

Workforce Information Annual Research Report 2004-2005



July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



MISSOURI ECONOMIC RESEARCH & INFORMATION CENTER

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MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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Purpose

The purpose of this annual research report is to describe the core workforce information products and services that were provided to our customers, in support of the State of Missouri's overall workforce development plans.

Report Period

July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005

Report Narrative

The annual report is organized into three sections. The first section outlines our accomplishments for the core products and services. The second section describes our customer satisfaction assessment. The third section discusses recommendations for improving our core products and services. The fourth section presented the results of Missouri's Labor Market Information Review, which was conducted by our regional Employment and Training Administration office for the U.S. Department of Labor.

SECTION A

**WORKFORCE INFORMATION CORE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES
ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Core Product 1 - ALMIS Database

Description

Continue to populate the ALMIS (America's Labor Market Information System) database with Missouri data.

Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan

MERIC's ALMIS products support three goals of Missouri's Wagner-Peyser Strategic Plan. Activities supporting *universal access* and *lifelong learning/choice* include populating the ALMIS database and deploying it on MERIC's website to ensure labor market information is provided to businesses, job seekers, students, education and training professionals, policy makers, and citizens. Activities supporting *integration* include populating and using the ALMIS database to support the integration of state economic and workforce development policy interventions by: (a) identifying targeted industries and occupations; (b) identifying historic and future economic trends; (c) identifying economically distressed communities; and (d) providing source data for SWIB/SWA analysis products.

Principal Customers

The principal customers of MERIC's ALMIS products include: (a) Employment and Training Administration, US Department of Labor; (b) Missouri Training and Employment Council (SWIB) and all ten local WIBs; (c) Missouri Department of Economic Development (SWA); (d) education and training agencies; (e) business and industry; and (f) the general public not served by any of the above customers.

Costs

\$65,000 in ETA LMI One-Stop Funds.

Accomplishments

Populated the ALMIS database with Missouri labor market data, specifically OES, Projections, InfoUSA, ONET, and QCEW data.

Upgraded the ALMIS database structure by converting to ORACLE 10G and upgrading to ALMIS 2.3.

Upgraded the memory and storage capacity of the server hosting the ALMIS database.

ALMIS was used to populate content and data extraction on the MERIC website, although this was done indirectly because of technical compatibility issues within DED.

Continued to participate in various ALMIS consortia and conferences.

Deliverables Not Met

None

Core Product 2 - Employment Projections

Description

Produce and disseminate industry and occupation employment projections.

Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan

MERIC's projections products support two goals of Missouri's Wagner-Peyser Strategic Plan. Activities supporting *lifelong learning/choice* include creating projections data and analysis products to assist: (a) job seekers in finding careers with a good outlook; and (b) students in exploring career options. Activities supporting *integration* include creating projections data and analysis products to assist: (a) economic and workforce development agencies in program planning, resource allocation and research; and (b) education and training agencies in curricula planning and resource allocation.

Principal Customers

The principal customers of MERIC's projections products include: (a) job seekers and students looking for career information; (b) Missouri Department of Economic Development (SWA); (c) Missouri Training and Employment Council (SWIB) and all ten local WIBs; (d) education and training agencies; (e) Employment and Training Administration, US Department of Labor; (f) business and industry; and (g) the general public not served by any of the above customers.

Costs

\$185,000 in ETA LMI One-Stop Funds.

Accomplishments

Completed long-term employment outlook brochures for ten WIAs for 2000-2010 and disseminated across the state.

Completed long-term industry projections for the state and ten WIAs for 2002-2012, which took through July 2005 to finalize.

Completed long-term occupation projections for the state and ten WIAs for 2002-2012, which took through July 2005 to finalize.

Completed short-term industry projections for the state for 2003-2005 and 2004-2006.

Completed short-term occupation projections for the state for 2003-2005 and 2004-2006.

Completed 4 Occupation Highlights brochures, which describe occupational employment and trends statewide for (i) All Careers, (ii) High School Careers, (iii) High School + 2 Careers, and (iv) High School + 4 Careers.

Completed ad hoc Occupational Profiles, which provide in-depth analysis of a given occupation statewide and by WIA.

Completed Career Report Cards, which describes the state's long-term occupational outlook statewide for A, B, C, D and F careers.

Completed WIA-level Career Report Cards and Occupation Highlights brochures for selected WIAs. Not all WIAs were completed due to delay in WIA employment projections. These will be produced in PY-05.

Completed A+ Career posters, which highlight top long-term career outlooks statewide, but did not print and disseminate in PY-04 due to change in DED administration. These will be produced in PY-05.

Completed 2 Hot Jobs posters, which highlight top short-term career outlooks statewide for (i) all Hot Jobs and (ii) Education Hot Jobs.

Completed Target Occupations research, which identify nationally competitive occupations statewide and by WIA, but did not print and disseminate in PY-04 due to lack of customer demand.

