials indicated that there were very low development costs to beginning to use Facebook and because Facebook hosts the application, and there are also no ongoing mainframe computer costs. The main costs of using Facebook for the state agency are staffing costs associated with maintaining the site, posting announcements, and responding to Facebook user inquiries.

As of November 2014, the state's Facebook site had 12,953 "likes," about a 33 percent increase over the 9,700 likes it had a year earlier (in June 2013) and a 51 percent increase from December 2012 (8,558).

Twitter. NYSDOL uses a Twitter account to make announcements to the public—particularly job seekers and businesses—about workforce services and upcoming events, such as job/career fairs and recruitment events (https://twitter.com/nyslabor). The Twitter account serves primarily as an outreach tool to draw customers to NYSDOL's website, as well as a tool for creating a positive image for the agency. The state regularly uses Twitter to announce the number of job openings currently within the state's job bank and to encourage job seekers to search for job openings using the state's system. NYSDOL has found that Twitter is also useful for engaging and informing representatives of media outlets, politicians, higher education and other human service agency officials, and employers. The NYSDOL Communications Unit typically posts one to two tweets per day. Often tweets are accompanied by links to the state's website or Facebook page, which provide more in-depth background information about the tweet. Twitter (like Facebook) can be a useful tool for the state to monitor job seeker and business perspectives on the agency and service delivery (both positive and negative).

In about five years of using Twitter (through November 2014), the NYSDOL Twitter account had accumulated approximately 5,302 followers, compared with 3,974 in June 2013 (a 33 percent increase) and 3,455 in December 2012 (a 53 percent increase). State agency officials have found that Twitter can be used to engage certain target populations that might miss or be unresponsive to messages issued through other social media or more traditional means (including sometimes difficult to reach groups such as young black and Hispanic men).

YouTube. NYSDOL's YouTube Channel is another social media outreach and information tool (http://www.youtube.com/user/NYSLabor). NYSDOL posts videos on YouTube to attract potential (and existing) customers to the services and resources available through its website and at its physical locations. Also posted on You Tube are a range of videos developed in-house by NYSDOL aimed at informing job seekers and employers about services available through the AJC system. As of November 2014, NYSDOL had more than 50 videos available on its YouTube channel. The videos are seven minutes long and typically produced in English, but several are also available in Spanish (such as a recent Spanish-language video focusing on preparing effective resumes). The state workforce agency partners with other state agencies to share equipment needed to produce videos for uploading to YouTube. NYSDOL produces on average one to two videos per month for YouTube. The agency keeps production expenses low by using its own state-of-the-art video equipment and relying on two in-house videographers to film the videos. Typically, the agency does not contract out for production help, scriptwriting, or professional actors. As of November 2014, the department had

192 YouTube followers, which represented a 37 percent increase over the 140 followers it had in June 2013.

LinkedIn. To address the growth in customer use and awareness of LinkedIn, AJCs across the state offer two- to three-hour workshops focused on (1) helping UI claimants and other job seekers create an online professional LinkedIn profile, (2) using LinkedIn to develop a "marketable promotional brand" and (3) effectively using the networking and job board tools LinkedIn offers (https://www.linkedin.com/company/new-york-state-department-of-labor). Many AJCs use LinkedIn to create job club networking groups for job-seeking customers. As of November 2014, the state's LinkedIn site had 3,848 followers, a 76 percent increase over the number of followers in June 2013 (2,179) and a 135 percent increase over the number of followers in December 2012 (1,637).

Flickr, Pinterest, and Instagram. The NYSDOL Communications Unit has used Flickr, Pinterest (http://www.pinterest.com/nysdol/), and Instagram (http://instagram.com/nyslabor) to post albums and photos chronicling reemployment events and career fairs held throughout the state.. Over time, the Communications Unit has gravitated from using Flickr to using Pinterest and Instagram to post pictures of events hosted by NYSDOL. Although it does not use these tools as much as Facebook, Twitter, or LinkedIn, the agency has found that Pinterest and Instagram are useful for developing the "brand" of the state workforce agency and local AJCs. According to Communications Unit administrators, Instagram can help to project a "more casual" and "warmer" customer view of the state workforce agency and the various workforce programs and services provided. As of November 2014, NYSDOL reported 66 Instagram followers and 11 Pinterest followers.

