

# **Understanding and Using Labor Market Information to Enhance Employment Services for People with Disabilities Webinar**

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**[Robb Sewell]** Good afternoon, this is Robb Sewell and on behalf of the NTAR Leadership Center, I would like to welcome you to today's webinar on *Understanding and Using Labor Market Information to Enhance Employment Services for People with Disabilities*. Before we begin, I'd like to take a few minutes to review some important information. For those unfamiliar with this particular webinar format, the presentation slides will appear on the right side of your screens. A chat feature on the left portion of your screen enables you to communicate with me, should you have any questions or encounter any problems, simply type your message, select chairperson and click send. On the top left portion of your screen is an option for full screen. This maximizes the area where the presentation slides appear. This will also minimize your chat window so that it appears as a small floating box. Please note that this webinar has been arranged so that during the presentation, the only voices you'll hear are those of the presenters. We have a lot of time after the presentation for a Q and A session. At that time, I will provide you with information about how to ask questions. And please note that this webinar is being recorded. A direct link to the webinar including audio and web contents will be available on the NTAR Leadership Center Web site by 4 p.m. Eastern Time today, Monday, January 26, 2009. The NTAR Web site could be accessed at [www.ntarcenter.org](http://www.ntarcenter.org). That is W-W-W dot N-T-A-R-C-E-N-T-E-R dot, O-R-G. Finally, after you exit the Internet portion of today's webinar, your web browser will automatically take you to a brief survey where you can give us feedback about your experience as well as provide suggestions for future webinar topics. Please take a few minutes to complete that survey. And at this point, I'd like to turn things over to Kathy Krepcio who is Executive Director of NTAR Leadership Center, Kathy?

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Thank you, Robb and welcome to today's webinar on Labor Market Information. I'd like to introduce our three presenters. Aaron Fichtner, Director of Research and Evaluation at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University; John Dorrer, Director for the Center for Workforce Research and Information in the Maine Department of Labor; and Christine McKenzie who's a Program Manager at the Department of Vocational Services in the Maine Medical Center. Next slide. First, I'd like to go through just for a moment, what is the NTAR Leadership Center? Well, the Center was established in September 2007 through a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. The Center is actually a collaboration of partners with different expertise in such areas as workforce and economic development, disability employment, financial education, asset building and leadership development. Our foremost purpose was for the building capacity and leadership at the federal, state, and local levels to enable change across workforce development and disability-specific systems that will increase employment for adults with disabilities. Next slide please. We are based on five guiding principles established by the Office of Disability Employment Policy. First, increasing partnerships and collaborations among and across generic and disability-specific systems, increasing use of self-direction in services and the integration of funding across and among those services, increasing economic self-sufficiency through leveraging such things as work incentives, financial education, or other strategies that promote asset building and savings, increasing the use of universal design in employment services and using universal design as a framework for employment policy, and finally, increasing the use of customized and other forms of flexible work options for individuals with disabilities and others with barriers to employment. Next slide. Today's agenda is really threefold. One is to provide an overview of labor market information and I know many of you out there may or may not be familiar with labor market information and Dr.

Fichtner at the Heldrich Center is going to provide you with the very broad overview. Then what we'd like to do is highlight the work in the State of Maine that incorporates LMI into practice and that helps frontline workers become more versed with labor market and for data systems and tools, specifically as it relates to people with disabilities. One of the formats of our webinar that we really like to engage in is to provide our participants with sort of a broad overview of the subject matter and then ask a state to talk specifically about some of the work that their doing. And then finally, as Robb had said earlier, we'd like to leave the answers to the questions at the end. However, if any time during the presentation, you'd like to type in questions to Robb as our technical person, please feel free to do so. Next slide. And so with that, I'd like to introduce Aaron Fichtner again who is at the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development and Director of our Research and Evaluation Unit, Aaron.