Completed ad hoc Industry Profiles, which provide in-depth analysis of a given industry statewide and by WIA for selected industries.

Completed Industry Report Cards, which describes a region's long-term industry outlook statewide, but did not print and disseminate in PY-04 due to lack of customer demand.

Completed Target Industries, which identify nationally competitive industries statewide and by WIA, but did not print and disseminate in PY-04 due to lack of customer demand.

Completed Advanced Manufacturing Target Industry report for Missouri and by county.

Completed Life Science Target Industry report for Missouri and by county.

Completed Information Technology Target Industry report for Missouri and by county.

Completed Automobile Manufacturing Target Industry report for Missouri and by county.

Deliverables Not Met

Industry Highlights, which describe industry employment and trends statewide and by WIA, were not completed due to lack of customer demand. There are no plans to produce these products unless customer demand is indicated.

Core Product 3 - Occupation and Career Products

Description

Provide occupational and career information products for public use.

Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan

MERIC's career products support three goals of Missouri's Wagner-Peyser Strategic Plan. Activities supporting *universal access* include making career data and products available to job seekers, students, education and training professionals, and policy makers through: (a) web access, (b) print and digital media, and (c) presentations. Activities supporting *lifelong learning/choice* include creating career products to assist: (a) job seekers in finding careers with a good outlook; and (b) students in exploring careers options. Activities supporting *integration* include creating projections data and analysis products to assist education and training agencies in curricula planning and resource allocation.

Principal Customers

The principal customers of MERIC's career products include: (a) job seekers and students looking for career information; (b) Missouri Department of Economic Development (SWA); (c) education and training agencies; (d) Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; and (e) the general public not served by any of the above customers.

Costs

\$160,000 in ETA LMI One-Stop Funds.

Accomplishments

Completed Career Path CD targeted to 13-19 year olds for the Arts and Communication Career Path. Customer demand for this product is currently being assessed before continued development.

Conceptually developed the Star Posters product, which has Missouri notables giving career advice. Development of this product was delayed due to changes in DED administration. These will be produced in PY-05.

Completed the Missouri Benefits Survey, and currently working with other states to share our methods and tools.

Missouri was the lead state in the national Benefits Survey Consortium, which included oversight and programming expertise.

Provided Choices Career Information Delivery System to high schools, workforce development entities, vocational rehabilitation offices and higher education institutions.

Completed LMI For Students by Students brochures with one vocational-technical school. This will be expanding in PY-05.

Completed the Education Pays research brief and poster for use in Career Centers and in schools.

Participated in the Career Management Website Task Force with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Deliverables Not Met

Developed a new format for the Missouri Statewide Career Guide, yet the final product was not completed in PY-04. The Missouri Regional Guide was also not completed in PY-04. The Missouri Career Guide will be produced in PY-05.

The Real Game series, a career planning game for grades 3-12 and adults, was not completed due to the limited resources of outreach and training staff.

Core Product 4 – WIB Support

Description

Ensure that workforce information and support to state and local workforce investment boards are provided.

Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan

MERIC's SWIB/SWA analysis products support three goals of Missouri's Wagner-Peyser Strategic Plan. *Lifelong learning/choice* is supported by providing Missouri's SWIB/SWA with the following products to assist job seekers: (a) skills-based analyses to facilitate training decisions and career transitions; (b) job vacancy surveys to provide more current estimates of labor demand; (c) self-sufficiency analyses to benchmark careers to a livable wage; and (d) labor shed and commuting analyses to identify where jobs are located and estimate commuting costs. *Integration* is supported by providing Missouri's SWIB/SWA with the following products to assist program planning and resource allocation: (a) WIA Gap Analyses to identify current and future needs in the local area, and to research special topics of interest; (b) Local Employment Dynamics to provide quarterly workforce indicators on job creation, destruction and turnover; (c) labor shed and commuting analyses to understand worker flows for economic development policy; and (d) seasonal hiring patterns to anticipate cyclical shortages and surpluses of labor. *Accountability* is supported by providing Missouri's SWIB/SWA with the following products to assist program evaluation: (a) Workforce System Scorecard to evaluate progress in the economic, education and workforce environments; (b) economic impact modeling to conduct fiscal cost-benefit analyses of various workforce programs; and (c) providing program evaluation services as requested by the SWIB and SWA.

Principal Customers

The principal customers of MERIC's SWIB/SWA analysis products include: (a) Missouri Training and Employment Council (SWIB) and all ten local WIBs in Missouri; (b) Missouri Department of Economic Development (SWA); (c) other local economic, workforce and education agencies; (d) business and industry; and (e) the general public not served by any of the above customers.

Costs

\$200,000 in ETA LMI One-Stop Funds.

Accomplishments

Overall, MERIC responded to 389 requests for information and technical assistance during the program year. Broken down by customer groups, 102 were from employers and economic developers, 94 from elected officials and policy makers, 89 from jobseekers and workforce professionals, 75 from training and education providers, and 29 from researchers and the media.