SoundCloud. NYSDOL is one of the few public agencies nationwide that posts audio clips through SoundCloud (which is similar to YouTube but for audio). The department's first use of SoundCloud was its posting of the 81-track audio version of the complete Unemployment Insurance handbook. Subsequently, the Communications Office has posted several audio press releases and packages that are shared through other social media platforms, including Tumblr and Pinterest. The tracks have received more than 2,600 plays in just over a month.

Career Center Events Calendar. In June 2014, NYSDOL introduced an events calendar (using a Trumba software application) that is intended to provide a single electronic calendar of workforce events (workshops, recruitment events, career fairs) across the state. State workforce and Career Center (AJC) staff submit events to DEWS, where staff review and, if necessary, check back with submitters if vital information is missing or additional detail is needed before the event listing can be posted on the calendar. The new calendar application is intended to capture and publicize all Career Center events across the state, allowing customers the find workshops virtually anywhere in the state. This calendar also allows AJC staff to see what colleagues are offering around the state and share information. The events calendar is available through NYSDOL's website and is searchable by type of event, labor market region, Career Center, and date. At the time of the visit (June 2014), the electronic calendar had been fully tested and in operation for about two weeks. As of December 2014, 77 of the state's 94 Career Centers had submitted events to the calendar.

Virtual Career Fair. Beginning in July 2014, NYSDOL launched its virtual career fair events software platform developed by Expos2. This software allows NYSDOL's Business Services Unit to sponsor virtual career fairs on the Internet, bringing together up to 50 exhibitors (i.e., employers) and up to 5,000 job seekers. The software has features such as presentation and media sharing,

customizable event promotion, interactive Q&A, e-commerce tools, and video chat. The online chat capability allows employers and job seekers to send electronic text messages, which can either be shared with all attendees or privately between a job seeker and an employer. As of November 2014, NYSDOL had hosted six virtual career fairs with 42 businesses participating and 423 job seekers attending. The events ranged in size from a single business to 17 businesses. Event types have included a virtual customized recruitment, a National Disability Employment Awareness Month virtual career fair, and a virtual career fair for veterans. NYSDOL officials identified some potential advantages of the virtual career fair for the agency, employers, and seekers, including: (1) elimination of travel time and transportation costs, (2) elimination of employer costs associated with printing of posters and brochures, as well as setting up booths, (3) elimination of costs of renting a venue to host the event, (4) an ability to draw employers and job seekers from a wide geographic area, and (5) easy scanning and searching of available job openings by job seekers across all employers attending the career fair.

Live Chat. NYSDOL has used its social media grant to purchase Website Alive software to provide live career counseling services to job seekers and other interested individuals on NYSDOL's JobZone website. The software enables an agency operator to have up to four "chats" with customers ongoing at one time. Up to 10 operators can be online at one time fielding inquiries from the public. While similar in some respects to a telephone hotline, live chat offers several advantages: operators can handle multiple customers at a time, they can send out pre-prepared responses to common questions, and they can choose to provide web links electronically during the chat. The chat is live from Monday through Friday between the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The chat is staffed by career advisors from NYSDOL's Division of Employment and Workforce Solutions. Twenty NYS Career Center staff are trained as Live Chat operators with alternating one hour shifts. Four staff are trained as administrators and provide technical assistance and support to the operators during their shifts.

NYSDOL Website. The NYSDOL website (http://www.labor.ny.gov/) is the hub for all customer information. All marketing, social media, and public relations efforts direct the public to the NYSDOL's website where they can find specific information on workforce programs and services. In an effort to make the website more user-friendly and to better connect customers with the programs and services they need, the website was redesigned using grant resources to reflect the known search patterns of customers. Content has been adapted to redirect specific customer groups toward program information tailored to meet their specific needs and interests.

Social Media Staff Capacity-Building. NYSDOL hosts a Social Media community of practice (COP) with workforce professional staff. The COP meets regularly to discuss social media tools and how they promote effective service delivery to job seeker and business customers. The COP is open to frontline staff, supervisors, managers, and partner staff statewide. The meeting is held through videoconference and members discuss trends in social media tools such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and the impact they have on work search and workforce development efforts.

