Using Labor Market Information to Address Rural Workforce Challenges

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Agenda

• Placing Extension within the landscape of workforce development
• Integrating labor market information (LMI) into workforce development planning process
• Introducing the Future Opportunities for Rural Workforce and Rural Development (FORWARD) Curriculum as resource for extension professionals
Extension’s role in workforce development
Common rural workforce challenges

• Rural employers have a hard time finding workers, and especially skilled workers

• Rural communities often have limited access to training and education
  • Rural students are under-represented in post-secondary education
  • Rural workers are underserved by workforce development programs

• Extension’s role in addressing workforce issues is uneven
  • Workforce is not an extension focus in all states
  • Many extension educators have limited experience with workforce issues
State Funding & Programs
- Pipeline training grants
- Incumbent worker training
- Youth employment programs

Federal Funding & Programs:
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act
- Pell
- Perkins
- Wagner-Peyser Act
- SNAP E&T
- TANF Employment & Training
- Rehabilitation Services
- USDOL Employment and training administration grants

State Laws, Rules, Policies

State boards Determine state-level policies to guide use of funds

Local boards convene partners and industry sectors, guide use of funding, charter American Job Centers, analyze market data and collect and manage performance data. Elected officials serve on these boards.

American Job Centers provide services: coaching, job search, referral, assistance for companies with filling positions. Co-located with UI services funded through the Wagner Peyser.

- e.g., Community Colleges, Proprietary Training, social support organizations (e.g., goodwill international, re-entry programs, etc.)

• Job Seekers + Employers

Contract service providers

American Job Centers/Career Centers

Local Workforce Development Boards

Chief Elected Officials

State Workforce Board

State Agencies

Source: Adapted from Snyder, 2021
Know the landscape and find your role

- Partners can come from education, government, community organizations, or local influencers

- Engaging with other workforce actors can:
  - **Help** by providing potential partners, networks and resources, or
  - **Hinder** through unnecessary competition, redundant activities, or creating confusion.

- Find ways to support, rather than duplicate other regional efforts.

- Good roles for extension include:
  - Leadership and project management
  - Facilitating local initiatives and planning efforts
  - Niche programming
  - **Applied research**
What is Labor Market Information?
Labor Market Information (LMI) includes data track how the labor market functions & determines the supply/demand of labor.

• This information can help us answer many common questions, including:
  • What industries drive my economy?
  • What does my workforce look like, & what can they do?
  • How far do people travel to work?
  • What kind of workers do my region’s employers need now, & in the future?
  • What types of policies & investments should my community, region, state make to grow the workforce?
  • What do I need to know to select a career or find a job?
Main Suppliers of Labor Market Information

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (DoL)
- “Counts the Jobs”
- National Programs
- Federal/State Cooperative Programs

Employment & Training Administration (DoL)
- Workforce Information Grant
- Program Administrative Data
- O*NET

State LMI Agencies

U.S. Census Bureau
- “Counts the People” (among many other things)
- US Commerce Dept.

U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
- “Counts the Money”
- US Commerce Dept.

Private Sources & Proprietary Data Vendors
- Data Aggregators
- Economic Modelers
- ‘Real-Time LMI’
Different LMI user groups

• **Students and jobseekers** use data to find and select career and job opportunities;

• **Employers** use LMI to understand local prevailing wages for a given occupation;

• **Counselors** need information to place students and workers in jobs and careers;

• **Education and training providers** use LMI to help determine the courses and programs they offer, and

• **Community leaders** use LMI to inform workforce training and economic development investment decisions.
Data User Perspective: Characteristics of “Good Data”

How do different users define each?

Accurate

Current

Detailed Variables & Geography

Accessible

The data users’ “sweet spot”
Incorporating Labor Market Information into Your Workforce Efforts
Developing the necessary information requires several steps

**Set the direction**
- Understand the priorities of community leaders
- Develop research plan that speaks to those priorities
- Consider how the information can help build support

**Examine key issues & focus areas**
- Determine strategic focus
  - Target industry (e.g., construction) or occupational (e.g., IT) focus
  - Specific populations (e.g., Youth, disabled, etc.)

**Frame data for different audiences**
- Customize information according to participant needs
  - Stakeholders: Emphasis on labor market conditions
  - Jobseekers: Focus on employment opportunities & career exploration

**Validate data**
- Build in multiple feedback opportunities for stakeholders (e.g., employers, instructors)
- Use feedback to identify critical information & remaining information gaps.
Your efforts will garner more support if they align with how the community prioritizes jobs.

• **Good paying jobs**: Look at jobs that pay above the median wage, or a family-sustaining wage.

• **Middle-skill jobs**: Emphasize jobs that require more than high school, less than a 4-year degree, & some OJT.

• **Pathway jobs**: Identify jobs that, with incremental education & training, can provide steppingstones to other higher-paying jobs.

• **High demand jobs**: Focus on jobs that have grown & are projected to grow.

• **Cross-cutting occupations**: Select occupations that are in-demand across multiple industries.

• **Uniquely competitive occupations**: Examine occupations that are relatively concentrated in your region (using LQs).

