

October 31, 2011
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Media Release

John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development,
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Toward a New Agenda for Employment & Training Research

Workforce Experts Seek More Timely Research,
More Effective Dissemination of Promising Practices

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Copies of **Identifying Gaps and Setting Priorities for Employment and Training Research** are available online at <http://bit.ly/nGEb3d>.

A new national study entitled **Identifying Gaps and Setting Priorities for Employment and Training Research** has been released by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The 125-page report, prepared with support from a grant by the U.S. Department of Labor's (USDOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA), recommends priorities for workforce development research that will contribute to better policies and programs that prepare the nation's workforce and help the unemployed return to work.

The report was co-authored by Carl Van Horn, Professor of Public Policy and Director of the Heldrich Center and by Christopher King, Director, and Tara Smith, Research Associate at the Ray Marshall Center for the Study of Human Resources at the University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs. Maria Heidkamp of the Heldrich Center also contributed research for the report.

The highest priority research topic areas include:

Understanding Changing Labor Markets. ETA should support more research on understanding the changing dynamics of labor markets and the program and service needs that result from them, rather than simply conducting more program-specific studies.

Identifying Effective Strategies. ETA needs to fund more research topics geared to the needs of the overall workforce system, such as the economic impact of Unemployment Insurance; the effectiveness of various training options; the value of credentials, training certifications, and apprenticeships in the labor market; strategies for teaching adult education through contextualized learning; and the value of workforce sectoral strategies.

Improving Workforce System Infrastructure. ETA should conduct research into the effectiveness of waivers in allowing states and local areas the flexibility to manage their workforce systems based on local circumstances, and new ways to disseminate promising practices.

Addressing the Needs of Special Populations, such as long-term unemployed workers, dislocated workers, youth and older workers, low-wage workers, ex-offenders, English-language learners, persons with disabilities, and veterans. More research is needed into special strategies for effectively serving low-skill, disconnected men, Native Americans, Hispanics, and other immigrant populations.

Building Research Infrastructure and Support. Overall, ETA should improve access, use, and confidentiality of administrative records for research and evaluation, and create and distribute more public-use datasets for analysis. There is also a need to better understand the relationship between education and workforce systems, and the outcomes and impacts associated with coordination between these systems, particularly for low-skill, low-wage populations and dislocated workers.

“A number of the stakeholders and panelists said that the quality of ETA’s research in general has improved, but that more rigorous evaluation research is needed to enable, as one panelist put it, ‘more evidence-based and less belief-based policymaking,’” remarked co-author Carl Van Horn. “Workforce development research needs to focus more on assessing strategies that might improve wages and that address fundamental labor market challenges and less on specific programs.”

Among the report’s other findings:

- Access to and dissemination of ETA-funded research has increased in the past few years, but is still in need of further improvement.
- ETA should pool resources and seek closer collaboration between state and federal agencies, and, where feasible, with private foundations.
- Congress and the Executive Branch should establish a Workforce Development Institute at USDOL/ETA to set research priorities, administer funding and evaluation initiatives, and disseminate results.
- The dissemination and use of federal research would be improved by reestablishing the interdisciplinary regional network of academic research, training, and technical assistance centers that existed in the 1970s and 1980s.

“There was broad consensus among the experts we consulted about the great need for larger, more strategic investments in workforce development research by USDOL/ETA,

the federal agencies, and private foundations,” observed co-author Chris King. “There was also considerable agreement on the broad research topics that should receive top priority in the next five years.”

The new report’s conclusions and recommendations were developed through:

- A survey of 665 stakeholders representing state and local workforce agencies, professional and labor associations, and community organizations;
- Interviews and meetings with a 20-member National Expert Advisory Panel;
- Interviews with USDOL senior staff in Washington, D.C., as well as ETA’s national and regional offices; and
- An extensive literature review of employment and training-related research conducted (since 2005) with the support of the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, Commerce, Housing and Urban Development, and Energy; Social Security Administration; National Science Foundation and other federal agencies; several state and local governments; as well as efforts supported recently by major foundations, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The research published during this timeframe included demonstrations and analyses for specific populations of workers (e.g., youth, low-wage, immigrants, ex-offenders, unemployed individuals, older), as well as evaluations of services, training, and support strategies within the workforce development system.

“Given the major challenges facing the U.S. economy and workforce,” Dr. Van Horn concluded, “it is imperative that federal, state, and local workforce policymakers and practitioners have access to rigorous, timely, and credible research about the programs and strategies that are most effective in helping American job seekers obtain employment and advance their careers.”

The Employment and Training Administration has just released a draft of its next Five-Year Research and Evaluation Strategic Plan, which is required under the Workforce Investment Act. (See: Federal Register Volume 76, # 209, Friday, October 28, 2011, <http://webapps.dol.gov/FederalRegister/HtmlDisplay.aspx?DocId=25434&AgencyId=15&DocumentType=3>). According to the Notice, the Heldrich Center’s report was “a critical source for the Research Plan, and information from the paper was adopted as core parts” of several chapters and appendices.

ETA also commented on the “extensive effort” that was made by the Heldrich Center “to engage both internal and external stakeholders in the process of identifying research gaps and high priority topics for the public workforce system.”

The **John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development** is based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, at Rutgers University. It is one of the nation's leading university-based research and policy centers dedicated to raising the effectiveness of the American workplace through improved workforce education, placement, and training. The Center identifies innovative workforce practices and practical policy changes that can help Americans receive the education and training they need to be productive and prosperous in a global knowledge economy. Learn more at <http://www.heldrich.rutgers.edu>

The **Ray Marshall Center** is based at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. It is a university-based research center dedicated to strengthening education, workforce, and social policies and programs that affect current and future generations of American workers. The Center seeks to translate its research into effective policies and programs through Program Evaluation; Survey Research; Labor Market Analysis; Program Design and Development; and Training and Technical assistance. For more information, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/research/cshr/rmc1/>