Links to New York's Social Media Tools

- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/nyslabor

- Twitter: @nyslabor

- YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/user/NYSLabor

- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/new-york-state-department-of-labor

- Instagram: http://instagram.com/nyslabor

- Pinterest: http://www.pinterest.com/nysdol/

- SoundCloud: https://soundcloud.com/nyslabor

- Website: http://www.labor.ny.gov/

Appendix B: Evaluation Design Options for Future Social Media Initiatives

This appendix discusses potential approaches to future evaluations of social media tools aimed at better assessing how these tools are being used by state and local workforce agencies, employers, job seekers, and the general public, as well as to better understand usage patterns, outcomes, net impacts, and costs of these tools. None of the grantees in this social media initiative have conducted implementation, outcome, impact, or cost-effectiveness evaluations of their social media grants—and none plan to do so, at least not in the near term. However, each of the states collects and regularly reviews statistics on usage and responses of customers to the social media tools. Social media applications (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter) provide those sponsoring and using tools with ongoing counts of users (e.g., "friends") and indications of satisfaction (e.g., "likes"). It is also possible to purchase software that pulls together statistics on usage trends and to some degree "performance" of various social media tools into one analytic package for monitoring and analysis purposes (e.g., primarily to produce graphs showing usage trends). For example, Idaho uses software to collect and monitor usage trends of several of the social media tools, including monthly and quarterly changes in "friending" and "likes" on the state's Facebook page. Among the types of usage information most relied on to determine how well each of the grantees' social media tools is "performing" is year-over-year changes in usage patterns.

While useful for understanding how customers are using and expanding use of the social media tools adopted by the state, usage statistics do not necessarily reveal how much usage has been driven by the grant (i.e., the adoption of new social media tools and usage increases may have occurred in these states without the grant). The states also observed during the research team's visits that many customers were familiar with social media tools and using them extensively for job search purposes before the grant was awarded. Even if states can document before and after trends in usage, such trending data does not provide evidence of how well the tools work for the intended users and their impact on employment, earnings, improved job search skills, increased education and training, and other outcomes. As discussed in the report, states were able to provide anecdotal evidence and qualitative assessments of the effects of the grants, which could be the focus of a future rigorous evaluation.

In this appendix, we examine the potential for using experimental and non-experimental research designs to more rigorously estimate net impacts of social media tools and the implementation of social media in the states. The appendix is divided into the following subsections: (1) an overview of potential outcomes that could be the focus of rigorous evaluation; (2) an assessment of the potential for experimental research designs; (3) an exploration of the potential for non-experimental research designs; (4) a discussion of the potential for further process/implementation evaluations; and (5) conclusions and recommendations for future evaluations of social media tool use by states and local workforce agencies.

Key Outcomes of Interest

Given that the goal of the social media interventions is to increase employment and earnings of job seekers, the focus of an evaluation would be on measuring whether changes in employment and earnings occurred as a result of using the social media tools (and would not have occurred in the

absence of the social media intervention). Thus, in addition to collecting usage data and identifying the specific users of each social media tool, potential outcome measures are (1) employment status (e.g., at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months from beginning of use of the social media tools); (2) hourly wage rates and hours worked (e.g., at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months from beginning of use of the social media tools); (3) quarterly earnings for up to three years; and (4) duration of UI benefits and amount of benefits received (if the focus of the study is on UI claimants).

While some impact evaluations use analysis of variance to compare outcomes for treatment and control group participants (e.g., the difference in means for the earnings between the treatment and control groups), multivariate techniques such as multiple regression often are used to compare outcomes after adjusting for a set of explanatory, or control, variables. There are several important reasons for using explanatory variables in multivariate models, including (1) to increase the precision of estimated program effects; (2) to control for "confounding factors" in non-experimental designs that would otherwise result in biased estimates of program effects; (3) to estimate interactions between individual characteristics (as captured by the explanatory variables) and program effects; and (4) to generally improve understanding of the determinants of outcomes for intervention participants.

Using Experimental Research Designs for Evaluating Social Media Tools.