**[Aaron Fichtner]** Thank you, Kathy. Good afternoon to all of you on the East Coast and the Central part of the United States and good morning to all of you in California. I wanted to spend the next 15 to 20 minutes giving you a broad overview of Labor Market Information. I know this is a topic that can be intimidating for some, it can be complex for others, and I think it's important to get into this just to layout a framework that we have found helpful for speaking about labor market information that we hope will help you as you do your jobs, and to help you get the information you need to do your jobs more effectively. So what is labor market information? Next Slide, Robb, thank you. We define labor market information as publicly available collections of facts, data, or analysis related to a particular labor market, including economic and business trends that can be used by information users to make decisions. So kind of a mouthful definition but one to get everybody on the same page. And there are three really important components of that definition that I want to highlight here and we'll talk about throughout the presentation. One is workforce

information, labor market information, really includes both data, the hard numbers that you might look at and be familiar with as well as the analysis of that information. So we think about a broader definition for labor market information, not just the data. The second point is that really we're not talking about here all the privately generated data and analysis that's not readily available to most people. There's a wealth of information produced by states and by the federal government that is readily available publicly to all of us, free for no cost. And so we're going to focus on that data as much as we can today. And then thirdly, well, the research community tends to use labor market information to answer big research questions. We're really not going to focus on them as much today. We're really going to talk about how workforce and labor market information can be useful to a range of consumers rather than focus on its usefulness to researchers. Next slide. So there are four key audiences of labor market information that I'll talk about: job seekers, public policy makers, which includes most of you, businesses, and educators. And all of these groups make informed decisions about a variety of areas affecting current economic circumstances and futures. And really, the fundamental challenge that all these audiences face is really trying to keep pace with what has always been, and is increasingly, a rapidly fluctuating economic landscape, and also, to keep pace with the changing skill requirements of employers throughout the economy. Next slide. So I'm going to talk briefly about each of these four key user groups and some of their needs before talking a little bit about different kinds of available labor market information. So starting with public policy makers and program managers, there really are four key needs that we see that can be supported by labor market information. The first is allocation of resources, setting up priorities, legislation, regulations, a lot of that really can be influenced by information about the labor market in the economy. Then when people are developing courses, curriculum, training, or workforce and education programs, it's critical that they understand information about the economy

as well as about the individuals that they're trying to serve, this also goes for planning the types of services to be delivered. And then fourth, evaluating that program performance. So there are a variety of typical sources of information available for policy makers and program managers, broad economic data, census data, administrative data on individual programs that's available to all of you as managers, certainly research reports. And then of course, it's important to think about anecdotal information and previous experience. The second group would be researchers. And I promise not to talk about this very, very much since it's a less important group to all of you and all of us. But certainly, researchers can get involved with you when they're helping develop grant proposals and grant seeking, grant writing. And again, there's a variety of information sources that are available to that group that would be of interest. Next slide. It's extremely important we feel that we all just think about jobseekers, both youth and adults as important consumers of labor market information. As you know, these individuals are constantly making decisions about what education and training they should pursue, what careers they should pursue, and how they should go about looking for jobs, where openings might be, what fields might be growing. And there are some typical sources of information including information on occupations that are growing, obviously, information from family, friends, and teachers, that anecdotal information is important as well as previous experience. Next slide. The next group I want to talk about is frontline staff and educators. And again, they have some very similar and a lot overlap with the policy makers, trying to get assistance with decisions about education and training with career and job search decisions. They may be helping students make or individual job seekers trying to identify employers for job developments, activities, or for finding employment for students or for customers and clients and really identifying the skill needs of occupations and for curriculum development. And again, much of the same information is available to that group. And then finally, the last group is employers. It's important we fail to

think about employers as they use labor market information. Obviously, they have a need to think about issues of employer recruitment, compensation, and training, getting more information about available labor pools that they could hire from. Also information on affirmative action and diversity planning, labor market information can play a key role in that as well. Next slide, Robb. So I want to talk now to giving you a little bit of background on the different audience for labor market and workforce information and we use those terms interchangeably here, labor market information and workforce information, so I should say that. But I want to talk for the rest of my presentation about four broad and distinct categories of labor market and workforce information. The first is information on workforce supply; the second is on employer demand, market demand. There are the two sides of the labor market, the supply of workers and then demand for workers or employers. The third category is the intersection of supply and demand, really trying to understand at where those two sides of labor market come together and where there may be some inefficiencies between that. And then the fourth category, which we think is important to throw in is also information on workforce and education services that would be available to individuals. Next slide. So starting with workforce supply, we've done a number of projects here at the Heldrich Center on labor market and workforce information talking to users. And we've identified three key workforce supply questions that come up from policy makers and other audiences. The first is how are different groups or communities faring in the labor market? What's the employment rate, the unemployment rate for different groups of individuals? The second is what is the current and projected available labor force? Looking at issues will there be enough skilled workers in the future to fill demand from employers? And then third, what does the local workforce look like? What are the skill levels of that workforce, the education levels, the demographic characteristics? Now, four key components in workforce supply information, current and projected workforce size and demographic characteristics,