• **Diversity & Inclusion**: Consider jobs that employ people of different age, gender, race & ethnicity.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Data Element</th>
<th>Extension Educator</th>
<th>WF-ED Professional</th>
<th>Community Leader</th>
<th>Educators &amp; Counselors</th>
<th>Employers</th>
<th>Jobseekers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population Trends &amp;</td>
<td>1a. Population trends</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Characteristics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1c. Age characteristics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1d. Gender composition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1e. Racial and ethnic diversity</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>1f. Per capita income</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>1g. Poverty</td>
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<td>2c. Labor force participation rate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2d. Educational attainment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2e. Commuting patterns</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>3a. Current industry demand</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>3b. Industry demographics</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>3c. Measuring entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>4b. Industry staffing patterns</td>
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<td>4c. Occupational projections</td>
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<td>4d. Occupational requirements (O*Net)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>4e. Online job postings</td>
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<td>5a. Post-secondary completers</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>5b. Professional credentials</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Other sources</td>
<td>6a. Focus groups and interviews</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>6b. Other data resources</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- No one size fits all research, as it may vary by:
  - Issue
  - User

- Some users need general labor market, while others need more job-specific information.
Building career pathways programs requires an array of participants & they each have different information needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Jobseekers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• e.g., community leaders, ED/WF professionals, extension educators, etc.</td>
<td>• e.g., students, incumbent or displaced workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need wider array of LMI that address both labor supply and demand</td>
<td>• Need more targeted information that guides their career exploration or job search</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Used to highlight workforce challenges, or to build support (financial or otherwise) for workforce strategies.</td>
<td>• Concise information to answer straight forward questions (e.g., How much should I expect to make in this job?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing the necessary information requires several steps

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- **Validate data**
  - Build in multiple feedback opportunities for stakeholders (e.g., employers, instructors)
  - Use feedback to identify critical information & remaining information gaps.
Validating this information with employers or other key stakeholders will strengthen your efforts

- Qualitative data can help interpret your findings
  - Quantitative data shows patterns, qualitative helps explain underlying processes.
- These conversations can add important or missing details to your understanding of workforce issues and challenges.
- Specific examples can also make your story more compelling, by ‘putting a face on data’.

- Engaging stakeholders and private sector leaders in your research can help build support for your subsequent efforts.
- Creating feedback loops on what works or does not work—in the past, present and future—can strengthen the effectiveness of your strategies.
The Future Opportunities for Rural Workforce and Rural Development (FORWARD) Curriculum
The full FORWARD curriculum is available through the Community Development Extension Library

The FORWARD Curriculum
Introduction: Moving Communities FORWARD

Module 1: Developing Key Partnerships

Module 2: Identifying Workforce Assets and Needs

Module 3: Mapping Pathways to Economic Mobility

Module 4: Recruiting and Supporting Rural Learners

Module 5: Evaluation and Reflection

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Michael D. Wilcox, Jr., Ph.D., Purdue University

- https://cdextlibrary.org/resource-library/forward/
- Or just Google: “Community Development Extension Library” and “FORWARD”
Resources available through the FORWARD Curriculum

MODULE 2: Identifying Workforce Assets and Needs

Labor Market Information Resource Guide

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SOURCE: Mark C. White, Ph.D.
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This guide can support community or regional workforce initiatives by:

• Directing users toward data tools and resources that will allow them to answer key labor market questions.

• Describing how these data are produced and what they show.

• Identifying any important caveats for which users must be aware when using these data.
The full FORWARD curriculum is available through the Community Development Extension Library

**The FORWARD Curriculum**
Introduction: Moving Communities FORWARD
- [curriculum](#) (pdf)

**Module 1: Developing Key Partnerships**
- [curriculum](#) (pdf) | [slides](#) (pptx)

**Module 2: Identifying Workforce Assets and Needs**
- [curriculum](#) (pdf) | [slides](#) (pptx) | [workbook](#) (xlsx)

**Module 3: Mapping Pathways to Economic Mobility**
- [curriculum](#) (pdf) | [slides](#) (pptx)

**Module 4: Recruiting and Supporting Rural Learners**
- [curriculum](#) (pdf) | [slides](#) (pptx) | [handouts](#) (pdf)

**Module 5: Evaluation and Reflection**
- [curriculum](#) (pdf)

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Concluding Thoughts
A few key takeaways

• Make sure you know your region’s workforce landscape before diving into any significant workforce initiative.

• Integrate labor market information (LMI) into your workforce development planning process, but make sure it fits with your community’s priorities and informs its actions.

• The FORWARD Curriculum can serve as a resource to help extension professionals get started
Just as your community workforce efforts will require partners, so too should your labor market research.

• Organizers should actively engage others (e.g., employers, community leaders, subject matter experts, etc.) to help interpret and validate the information and findings.

• Develop a relationship with your state’s LMI agency, as they can help you more effectively access, understand, and use labor market data and information.
  • Find your state’s LMI agency here: https://www.lmiontheweb.org/what-we-do/agency-directory/
Thank you.

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