Randomized social science experiments are a type of controlled experiment that happens outside a laboratory environment while using the same random assignment methods used for experiments in the physical and biological sciences. Experimental methods have a high degree of credibility, as randomization assures that those who experience the policy change (the treatment group) are, in all important ways, like those who do not experience it (the control group), except for the difference in the treatment or policy itself. The sample size must be adequate to ensure that differences in outcomes between the treatment and control groups are due to the treatment rather than chance.

There are two ways to conduct random assignment experiments. The first involves withholding services to a control group to test the treatment. The second involves enhancing the treatment such that the offer of the normal treatment becomes the control group, while the enhanced treatment becomes the treatment for the experimental group. Neither of these options may be viable for an evaluation of social media. Because the "service" is something that is widely available and accessible over the Internet, it would be difficult to withhold use of the tools or to "enhance" the tools for randomly selected groups.

Using Non-Experimental Research Designs for Evaluating Social Media Tools.

Two non-experimental approaches that do not involve random selection potentially could be used to evaluate social media interventions: (1) an instrumental variables approach known as "randomized encouragement" and (2) interrupted time series.

Given the difficulties of using experimental designs, it is worth considering using an instrumental variables approach known as "randomized encouragement."[12] In this approach, potential customers of

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[12] For a description of randomized encouragement, see S. G. West, D. Naihua, W. Pequegnat, P. Gaist, D. C. Des Jarlais, D. Holtgrave, J. Szapocnik, M. Fishbein, B. Rapkin, M. Clatts, and P. D. Mullen, P. D. (2008). "Alternatives to the Randomized Controlled Trial," *American Journal of Public Health*. 98, no. 8 (2008): 1359–1366.

the workforce system (for example job seekers) would be randomly divided into treatment and control groups. The treatment group would then be encouraged to use specific types of social media tools by providing them with information about such tools (for example, through emails to assist them in accessing the tools), while the control group would not receive any information on the tools. Note that in the randomized encouragement model, the treatment is not randomly assigned, but the encouragement to participate is randomly assigned; we use the terms treatment group and control group to refer to encouragement status, not participation status. Assuming that data on actual use of specific social media tools can be obtained, two-stage least squares, a form of instrumental variables estimation, can be used to estimate the impact of social media usage on the outcomes of interest. If the encouragement has the desired effect of increasing use of social media tools, then the conditions for use of instrumental variables are met, namely that the instrument is correlated with the treatment variable of interest (use of a social media tool or tools), but is not related to the outcome variable of interest in any other way (which is ensured by the random assignment to encouragement status).

The evaluation could be conducted as follows. First, a pool of potential job seekers must be identified and randomly assigned to encouragement treatment or control status. If, for example, a state UI office were willing to participate, targeted UI claimants or those who have registered for services could be assigned to encouragement status at the time they sign up, file their initial claim, or at some other pre-designated time (e.g., after the sixth week of the claim). Then, those in the treatment group would receive an inducement to use a particular social media tool or tools, while those in the control group would receive no inducement. This inducement would include, at a minimum, information on how and why to use a particular social media tool or tools. Stronger encouragement could include emailed links to the social media tools, offers of a free workshop on effective use of social media tools, and possibly financial or in-kind inducements (such as a bus/transportation pass or gift card). The evaluation would make use of encouragement status, participation status, information on the individual from the UI claim application, and wage records to estimate the impact of social media tool(s) use on employment and earnings outcomes.

There may, however, be practical issues that must be investigated before this approach could be deemed appropriate for an evaluation. In the illustration provided, for example, would a state UI agency agree to withholding information about social media tools to certain types of claimants if the agency thought such tools as LinkedIn, Twitter, or Facebook would be helpful in terms of facilitating job placement and decreasing duration of UI benefits receipt? Additionally, the randomized encouragement model is subject to the dangers of all instrumental variables estimation.[13] First, the instrument, random encouragement, may be a "weak instrument" in the sense that there is not a strong correlation between encouragement and participation; in this situation the evaluation is likely to produce very imprecise estimates or biased estimates. Second, the two-stage estimator is only asymptotically unbiased, meaning that it provides biased estimates of the impact for small samples. Third, two-stage least squares may produce biased estimates of the standard errors, although

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[13] J. D. Angrist and A. B. Krueger, "Instrumental Variables and the Search for Identification: From Supply and Demand to Natural Experiments," *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* 15, no. 4 (2001): 69-85; M. P. Murray, "Avoiding Invalid Instruments and Coping with Weak Instruments," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 20, no 4 (2006): 111-132.

approaches are available to correct for this. Another limitation of this proposed approach (if the group randomized to receive encouragement is UI claimants) is that study results are applicable only for this group. There is no way to tell if the impacts estimated would apply to other groups of job seekers, employers, or other workforce system customers. Although not ideal, given the unlikelihood of being able to perform a standard experimental evaluation to measure the impacts of social media tools, a randomized encouragement evaluation approach is worth exploring.