education and skill levels of the workforce including educational attainment, other barriers to employment in the workforce, including disability or poverty status, and the employment characteristics of the workforce including employment status, occupation, and earnings. Next slide. There's a large number of different sources of information when it comes to workforce supply information and you can see these listed on your screen. Many of you may be obviously familiar with a wide variety of these. Certainly, many of these are produced by the U.S. Census Bureau on an every 10-year basis as you mostly know. Though the Census Bureau has taken steps to the American Community Survey to update a lot of the very good supply information on a more regular basis for many communities around the country. And so I want to make that note that there are some useful information that's available not just on every 10-year basis. Next slide, Robb. Turning again to another question of issue of employer demand, we really see that there are four key questions that most folks have around employer demand. The first one is what jobs are or will be available consistent with job seeker skills, interests, and experiences? What are the requirements looking at education skill requirements and the hiring processes for jobs in particular occupations and industries? Then a question that follows from that, those two initial questions, what are the wages, benefits, career paths, potential for advancement, looking at a little bit more complicated information about occupations, not just what occupations are out there and what are their skill requirements but where might they go for an individual who's in the labor market in terms of career path, advancement, wages, and benefits. And then kind of an overarching question is really what industries should be targeted for training and other workforce assistance? As all of you are working to help people get into the labor market, get employed, it's important to think about the industry perspective, which industries are growing, which industries are hiring people, and what level and what skill level. Next slide. So there are three different components of employer demand information. The first one is

one that we're probably all familiar with, the current and projected employment levels by occupation and industry. So looking at such things as how many jobs are there in an industry or in an occupation in a particular geographic area? How many openings are there on a regular basis? How many of those are due to replacement or to growth? Information on job orders places to the public workforce system so various information about employment levels. The second category is really the skill requirements of jobs. Trying to understand a little bit better about what does it mean about a specific occupation, trying to get a little bit better information about how to match people with the jobs that might meet their skill and educational levels. And the third category is job characteristics including wages and benefits. Next slide. So there are a wide variety of sources of information on employer demand and I'll go over some of these and to highlight some of those. The first set of information sources are about occupations. So it's the number of people in a number of jobs in a particular occupation in a geographic area and there are a wide variety. There are really two sources of information at the state and federal level, the Occupational Employment Statistics Data and the Occupational Outlooks and Career Information. States also produce Growth Occupations Lists, which many of you are aware of which are a great resource because they take all the information on occupations and they really identify those that are expected to grow in the future. And then Prevailing Wages Databases really can give you some very useful information on wage levels and different occupations. Then at the industry level, there are a variety of sources also that are available looking at data on industries overall. Obviously, there's some limitation because as most of you are working in fields, trying to get people into particular occupations, industry data tends to mask a lot of the differences within occupations. But there are some very useful information sources out there as well on industry, the County Business Patterns which is created by U.S. Census; the Current Employment Statistics, which is created by states in