MERIC staff responded to 296 customer inquires, of which 88 were from employers and economic developers, 72 from elected officials and policy makers, 59 from training and education providers, 53 from jobseekers and workforce professionals, an 24 from researchers and the media.

MERIC staff gave 72 informational presentations, of which 35 were to jobseekers and workforce professionals, 16 to elected officials and policy makers, 12 to employers and economic developers, 7 to training and education providers, and 2 to researchers and the media.

MERIC staff provided 21 customers with in-depth technical assistance lasting over one month, of which 9 were education and training providers, 6 from elected officials and policy makers, 3 from researchers and the media, 2 from employers and economic developers, and 1 from jobseekers and workforce professionals.

Completed research on KSA Clusters, which statistically groups occupations based on similar sets of knowledge, skills and abilities for use in career path and career transition analyses.

Provided ad hoc Skills Profile Analysis to customers, which details the knowledge, skills and abilities of one or several occupations for use in career planning.

Completed Training and Education for Tomorrow's Workforce, which identifies future demand for knowledge, skills and abilities based on projections data.

Completed the beta Dislocated Worker Transition Tool, which assists career counselors in transitioning dislocated workers from declining industries/careers to growing industries/careers.

Completed Local Employment Dynamics, which provides quarterly workforce indicators on job creation, destruction and turnover by industry and basic demographics.

Completed the Local Employment Dynamics overview brochure.

Completed the Local Employment Dynamics data wheels for 2003 by industry and WIA.

Completed Seasonal Hiring Patterns, which is a statistical analysis predicting seasonal hiring patterns by industry and WIA.

Completed Workforce Investment Area Gap Analysis – Needs Assessment, which provides for each WIA a detailed analysis of the local economy and labor market.

Completed Workforce Investment Area Gap Analysis – Custom Research as requested, which provides for each WIA customized research on special issues identified by local WIBs from the Needs Assessments.

Completed the Workforce System Scorecard, which is an overview of Missouri's workforce system focusing on the economic, education and workforce environments.

Completed the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which provides an estimate of the required wages to support a household by county and for 70 household types.

Completed Economic Conditions and Trends reports, which provides an overview of Missouri's economy and labor market on a monthly basis.

Completed the Economic Momentum, Influence and Share research report, which estimated a county's economic change, influence and base.

Completed Entrepreneurship Analyses, which provides baseline economic and demographic data on entrepreneurs and self-employed persons across Missouri's regions.

Provided Economic Impact Modeling services to estimate the direct and indirect impacts of economic changes in local economies, and for use in fiscal cost-benefit analyses. Provided Census data analysis services and Geographic Information Systems mapping services.

Completed the Northwest WIA Skills Gap Consortium Planning Project, which was a collaborative project between MERIC and the Northwest WIB to set local policy using LMI.

Provided technical support to the Boone County Benchmarks Coalition, which is a local effort to create customized local indicators for job and social services agencies in Boone County.

Completed the Older Workers by County research report, which analyzed LED data to identify populations of older workers by industry across Missouri's counties.

Completed the New Hires research report, which looked at the characteristics of new hires by industry, age, gender and WIA.

Completed the Gender-Wage research report, which looked at the difference in earnings by men and women by industry and metropolitan area.

Deliverables Not Met

Labor Shed and Commuting Analysis, which profiles a community's workforce in terms of where people work, was not completed due to data delays from the US Census. These will be produced in PY-05.

LED Worker Origins and Destinations, which is an interactive mapping tool that displays the labor and commuting sheds at the sub-county level, was not completed due to data delays from the US Census. These will be produced in PY-05.

Job Vacancy Survey, which provides information on the current demand for jobs and skills in Missouri, was not completed due to methodology and technical issues at BLS. This will be produced in PY-05.

Core Product 5 - Web

Description

Maintain and enhance electronic state workforce information delivery systems.

Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan

This particularly supports the universal access and choice elements of the five-year plan. Labor market and workforce information becomes available to all potential customers of the system through a high-quality electronic delivery system, be they at career centers, work, home, schools, libraries or any other place with internet access. The main purpose of the information available on this system is to allow decision makers to make informed choices. Provision of labor exchange and other services at one-stop centers will be enhanced by the easy availability of high quality information to staff and customers alike.

Principal Customers

Businesses, job seekers, those planning careers, WIBs and their staffs, career center staff, economic developers and researchers, educational institutions and planners, counselors, news media, the general public.