Another potential approach for estimating the impact of social media tools is using an interrupted time series. In this approach, aggregate outcome variables, such as the number of claimants whose spell ends each month, are measured over a number of months including a substantial number of months before and after introduction of the social media tool. Explanatory variables would measure the characteristics of the claimants, economic conditions, and changes in the UI system. Time series regressions would then be estimated where the dependent variable would be the outcome of interest (e.g., number of spells ending) and the explanatory variables would be the claimant characteristics, UI program characteristics that vary, and economic condition variables available. This approach has been widely used for evaluations estimating the impact of welfare reforms on the size of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload, but the use of these models has been somewhat controversial. In studies of the impact of major welfare reform legislation on the reduction in the caseload, researchers have noted that plausible variations in the model can lead to major changes in the estimated impact of the reforms.[14] We are not aware of similar models being estimated for the effect of social media usage on employment outcomes for UI claimants or others, but we are not optimistic about this approach because we do not necessarily expect dramatic impacts from the use of social media tools.

Among the potential explanatory variables (collected on each individual involved in an experimental/non-experimental study) that would likely be needed and should be considered for collection are (1) demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, disability status); (2) educational attainment and credentials (e.g., highest grade level or degree achieved); (3) previous work history and earnings (e.g., occupation, hours worked, wages/earnings, number of months unemployed before random assignment); and (4) environmental-specific factors (e.g., economic characteristics of the labor market in which the customer is seeking employment).

Most of these data items would likely be available for job seekers registered with the state's Wagner-Peyser program, WIOA participants, and UI claimants, though as discussed below, it would be difficult to randomly assign individuals to treatment and control groups because of difficulties withholding use of social media tools to randomly selected control group members.

Using Process/Implementation Evaluation Designs for Evaluating Social Media Tools

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[14]   Rebecca M. Blank, "Evaluating Welfare Reform in the United States," *Journal of Economic Literature,* 40, no. 4 (2002): 1105-1166. See the discussion on pages 1124-1139 on the difficulties of constructing econometric models and how the results of past studies vary.

A process/implementation evaluation involves the systematic collection and synthesis of information on the program environment and processes. [15] A recent World Bank publication provides a working definition of "process evaluation":

> …A process evaluation is an evaluation that tries to establish the level of quality or success of the processes of a program; for example, adequacy of the administrative processes, acceptability of the program benefits, clarity of the information campaign, internal dynamics of implementing organizations, their policy instruments, their service delivery mechanisms, their management practices, and the linkages among these.[16]

Similarly, Holcolmb and Nightingale note that the "term implementation analysis is used as an umbrella term referring to a range of studies that address the ways public policies are developed and implemented—from the early stages when legislation is formulated and regulations developed, to the actual delivery of services at the grass roots level, and all administrative, political, and operational stages in between."

To assess social media tool(s) used by state and local workforce agencies, a process/implementation evaluation could be initiated as a stand-alone study or as a component of a comprehensive impact evaluation effort. Such process/implementation evaluations—which provide contextual information to support analyses of program outcomes and costs—would be complementary to the non-experimental research design (using randomized encouragement) discussed earlier. Additionally, such studies might also provide feedback that could be helpful in identifying differences in how social media tools are used across state and local workforce areas. Such a study, while perhaps including one or more of the three states receiving grants, could be expanded to include other states and localities not receiving grants. One of the limitations of the current study, for example, is that it did not include comparison states (i.e., those not receiving DOL social media grants) making it difficult to determine, in the absence of the grants, how the states would have moved forward with expanding use of social media tools and/or would have experienced similar increases in usage. Inclusion of other study states and localities would provide an opportunity for capturing a more representative picture of ways in which social media tools have been used in the workforce system.

