

October 15-17, 2014

TRANSFORMING U.S. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY CONFERENCE



In October 2014, the Federal Reserve Banks of Atlanta and Kansas City and the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University hosted a national conference titled, Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century. The goal of the conference was to provide a forum for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to share perspectives on transformative education and workforce development policies.

Over 250 people, including business and labor leaders, scholars, educators, policy advocates, researchers, and workforce development professionals, attended the conference. More than 60 national and international experts shared recommendations for developing policies and programs that will meet the nation's needs for talented workers. This publication, the eighth in a series of nine reports, highlights the discussions and recommendations that were offered during the panel, "Intelligent Workforce Development Systems."

Panel Summary Report #8

Intelligent Workforce Development Systems

by **Charyl S. Yarbrough, Ph.D.**

In the wake of the Great Recession, the U.S. workforce system continues to experience decreases in funding and resources and relatively high demand and requests for services. Workforce development administrators and policymakers are looking to establish innovative strategies to make better use of limited resources. Maximizing the system's efficiency and effectiveness will require the U.S. workforce system to evolve into an intelligent workforce system. Agency leaders will need to focus more attention and resources on implementing tools and collaborative processes that support data-driven decision making at all levels: from policymakers, workforce program staff, and

education and training providers, to job seekers and employers. The purpose of this session was to discuss ways that data and evaluation can help to improve workforce development systems and services.

The session moderator **Rachel Zinn**, Director of the Workforce Data Quality Campaign, gave each panelist the opportunity to describe one best practice related to using data in the workforce system and asked each to explain how that best practice could improve service delivery. **David Berman**, Director of Programs and Evaluation for the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity, highlighted the importance of using a wide array of data. He described the outcome and implementation studies that his organization conducts to

understand anti-poverty strategies and programs. Zinn asked Berman if he had identified strategies to support staff in developing their capacities to work with and incorporate data in their everyday work. Berman described three useful strategies. First, his organization hires technical assistance providers to help community organizations to improve their data systems or create data dashboards. Second, his organization uses strategies to both share data with programs on a regular basis and allow the funded programs to gain insights on how their outcomes compare to other programs implementing the same interventions. Finally, the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity is implementing a common metrics initiative across all of its workforce programs that allows the organization to define outcomes similarly across different programs and provides grantees with a clear understanding of the funder's expectations. Berman also highlighted the importance of engaging programs in a collaborative process when planning and implementing more comprehensive evaluation approaches, such as random assignment research studies.

Amanda Cage, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Policy for the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, explained that she sees the need for creating integrated databases for workforce providers throughout a local workforce system. Zinn asked Cage to discuss the integrated data system that her program is developing and to provide examples of lessons learned during the development process. Cage explained that they are building a common interface that will allow service providers to enter data in one system that can then feed the data into the data systems that are ultimately managed by the state and federal government. In addition, the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership built the system to not only meet mandatory reporting needs, but to also be a functional case management system and job order system. In

describing key lessons learned, Cage explained the importance of having directors of state agencies as champions of the project, creating relationships with innovative service provider organizations that are willing to act as ambassadors for the project among other service providers, expecting bureaucratic barriers in completing this type of work, and being relentless and tenacious in picking away at barriers to the success of the project.

Bill Mabe, Director of Research and Evaluation at the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, suggested that states ought to try to consider the possibilities of gaining valuable information from non-traditional data as well as using data to incorporate prediction models to assess customer experiences and plan services for future customers. When asked to elaborate on both points, Mabe provided examples of how geospatial data could be used to make decisions related to targeting services and how strategic data collection and analysis of text data could provide invaluable insights about services and customer perspectives and experiences. In addition, he described both the need for increased use of powerful prediction algorithms as well as the challenges related to collecting the data needed to ensure that the results of the models are accurate and useful. The primary challenge to applying predictive models is poor data quality. Mabe explained that even the most well-thought-out models will not be useful without complete and accurate data.

The panel then discussed the challenges surrounding data quality in the data systems that capture information about the participants and services provided within the public workforce system. Collectively, the panel suggested that data quality has a lot to do with frontline staff training and buy-in. At the state level, panel members also suggested that state agencies should allocate more resources to improve the use of data in decision making

related to policies and practices, capacity building for staff, technology, and data sharing with local frontline workers and supervisors who submit data required by state and federal agencies.

About the Author

Charyl S. Yarbrough, Ph.D. is a researcher at the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. Click here for her [bio](#).

Conference Video

View an interview with a member of this panel at the links below.

[David Berman](#)

New Book Coming this Spring!

Look for the release of *Transforming U.S. Workforce Development Policies for the 21st Century* this spring. The book was edited by Dr. Carl Van Horn, Tammy Edwards, and Todd Greene, and will be published by Upjohn Institute Press. If you would like to receive a free copy of this book, email your name and mailing address to hcwd@rci.rutgers.edu