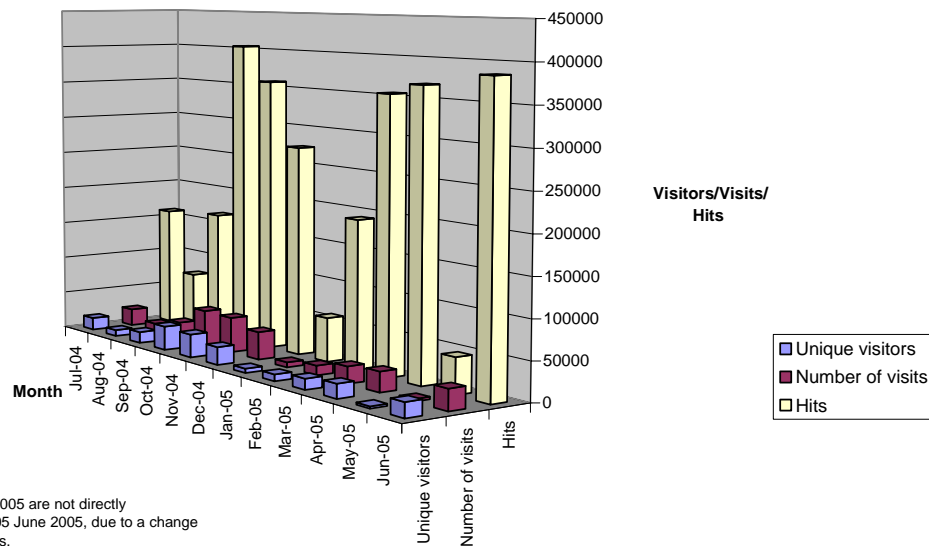
Costs

\$90,000 in ETA LMI One-Stop Funds.

Accomplishments

MERIC continued to support and populate our website with current labor market information and other socioeconomic data on www.MissouriEconomy.org. Information was disseminated through data tables, maps, reports and publications.

Monthly MERIC Web Site Usage



Statistics from July 2004 to January 2005 are not directly comparable to data from February 2005 June 2005, due to a change in methodology for calculating statistics.

	Jun-05	May-05	Apr-05	Mar-05	Feb-05	Jan-05	Dec-04	Nov-04	Oct-04	Sep-04	Aug-04	Jul-04
Unique visitors	18871	2654	18506	13986	8619	5538	23295	30324	31661	14904	8354	16358
Number of visits	26669	3089	25865	21828	12412	6502	36400	46125	46676	21659	10981	22642
Hits	384903	46303	368441	354511	192260	57576	274636	358053	403719	166746	75298	160224



Deliverables Not Met

The MERIC website was not redesigned because of State of Missouri approval delays, which occurred due to a change in Governor and Missouri Department of Economic Development directors, whom needed to approve the bid contract for the web redesign. By the time approval was granted, it was too late to secure a vendor and have the web redesigned. The MERIC web www.MissouriEconomy.org will be redesigned in PY-05.

Core Product 6 - Training

Description

Support state workforce information training activities.

Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan

Knowledge of LMI and how to use it is key to the planning process as well as to many aspects of customer service delivery. Trained board members and WIB staff, as well as trained front-line staff in career centers, is a key to improving performance of the workforce development system, in support of the Strategic Plan.

Principal Customers

WIB members and staffs. Front line staff in career centers. Business service representatives throughout the state. Customers of the career centers and the state's workforce investment programs (businesses and job seekers) will benefit directly from having trained, knowledgeable staff assisting them.

Costs

\$33,974 in ETA LMI One-Stop Funds; and \$140,000 in MOICC Funds.

Accomplishments

Provided 23 training sessions to education and training providers, and to workforce development professionals, with each session having an average attendance of over 100 people.

Completed the creation of a directory of MERIC staff, contacts and available information.

Initiated contacts with WIBs, Career Center Staff, DWD Business Representatives and other key customer groups on their need for LMI products and specialized training.

Followed up from these meetings with new LMI product and training offerings.

Participated in various conferences, meetings and functions as requested to explain available LMI or MERIC services.

Signed more people up for our e-mail distribution service and electronic newsletter.

Utilized our mobile computer training lab and electronic training feedback system to better deliver training services and to improve upon them in the future.

Provided LMI for Beginners training to customer groups.

Provided LMI for Veterans Representatives training to workforce development veterans' representatives.

Provided Local Employment Dynamics training to state agency customers.

Deliverables Not Met

The development of a general LMI Overview CD, produced in cooperation with the LMI Training Institute, was not completed due to the fact that the LMI Institute lost funding and was not in operation in PY-04.

Organizing an “LMI for Workforce Board Planners” course in conjunction with the Labor Market Information Training Institute was not completed due to the fact that the LMI Institute lost funding and was not in operation in PY-04.

The Missouri LMI Users Conference was not hosted because of State of Missouri approval delays, which occurred due to a change in Governor and Missouri Department of Economic Development directors, whom needed to approve the conference. By the time approval was granted, it was too late to schedule the conference. This conference will be held in PY-05.

Hosting a series of regional meetings with WIB Administrators and designated staff on the use of LED information, including the new origin/destination mapping information, was not completed due to data delays from the US Census. These meetings will be held in PY-05.