A first step in planning a process evaluation of social media tools would be to determine the key evaluation questions that would be the focus of the effort, and then to tailor the types of data collection and analysis activities to address the questions. Once the overall purpose and key evaluation questions have been determined, the next step in the planning process is to identify

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[15]   P. A. Holcomb and D. S. Nightingale, "Conceptual Underpinnings of Implementation Analysis," in *Policy into Action: Implementation Research and Welfare Reform,* eds. Mary Claire Lennon and Thomas Corbett, (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute Press, 2003). Holcomb and Nightingale observe that "research that describes and explains how programs, policies, and procedures are translated into operation goes by different names: implementation research, process analysis, management research, organizational analysis, case study research, or simply qualitative research." In this report we primarily use the term "process" or "implementation" research.

[16]   P. J. Gertler, S. Martinez, P. Premand, L. B. Rawlings, and C. M. Vermeersch, *Impact Evaluation in Practice*, (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2011).

specific types of data collection to be undertaken. Common data collection methods employed in a process evaluation, which could be readily applied to assessment of social media tools used by state and local workforce agencies, include (1) site visits; (2) focus groups with social media users and non-users; (3) customer satisfaction surveys with social media users; and (4) collection and analysis of usage data. Each of these major types of data collection activities are briefly discussed below in relation to evaluating social media tools.

Site Visits. The overall goal of observational visits would be to determine how social media tools have been designed and implemented, as well as how they are used by workforce agencies, job seekers, employers, and other customers of the workforce system. Such visits could also be used to examine local context for implementation of social media tools, which social media tools are used and how they are used; to train administrators/staff and customers on appropriate use of each of the tools; to learn how the tools are marketed to the customer base (including employers, job seekers, and the media) to examine social media usage trends and how social media tool use is related to increased/decreased use of other employment and training services (e.g., resume workshops); to learn the perspective of administrators and staff on the utility of these tools for the agency and its customer base and to understand developmental and ongoing costs of using social media tools.

During the planning phase for such site visits, it would be critical to determine the number of state and local workforce agencies to be observed and how these entities are to be selected. If the findings from the study are to be used to determine how social media tools operate generally in state and local workforce areas, a representative sample would be desirable and could be selected by picking a (possibly stratified) random sample of states and local workforce agencies. There is no exact number of site visits that should be selected, with the number to be conducted governed by available budget, the extent of variability in the types of social media tools used, and the extent to which there is a desire to capture diversity of state and local workforce areas. A good starting point might be to conduct site visits at 8 to 10 local workforce areas, then gauge the extent of variation in implementation of social media tools and if these tools are meeting the needs of the state and local workforce agencies, as well as the customer base at which they are aimed (e.g., job seekers and employers).[17]

An observational site visit guide(s) should be developed to ensure that site visitors are observing state and local workforce agencies on the same factors/dimensions and using the same scale for their ratings on factors. In planning for site visits, separate discussion guides should be developed to guide discussions with different types of respondents (e.g., administrators, staff, job seekers, employers). During visits, semi-structured interviews should be conducted with program administrators and staff to gain their input on use of social media tools, the time allocated to various tasks and activities associated with the social media tools (e.g., developing substantive content, posting tweets and other content to social media sites, responding to inquiries, collecting/analyzing social media usage data), the challenges of using social media tools for agency staff and customers, and suggestions for improving social media tools in workforce programs. Following each visit, a brief site visit report or tables on site characteristics and key dimensions of social media tool use should be prepared to support and facilitate cross-site analyses and synthesis.

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[17]   Given that there are more than 500 local workforce areas (and thousands of AJCs), a much larger sample size would be needed to provide a representative sample.

