

AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY AUDITS

The type of community audit a local area will launch depends above all on the goals of the stakeholder partnership that initiates it. This is a quick overview—in table form—of community audits tailored to different strategic goals.

This paper was prepared by WORKFORCE LEARNING STRATEGIES for the Employment and Training Administration, Office of Adult Services.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY AUDITS

AUDIT TYPE	Purpose	Methods and Data	Conducting the Analysis	Customers
Baseline Audit	Provide a basic lay of the land about both the demand and supply sides of the labor market and the employment and training “resource base”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals and geographic scope need to be established in advance. In general, it is best to profile an <i>economic</i> region. • The first step is to create a basic profile using available quantitative data. • Supplement with primary research to ensure timeliness and fill in holes. • In the case of the employment and training “resource base”, begin with the required WIA partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In most cases, WIBs do not have the staff resources to conduct themselves so should contract out. • It is useful to have partners in this kind of project (e.g. a number of WIBs within a region or multiple organizations within a WIB area or both). • WIBs and their partners need to clearly drive the project and establish its goals. • Often useful for the WIB to be involved in some of the primary research since this process builds relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual customers and career counselors • Policymakers and practitioners (workforce development, economic development, educational) • Other stakeholders (e.g. unions, community-based organizations)

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Sector/Cluster Analysis	Identifies the industries and business clusters in which a region has competitive advantage and/or are critical to maintain in the local economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Techniques such as shift share analysis and location quotient analysis can identify critical industry sectors. • Additional research is needed to pinpoint the related businesses (including suppliers and customers). • The spatial dimensions of key sectors are important. • Analysis of the competitive dynamics of each industry requires qualitative and primary research. 	Same as above.	There can be multiple customers for the information, including job seekers, employment and training professionals, educators, and economic development staff. But this information tends to be <i>strategic</i> , as such it is particularly useful to policymakers.
Detailed Job and Skill Analysis	To provide detailed information about jobs and skill requirements, including changes over time.	O*Net is a useful data source but must be combined with other secondary and primary sources.	Small-scale surveys can be conducted locally by WIBs. Large ones should be contracted to professionals.	Depending on the purpose and method of the analysis, the information is relevant to most stakeholders, including individuals.

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Mapping Career Ladders	To help employment and training customers and professionals understand career paths.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupations to be mapped must be selected. • Quantitative and secondary data are reviewed. • Extensive interviewing within firms (often including focus groups). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller efforts can be conducted by WIB staff. • In general, however, this is a big project. As such, it is useful to form a consortium of stakeholders to fund and direct it and use a professional organization for the research and analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual customers and career counselors • Policymakers and practitioners (workforce development, economic development, educational) • Other stakeholders (e.g. unions, community-based organizations)
Vacancy Surveys	To provide data on job openings, skills shortages, areas of structural unemployment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment service jobs listings; • Want ad listings; • Firm surveys. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job developers and others routinely conduct informal vacancy surveys. • Sophisticated surveys require significant expertise and resource. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment and training professionals; • Educators; • Economic development professionals; • Policymakers
Identifying Skills Shortages	To identify serious occupational skills shortages.	At local levels, firm surveys are used, followed by interviews/focus groups.	It usually makes sense for a WIB to contract this work out.	Although information is useful to individuals, surveys are usually conducted for broader policy and planning.

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Business Visitation Programs	Are primarily for purposes of business and job retention.	Entails a formal method for regularly surveying area firms.	Conducted by employment and training and/or economic development professionals and even citizen volunteers.	Employment and training and economic development professionals and policymakers primarily use this information.
Rapid Response and Other Informal Methods	Can be employed for a variety of purposes, e.g. layoff aversion, rapid re-employment of workers being dislocated, identifying workforce development needs across firms and industries, identifying other firm needs, etc.	Can include informal information gathering and the collection of more formal data.	Rapid Response Team, Job Developers, Economic Development Staff, and so on.	Employment and training, and economic development professionals and policymakers primarily use this information.

TAILORING COMMUNITY AUDITS TO SUPPORT LOCAL STRATEGIES: SOME EXAMPLES

SPECIALIZED STRATEGIES	Purpose	Specialized Information Needed
Employing/Re-Employing a Target Population	To employ or re-employ a particular group of workers, e.g. hardware engineers from a defense dependent firm, welfare recipients, residents of a depressed neighborhood.	The information needed will depend on the strategy or set of strategies employed (such as some of those listed below). In all cases, however, it is important to know: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the demand side: which firms and sectors are most likely to hire the target population, their issues and problems, potential solutions. • On the supply side: as much information about the target population as possible, obtained both from available data and focus groups. • In terms of resources: identification of community resources available to meet the special needs of the target population (such as childcare, transportation, mentoring, mental health, etc.)
Sectoral Strategies	Sectoral strategies work with groups of firms to a) address a public policy concern, but at the same time b) solve one or more common problem that the firms share.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth sector (and even cluster) analysis of the regional economy. • Frequently also the particular problems addressed require use of some of the other kinds of specialized profiling techniques such as career ladder mapping and job and skill analysis.

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Layoff Aversion Strategies	<p>To retain businesses and jobs in the region. Can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early warning system; • Rapid intervention strategies when closing/layoffs are announced; • Sectoral strategies aimed at improving industry competitiveness; • On-going retention efforts including customized training, business visitation programs, modernization programs, etc. 	<p>Information requirements vary depending on strategy but all are based on a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the local economy and the workings of firms than is usually required of employment and training professionals, including firms' competitive position, how they make business decisions, how business activity can be monitored, how to broadly evaluate the economic health of a firm/industry.</p>
Employer-Focused Training	<p>To improve firm competitiveness and the productivity/employability of its workforce. The immediate goal can also be either business attraction or retention.</p>	<p>Program must, by definition, be customized and therefore require in-depth analysis of needs of the customer firm(s). As such, this also requires a specialized provider inventory since many providers cannot meet firms' needs.</p>
“High Road” Strategies	<p>Ensure that public funds target industries, firms, occupations that provide the most “value-added” to the community in a variety of ways, including decent wages and working conditions.</p>	<p>Entails delving into employment and human relations practices of industries and firms and the development of independent standards of what constitutes decent wages and working conditions.</p>
Community Career Ladders	<p>To identify and/or create cross-firm or cross-industry skill progressions and then link firms to facilitate the movement of workers from lower level jobs to higher level ones.</p>	<p>Based on quantitative and qualitative analysis, specific industries and firms must be selected. Skills maps need to be developed.</p>

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Skills Standards	To create clearer career paths and provide firms with a common method for assessing the skills of workers for hire and/or promotion.	Requires firms to identify skills needs and reach agreement. Methods include surveys and focus groups.