SECTION B

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ASSESSMENT

Faced with funding challenges and a call for new initiatives to address the issue of increasing the capacity of communities and business to grow jobs, MERIC began this study to address and evaluate this vital question of MERIC's responsiveness to the business/employer customer. This study was designed to solicit feedback from the business/employer customer in order to assess MERIC's responsiveness to the business/employer customer, to investigate customer satisfaction with the current range of products and services, and to identify the economic and workforce information needs of the business/employer customer with the ultimate goal to improve existing and develop new and better products and services to meet their identified need. The results of this review are based primarily on a pilot survey and preliminary interviews with various business/employer customers and related representatives in the State of Missouri's Workforce Development System. The methods used to ascertain this information included in-depth personal interviews, focus groups and a hand-administered pilot survey instrument. These targeted first steps were designed to initiate dialogue with internal customers that would generate critical information for both assessing satisfaction with the products now offered, generating feedback on how to improve the products currently offered, and designing new products and services and methods for dissemination and outreach. Additional data was gathered from two focus groups; one was convened to broadly examine this issue and a second focus group and survey was conducted to solicit feedback and information on a specific customized analysis and assessment product and process. This document reports on the results of that preliminary review of MERIC's responsiveness to the business/employer customer.

A number of patterns and trends emerge from the surveys and interviews. Based on these in-depth personal interviews, the pilot surveys, and focus groups that have been completed, preliminary findings conclude that the business/employer customer has limited awareness of the products and services of the LMI system and up to this point has had limited involvement in the design of that system.

- More than half, or 55.6 %, of the respondents to the pilot survey, did not know of MERIC or use MERIC as a source of information or identified MERIC with the data produced by MERIC.
- Most respondents, or 72.9 %, never (52.1%) or rarely (20.8) used MERIC as source of data and information.

Despite the lack of awareness, there were positive indications. Some respondents expressed an encouraging interest in using the data and web site once they were made aware of the existence of MERIC services and the web site. Many respondents were impressed.

- Of those respondents to the survey who used the site, 86.4 % indicated that they found the information they sought easily, 95.0 % indicated that the format was easy to use and 94.4 % indicated the site was easy to understand and 89.5 % found the site easy to navigate.
- When respondents visited the web site for specific information, 45.0% indicated the information was easy to find and 50.0 % indicated the information was as easy to find as on most sites.

The study found that those survey respondents and individuals who were interviewed and were familiar with MERIC data products and services and the site, indicated in their comments clear expectations and requirements for data products that are made available. These requirements included the following criteria or general attributes that data should have:

- Relevance
- Timely and Current
- Appropriately Detailed
- Available On-demand, with short response lead- turn-around time
- A Single Point of Contact should be available,
- Appropriate Training and Communication,
- Appropriate Vehicle of delivery and feedback
- As a preferred method of delivery the Web Site should be enhanced.

The types of Specific Data and Information Products they sought included information related to:

- Unemployment,
- Labor/workforce availability issues,
- Employment,
- Industry specific and indicators information,
- Business related,
- Company specific information
- Product profiles,
- Compensation -Salary and Wage,
- Administrative data,
- Education issues,
- Demographic, EEO and Special populations data,
- Regional issues and Geography issues,
- Commuting and Traffic studies,
- General Social and Community issues and
- Site location issues.

The study clearly demonstrates that there are significant gaps in the familiarity and use of MERIC products and services. In addition to the observation and conclusion that many business/employer customers who are in need of information products are not aware of the MERIC products and services, data is being produced, but analysis, interpretation, presentation, marketing and dissemination of information efforts are deficient. Moreover, it appears that too little analysis and dissemination are done outside of that required by the production program mandates. Finally, there is no systematic, consistent and coordinated effort to determine and assess business/employer customer needs or satisfaction with products.

These findings clearly demonstrate there is a need to continue further research of this customer satisfaction question. This study recommends these six initiatives:

1. Continue to refine the pilot survey Assessment instrument and Outreach Plan that examined basic knowledge and awareness of workforce and economic information available through MERIC.
2. Develop a coordinated, focused strategy of integration and coordination within MERIC and the Divisions within DED to promote and increase the integration and coordination of MERIC efforts with the efforts of Business Development, Community Development, Workforce Development and MTEC.
3. Build Staff Capacity through the Implementation of a System of Cross-Training.
4. Implement a Peer and Professional Review Process.
5. Implement a Systematic Internal and External Communication Process to continuously improve overall communication processes both internally and externally.
6. Designate Dedicated Staff to establish a customer satisfaction focal point that will sustain this customer service effort and provide on-going customer satisfaction.

SECTION C

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO
IMPROVE CORE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

MERIC recommends that ETA view the Core Products and Services as overlapping activities that cannot be separated from each other, and that to do so would diminish the quality and usefulness of each of the activities. For example, during PY-04 MERIC worked extensively with a local WIB to create customized career and industry outlooks for use in local skills gap planning. This six-month long project served four of the six Core Products and Services (Employment Projections, Career/Occupation Products, WIB Support, and Training), and MERIC could not have completed the project without each of these functions being integrated.

