Getting the Message Out:
Disseminating Labor Market Information

Over the years, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has made large investments in developing labor market information (LMI) to shed light on economic conditions and ensure a well-functioning labor market. This information includes the number of people employed, unemployment rates, average wages, income, occupational projections, and other data. LMI can affect workers' education and training decisions; employers' investment decisions; and economic development strategies of local, state, and federal agencies. Recent interest in the green jobs sector spurred DOL to fund 30 grants to state workforce agencies to improve LMI on these jobs and develop practices for possible broader use and impact. This brief reports on lessons from the grantees' efforts to disseminate LMI created during the 18-month grant period.

Like any type of research data, LMI has the potential to help people make key decisions, but it has no impact unless it reaches the intended audiences. Effective dissemination begins with strategic planning to connect with stakeholders and includes (1) developing dissemina-tion plans unique to each product, (2) planning dissemination efforts early, (3) leveraging partnerships, and (4) measuring effectiveness.

Develop Dissemination Plan

The following steps are key to dissemination planning:

- **Identify the audience(s).** LMI is potentially of interest to various groups of end users, including job seekers; educational institutions; community-based organizations that offer training and support services; and labor, economic development, and industry organizations. Each may benefit from different types of information. For example, LMI on employer demand for green workers and existing skills of the labor force may be of interest to multiple groups, but the precise questions of interest will vary. Job seekers may want to know about in-demand occupations, while community colleges may need information on gaps between employer demand and job seekers' skills.

- **Consider accessibility.** It's important to ensure that the level of detail is appropriate and the findings are relevant for the target audiences. Effective dissemination may require packaging information in multiple forms. For example, a white paper may be appropriate for policymakers tasked with making key decisions. For job seekers, the same information may be more useful packaged as an interactive tool. Regardless of the audience, grantees in our study found that disseminating long technical reports was challenging.

- **Identify methods to reach targeted audiences.** Disseminating LMI often requires multiple techniques. Your intended audience will drive the method for getting the product or information out. For example, one grantee that was marketing an enhanced labor exchange to several groups (1) held trainings to show frontline staff at American Job Centers how to access and use the tool, and (2) distributed bookmarks with the URL of the tool to community organizers and local leaders who, in turn, could reach job seekers. Other grantees hosted conferences to reach targeted audiences.

Work Plan for Dissemination

1. **Identify Goals and Audiences**
2. **Start Early to Develop a Realistic Time Plan**
3. **Reach Out to Partners**
4. **Measure Impact**

- **Consider timing.** Your dissemination planning should consider any key decisions pending in the state/region. Consider scheduling dissemination during events such as conferences. Releasing LMI at established conferences can help stakeholders receive key messages.

Plan Early

Early planning can facilitate successful dissemination. Take timing and costs into account, and anticipate the need for ongoing efforts:

- **Develop a realistic timeline.** Successful dissemination takes time and may require more than a year of planning, particularly if the process involves coordination with partners.

- **Include production and dissemination in the budget.** Many grant budgets include data collection and analysis, but production and dissemination sometimes are overlooked. Budget for dissemination at the grant application stage. For example, consider costs associated with social media, distributing information on flash drives, making presentations, and hosting conferences, and budget for all of them. Grantees in our study underestimated costs related to production.

- **Plan for ongoing dissemination.** Some LMI published as reports is static, while other LMI needs to be continually accessible to users. Planning for the costs of these ongoing efforts is important. To reach job seekers, some grantees in our study used portals that provided information on green careers, training programs, and job listings. Outside vendors may charge ongoing fees for such portals. Other grantees used social media, such as regular tweets and blog posts, to make stakeholders aware of LMI. Using social media effectively may involve costs for staff members' time.

Leverage Partnerships

Leveraging partnerships is important to dissemination. Grantees were encouraged to develop strategic partnerships with research entities, Workforce Investment Boards, employers, and educational institutions to realize grant goals. These partnerships provided real value, with partners playing key roles in creating and disseminating LMI. Consider doing the following:

- **Seek partners' input on products.** Partners may bring important perspective on accessibility of LMI products and planned dissemination strategies. Educational partners, for example, may understand how to package and distribute LMI for community colleges to ensure that it affects schools' planning decisions and students' career planning choices.

- **Use partners to reach stakeholders.** Partners may have access to different stakeholders and mailing lists than

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LMI shops do. Partners may be able to disseminate information at their stakeholder conferences or trainings.

- **Take advantage of partnership flexibility.** Partners outside of state government may have additional flexibility that facilitates quick dissemination. It may be easier for them to secure and design new websites, issue press releases, and use social media.

Measure Effectiveness

Data on the use and reach of LMI are important for measuring effectiveness. Developing tracking methods for dissemination activities also helps improve these efforts over time. Consider doing

the following:

- **Monitor distribution of products.** For printed products such as brochures and reports, tracking the number distributed and the location of distribution provides a basic understanding of reach. One grantee tracked the number of requests for publications as well as the number of LMI publications distributed by partners and used this information to understand how LMI was reaching customers.

- **Track website traffic.** Tools such as Google Analytics or other tracking software can determine how many times a website is visited, how long pages are viewed, and the number of times a document is downloaded. You can also use web analytics to determine whether user traffic increases as a result of a marketing campaign. One consortium hired a for-profit partner to develop reporting capabilities to track web traffic and other user information. Analytics can also indicate how individuals reach a site, which may provide additional information about the success of dissemination and suggest possibilities for the future.

- **Use customer surveys.** LMI shops are already required to assess customer satisfaction. A survey of job seekers or American Job Center customers could examine job seekers' utilization or familiarity with particular LMI tools or products. It could include questions about how job seekers learned about specific career tools or other LMI products to assess the effectiveness of outreach efforts.

Effective dissemination can help spread knowledge and maximize the impact of research. The techniques used by grantees in our study illustrate real-world techniques for disseminating a variety of new and existing LMI products to users.

Read more about Mathematica's study at www.mathematica-mpr.com/labor/green_jobs_economic_growth.asp.