Focus Groups with Social Media Users and Non-users. As part of the site visit, or separately, focus groups could be conducted with customers who use and those who do not use social media tools. Focus groups would provide an excellent and relatively low-cost opportunity to collect job seeker, employer, and other customer views on why they use (or do not use) such tools, which tools are used and for what purposes, and how such tools are helpful (or not helpful) for planning a job search and securing a job. Krueger and Casey note the importance of conducting focus groups for a variety of evaluation efforts: "Focus groups are a wonderful method for gathering information for formative and summative evaluations. But don't limit your use of focus groups to the time after a program is implemented or completed. Focus group interviews are also valuable for getting information in the design phases of programs, policies, and even evaluations."[18]

Such focus groups would likely provide further explanations of what might be observed during site visits to state and local workforce agencies, as well as what might be found in analyses of customer satisfaction surveys and administrative data on participant outcomes, and other data collection activities. For example, focus groups with social media users may help in better understanding how participants react to each tool and which tools are considered to be the most and the least important or helpful (and why), and what users would change about the workforce systems social media tools. Additionally, focus groups with job seekers, including those not using social media tools (as well as separate focus groups with employers) would be helpful from the standpoint of better understanding user knowledge of the available tools and why attendees do or do not opt to use specific social media tools.

The steps involved in planning focus groups are relatively similar regardless of the types of individuals included in the group. The first planning step involves determining the scope and purpose of the focus groups, particularly in terms of the study questions each group can effectively address. Once the objectives of each focus group are determined, the next step would be to determine the number of focus groups to be held and the location for each. The number of focus groups to conduct is subjective, though in all likelihood a good starting point would be to conduct five to seven focus groups (each involving 8 to 12 participants). A third planning step would be to develop discussion guides to provide structure to focus groups and ensure that critical topics are covered.

Customer Satisfaction Follow-up Surveys. Customer satisfaction surveys are one method available to determine and track job seekers, UI claimant, and other customer use of and perspectives on social media tools. Such customer satisfaction surveys, which can be ongoing or conducted periodically (once yearly or quarterly), can be conducted by various means—in-person, by mail, by telephone, or over the Internet. Using an Internet application, a survey could be easily (and inexpensively) delivered to participants and, depending on the software used, results could be instantaneously tabulated by question as survey responses are completed. The advantage of in-person surveys (for example, administered during the last 10 minutes of a workshop at an AJC) is that the response rate is likely to be high (though the particular meeting may not be representative of individuals using or not using social media tools). In developing customer satisfaction surveys, care should be taken to ensure

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[18] R. A. Krueger and M. A. Casey, "Focus Group Interviewing" in *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation (Third Edition)*. eds. J. S. Wholey, H. P. Hatry, and K. E. Newcomer, (San Francisco,: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

that the survey is not overly burdensome (e.g., can be completed in not more than about 10 to 15 minutes).

Track Utilization Trends. As discussed earlier, the three states receiving social media grants regularly monitored and analyzed customer usage trends for each of the social media tools implemented. Such data and trend analyses are relatively easy to generate and analyze using capabilities built into each social media tool, as well as by purchasing an analysis software application (such as the Hootsuite used in Idaho) that brings together usage data from all of the major social media tools and facilitates comparative analysis of usage trends over time.

Conclusion

Overall, because social media tools are widely available and accessible over the Internet, it is difficult to withhold use of the tools or to "enhance" the tools for randomly selected groups, making the prospects appear to be poor for experimental evaluation of the effects of social media tools on job seekers and other customers of the workforce system. With respect to non-experimental study designs, while an interrupted time series research design may be feasible, we are not optimistic that it will be adequate. A "randomized encouragement" design shows some potential and we would recommend that this approach be explored. An interrupted time approach could also be explored.

Perhaps the most promising (and feasible) next step from an evaluation perspective would be to conduct a more comprehensive process/implementation study of the use of social media tools by state and local workforce systems. Such a study should be aimed at providing a more representative picture of current social media use within and across states (i.e., beyond the three states included in this study). A process/implementation study would be applicable to periodic efforts to assess and track social media tools over time, as well as to identify strengths and weaknesses and challenges of using social media tools from varying perspectives (e.g., job seekers, claimants, employers, and workforce administrators and staff). Such studies, particularly if collected over time, could help to identify ways in which social media tools are exceeding or falling short of expectations from various perspectives, identify potential approaches to improving use of social media tools among customers of the workforce system (e.g., job seekers and employers), and spur replication efforts in other states and local workforce systems. Finally, states and local workforce agencies using social media tools should be encouraged to continue their use of various tools available for monitoring social media usage patterns over time (including numbers of users, ways in which various tools are being used, and subpopulations using various tools).