We feel that ETA has tended to view the Core Products and Services as mutually exclusive activities that can be separated from each other in terms of function and funding. We recommend that ETA give states the flexibility to combine and add Core Products and Services as they deem necessary in their grant plan. We also recommend that ETA not view Core Products 1 and 2 as separate in function and funding from the remaining activities, as it is presented in Attachment I of TEGL-1-04.

SECTION D

**MISSOURI LABOR MARKET INFORMATION REVIEW
BY ETA REGION V, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**

U.S. Department of Labor



**Employment and Training Administration
REGION V**

John C. Kluczynski Building
230 South Dearborn Street, 6th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-1505

<http://www.doleta.gov/regions/reg05>

August 17, 2005

Mr. Greg Steinhoff, Director
Missouri Department of Economic
Development
P.O. Box 1157
Jefferson City, Missouri 65102

Dear Mr. Steinhoff:

Enclosed is the report for the Region V review of the Missouri Economic Research & Information Center's (MERIC's) Program Year 2004 Workforce Information grant. Jean Grochowski conducted the review on July 19 and 20, 2005. The report includes detailed information concerning the progress Missouri has made in implementing its PY2004 core LMI products and services in support of the One-Stop service delivery system and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). A response to this report from the state of Missouri is not required.

We appreciate the management and staff of MERIC making themselves available for the review. If you have any questions regarding this report, please feel free to call me or Jean Grochowski at 312/596-5521.

Sincerely,

BYRON ZUIDEMA
Regional Administrator

cc: Marty Romitti
David Peters

PY2004 WORKFORCE INFORMATION (LMI) GRANT REVIEW
MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
JULY 19-20, 2005
ETA REVIEWER: JEAN GROCHOWSKI

Introduction

Review Background: ETA Region V conducted a review of the Missouri Department of Economic Development's Workforce Information (Labor Market Information) grant July 19-20, 2005, in Jefferson City, Missouri. This review of the State Labor Market Information (LMI) operations covers only the deliverables due in the most recent ETA LMI workplan, since there is not an OMB-approved Workforce Information Review/Technical Assistance Guide. This LMI grant review is authorized by the Federal Workforce Information Directives (TEGLs 09-03 and 01-04) which have OMB clearance under control number 1205-0417. The review and report covers activities performed during PY 2004 (July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005).

LMI Unit Background: The Missouri Economic Research & Information Center (MERIC) is the State's Labor Market Information department, housed under the Missouri Department of Economic Development. As such, it reports directly to the Director of the Department of Economic Development. Since the last federal review, the Department has undergone numerous changes, including many retirements, changes in administration, a hiring freeze, and most recently, an influx of many new employees, including a new Manager of Economic and Workforce Research (EWR), who was placed in charge of Missouri's LMI One-Stop activities beginning this year.

The Economic and Workforce Research Division contains three LMI units:

- 1) Economic Research Group
- 2) Workforce Research Group
- 3) Outreach and Technology Group

These three units contribute a total of 17.00 FTE to ETA-funded Core Products and Services grant activities. Within the Economic Research Group, at the time of this review there were two positions vacant – Research Manager and GIS Specialist. MERIC staff informed the ETA reviewer that the FTE associated with these vacancies do not fall under the ETA-funded LMI activities within the staffing matrix. However, upon later review of a copy of the matrix provided on p. 32 of Missouri's PY2005 grant plan, it does indicate that 0.30 FTE of this vacant GIS Specialist's time is in fact charged to the grant.

Otherwise, there were no other current vacancies noted at the time of the review. The organization appears to be stable and adequately staffed.

Executive Summary

The ETA reviewer did not have any findings of non-compliance with the Workforce Investment grant requirements. However, this report does document four observations regarding areas that are not related to compliance, but are areas where improvements can be made. These ranged from adhering more closely to planned milestones in the grant plan, to leveraging resources, to placing greater emphasis on training end-users how to use LMI, and further engaging business. The reviewer also identified effective practices in the areas of performance tracking, customer satisfaction, training initiatives, Local Employment Dynamics, occupational analysis, projections, and skills gap analysis.

LMI Core Products and Services Overview

Core product 1 – Continue to populate the ALMIS Database with state data

MERIC is upgrading the ALMIS Database structure by converting to Oracle 10g with Linux operation system (at the time of this review Oracle 10g was being run on a client/server machine). MERIC will upgrade to version 2.3 of the ALMIS Database.

MERIC continues to populate the ALMIS Database with all appropriate data, participates in various ALMIS consortia and conferences, and has plans in place to use ALMIS data to run real-time applications on the Department's website, to further satisfy customer requests.

Core product 2 – Produce and disseminate industry and occupational employment projections.

MERIC has completed the 2002-2012 industry and occupational projections in accordance with the methodology, software tools, and guidelines developed by the Projections Managing Partnership. Short-term (2004-2006) projections have also been completed on a statewide basis; MERIC plans to conduct a sub-state analysis in the upcoming year. In addition, Utah's Short-Term Industry Projections (STIP) software was beta-tested.

MERIC indicated to the ETA reviewer that it intends to approach its State WIB about the possibility of producing sub-state projections for its defined Economic Development Regions, as opposed to its Workforce Investment Areas. This would provide more meaningful data for the users of the information.

Core product 3 – Provide occupational and career information products for public use.

MERIC provides many quality occupational analysis products for use by its various customer groups: jobseekers, employers, economic and workforce developers, state and local workforce boards, Missouri Department of Economic Development, education and training providers, and policy makers. The following are a few highlights:

- “Hot Jobs” posters for short-term projections were created and distributed to local areas throughout Missouri.
- MERIC has dedicated \$30,000 toward doing mass-mailings of career/occupational projections literature pieces to local areas (prior to this, no formal process existed for coordinating such mass-mailings).
- MERIC staff has developed a career and industry “grading” system - a way of classifying growth industries and occupations. This serves the purpose of assisting Missouri’s State and Local WIBs in the distribution of training dollars toward these high-growth, high-paying jobs, as well as in helping to transition dislocated workers out of declining industries and into growing ones within the region. MERIC initially produced this career and industry grade information for the Northwest Missouri WIB (using it as a beta-test for the products); it plans to provide career grades to every Workforce Investment Area in the state, and will give out industry grades (which tend to have certain political ramifications associated with them) on an as-asked-for basis.
- A dislocated worker tool (tied to skill sets) in CD form for use by rapid response coordinators was developed. Plans are to embed this tool into the Department’s new (re-designed) website.
- Missouri is involved in a collaborative pilot project with the State of Illinois on LED data that looks at commuting patterns across a specific geographic area. Plans for the upcoming year are to work on dissemination and marketing of this data, to train end-users (e.g., economic developers, policy makers, etc.) how to understand and use it.
- MERIC has produced Missouri Career Videos in DVD form, with six career paths featured. The Department is awaiting feedback on this product from customer groups before proceeding with mass producing them.
- At the time of this review, MERIC was in the process of mailing out Job Vacancy Surveys to 6,000 employers, stratified by Kansas City, St. Louis, and the balance of the State. Benefits Surveys (by occupation and industry) on a statewide basis were nearly completed.

Core product 4 – Ensure that workforce information and support required by state and local workforce investment boards are provided.

MERIC's Economic and Workforce Research Division provides many products and services supporting the WIBs in Missouri. The following are a few highlights:

- At the request of the local WIBs, the Economic Research Group within EWR produced hiring data by quarter for the top 20 industries in the State.
- At the request of policy-makers within the Department of Economic Development, the Economic Research Group also produced an in-depth report on the history of patents in Missouri from 1963-2003.
- Staff from both EWR's Outreach and Technology and Workforce Research Groups attend meetings of the State WIB (MTEC), as well as provide training to local WIBs on how to use LMI.
- Over the past year, MERIC's EWR has engaged in an extensive Workforce Gap Analysis project, designed to provide regional workforce and economic information to local WIBs in order to assist them with planning and policy-making. A Workforce Gap Analysis Needs Assessment report, containing information specific to the counties included in each of the 10 WIA regions in Missouri, was distributed to every local WIB. Various WIBs around the state have used the Needs Assessment report as part of a skills gap planning process to assist in the targeting of critical industries for their region. Ultimately, each local WIB will be using the results of this project to implement strategies to address the identified gaps.

Core product 5 – Maintain and enhance electronic state workforce information delivery systems.

MERIC is currently engaged in a complete re-design of its website (its current site is a melding of two previous sites that existed prior to the merger with Economic Development). The Department established a web committee that studied all other states' websites, and catalogued all of the features from them that committee members liked. MERIC's goal is to have as comprehensive a site as possible, offering value-added research with a customer focus, and more real-time information. An RFP has been written and submitted to IT, and MERIC hopes to have the vendor selected by October 1, with a roll-out of the new site targeted for March 1, 2006.

A "tour" of the current website was provided for the ETA reviewer, with emphasis on key areas including a demo of the Illinois/Missouri cross-state commuting patterns LED project.

Core Product 6 – Support state workforce information training activities.

MERIC has developed a number of different training programs and curricula for various customer groups. The following are a few highlights:

- MERIC maintains a mobile computer lab, consisting of 30 computers which staff are able to set up on-site at its training locations. This provides local areas with the advantage of saving on travel costs, as well as MERIC the advantage of not needing to install the necessary associated software on its customers' computers.
- MERIC staffed a booth at this year's Mid-America Labor Management Conference.
- Staff from the Outreach and Technology Group within EWR have 24 trainings scheduled between the time of this review and November.
- A member of MERIC's staff is a trainer for the LMI Institute.
- MERIC has partnered with the LMI Institute to provide applied and advanced training, utilizing its mobile computer lab. It has also partnered with the Missouri Training Institute to conduct training for Certified Workforce Development Professionals, with over 20 training sessions conducted in the past year.
- MERIC has also developed additional training modules for One-Stop personnel – for example, one specifically geared towards Veterans Representatives. Modules for Economic Development professionals and for Business Services Representatives are also under development.
- Staff from EWR's Outreach and Technology Group also train business customers in how to use LMI. "State of the State" presentations have been given to various groups, and the Missouri Employer Committee (made up of 3,000 employers) has also received presentations on LMI.

Findings

The ETA reviewer did not encounter any findings of non-compliance with grant requirements.

Observations

The following are areas where improvements are suggested:

Planned grant milestones: In Missouri's PY2004 Workforce Information Core Products and Services Grant plan, the reviewer noted that at least two planned milestones were significantly off-schedule. The Job Vacancy Survey was indicated to be complete, with

results disseminated, by June 2005. The Department's new website was indicated to go on-line in Spring 2005. ETA understands the fact that MERIC has undergone many recent organizational changes which may have contributed to these milestones being thrown off-schedule. However, MERIC staff should be mindful of this when setting milestones in its future Workforce Information grant plans. Also, an explanation of why these and any other milestones were not met is expected to be included in Missouri's PY2005 Annual Performance Report, which is due to ETA's Regional Office by September 30, 2005.

Leveraging resources: Missouri should strongly consider bringing other partners to the table to collaborate on projects (note: a few examples of this were brought to the reviewer's attention during this review, however additional efforts in this area appear needed). Examples of resource leveraging include obtaining matching funds from other organizations for a common grant activity, or incorporating other organizations' labor market or economic information to enhance grant information products or services. Resource leveraging not only provides a supplemental source of funding for MERIC, but it can help to further embed Labor Market Information into Economic and Workforce Development – a high priority of the current ETA Administration.

Training: ETA suggests that MERIC provide greater emphasis on training end-user groups on how to use LMI, as well as investigate ways to measure the effectiveness of such training. During a subsequent ETA visit to the One-Stop Center in Columbia, Missouri, the manager of the Center expressly indicated a desire to have more of his staff trained in the use of LMI.

Engaging Business: In MERIC's publication, "A Comprehensive Plan for the MERIC Organization to Meet and Satisfy the Workforce and Economic Research, Data, Information and Delivery Needs of the Business/Employer Customer", the ETA reviewer came across the following information (p. 20): When Business customers were asked the question, "Do you know about or use MERIC as a source of economic, labor market, or demographic information?" 42.2 percent responded "Yes", while 57.8 percent responded "No."

In addition, when asked the question, "How frequently do you access the MERIC website or call the MERIC office?" 20.0 percent answered "Rarely", while 55.0% answered "Never."

ETA encourages MERIC to continue to view business as a primary customer, and focus more efforts towards outreach to businesses, to build awareness of the products and services that the LMI Department has to offer them. As evidenced by the aforementioned survey results, in many instances businesses are simply unaware that state LMI resources exist. They may well be paying private entities to produce the same kind of information that already exists at MERIC – yet may not end up with as high quality of data.

Effective Practices

EWR's Performance tracking system: EWR staff has just begun to use this system in the course of the last few months, to record each of their "LMI transactions" with customers. This is an excellent way to capture the work that each staff member does, and thus demonstrate the value of the organization to various stakeholders within the Department of Economic Development.

Formalized procedures: MERIC has been engaged in more formalized and systematic approaches for activities such as conducting customer mailings and measuring customer satisfaction. This is a marked improvement and demonstrates commitment to elevating the priority of these processes.

Training: MERIC's mobile computer lab is a very innovative and efficient way of conducting training.

Beta-testing: ETA commends MERIC for utilizing the Northwest WIA area to beta-test new occupational analysis products, prior to developing the products for the rest of the state. The in-depth process MERIC engaged in with this area to receive its feedback on the products, and then direct the strategy going forward, is an excellent approach.

Projections: ETA commends Missouri for being the first state to submit its short-term (2004-2006) occupational and industry projections to the Projections Workgroup.

Skills-Gap Initiatives: Missouri's efforts in this area are very much aligned with ETA's priorities where integration of LMI and the Workforce Development System are concerned.

Local Employment Dynamics: The Illinois/Missouri pilot project providing cross-state commuting pattern information is an excellent example of collaboration, and will serve as a model for other states.

Conclusions

Despite undergoing many organizational changes over the past few years, the Missouri Economic Research & Information Center now appears poised to take full advantage of its role within the Missouri Department of Economic Development. The ETA reviewer was left with strong indications that MERIC staff are dedicated and proactive when it comes to exploring new ways to make Labor Market Information dynamic and relevant to both the Economic and Workforce Development communities.

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