collaboration with the U. S. Department of Labor. But one source I want to spend a little time highlighting is the Local Employment Dynamics Data which is an innovative and fairly new source of information which combines data from the Census Bureau and from the Labor Departments, from the unemployment insurance wage record data. This source of data, which comes out quarterly has 80 quarterly workforce indicators on a wide variety of industry levels. Basically, it will tell you the number of jobs in an industry in a particular quarter in your county or state. The number of new hires in that time period, the average wages of individuals in those particular industries, very useful information. And most interestingly, it is now allowing people to go in and to look up this information, not just by industry but also by the gender of the worker and the age of the workers. So for instance, if you wanted to know how many women between the ages of 55 to 64 were working in construction in your county, that information is now available and you actually could know how many people in that characteristic were hired in that last quarter, what their wages were. So it's a very rich data source that I would encourage you all to take a look at. The one problem with this data source as there is for many of these sources of data is the lag. And certainly, as we all know, we're going through a lot of turmoil in the economy. Most of the data sources that I'm talking about are going to be lagged by 9 to 12 months and so that is one of just the problems with labor market information. They can give you the longer-term trends and give you a lot of very useful comparative information but the amount of information available on a more real-time basis is a lot more limited and that's just a limitation. It doesn't mean the data isn't useful to look at, it just means that you have to be aware of that limitation. Next slide, Robb. There are some other useful sources of employer demand information that I want to bring to your attention as well. There is information available on individual employers through the ALMIS Employer Database. Your states often have information on Firm Expansions and Contractions, which is more real-time, and the U.S. Small Business

Administration has some data on Firm Size Data and Location. The next category information is job openings and I'd encourage you to think about how to use available job boards, whether they're state, private, or nonprofit job boards as a source of information on job openings. There's interesting information available on salaries in addition to what I talked about before. Salary.com is a Web site that's got some information on average salaries by occupation in geographic areas, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has data through the National Compensation Survey, which might be useful. And then the last set of data sources I'd like to talk about is one which we find very useful here at the Heldrich Center and it's really "the job requirement" and this is the O\*NET Database which is the occupational network database created by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration. And they've gone through with a significant investment of federal resources to profile over 600 separate occupations in the economy and to really understand the educational requirements and the skill requirements of those jobs. And the O\*NET database which is available online is very, very useful to identify very detailed information on occupations throughout the labor market. Next slide. The third category is an intersection of supply and demand, and really, this is where the labor market comes together. What jobs are employers having the most difficulty filling? What are some significant business and economics trends that will have an impact on the labor market? Which industries and occupations are declining, which are growing? And which are the skills that are in demand by local employers? And really, what we're looking at here is a variety of analysis of the available data. And that's one of the challenges here is there is no individual database, data set that's out there that answers all of these questions. And really, the major sources of data that are available are special reports that might be published by state and local agencies, by institutes, agencies, organizations on particular topics. We certainly do work here in New Jersey on a variety of these topics for the state and many of your states may have public

universities that do the information or labor market, departments within your Labor Departments that do these kinds of studies. But these are really studies that take these existing data sources that I've talked about and pulled them together and combine them with more qualitative information through employer focus groups and interviews. And so it's important to think about not just to trying to answer your questions in creative ways and rely on a variety of resources throughout your states. Next slide. And then the final category of labor market information is workforce and education services. Some key questions here include where can a job seeker find the education and training and the workforce services that they need? Where can a student go and obtain needed postsecondary credentials? Where can a laid-off worker go to obtain that career transition and reemployment services? And then what resources are available to businesses to help them train their current workers in new skills? Next slide. A variety of ways that these questions can be answered. First, many states catalogues, as you may know, available workforce service and education and training programs either to their states labor departments eligible training provider list or other sources that maybe online in other departments to your education departments or your labor departments. The effectiveness of workforce service and education, maybe some information available on that including job placement information that might be useful. A third source of information since many of you are in state government, the administrative data that all of you have can be used to answer many of these questions which is it's useful to think about the administrative data that you collect through all of your programs and how that might be useful. And then, there may be other government administrative data and other departments related to workforce issues that could be brought to bear. So, I realize that the workforce information, labor market information, is a complex topic. And hopefully, some of this framework will be useful to you as you go to try to use a lot of the available resources out there that answers the

questions that you have about the labor market and the economy.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Thank you Aaron, that was great. And also, I'd like to point out that the Heldrich Center will soon be releasing a center issue brief on the topics that Aaron talked about and talking further more, a little bit more in depth about how to analyze that data, where you can go to find some analysis. Next, I'd like to introduce John Dorrer who is the Director for the Center for Workforce Research and Information at the Maine Department of Labor. And John is going to talk about State Labor Market Information Resources and how to guide vocational rehabilitation plans and investments, John?

**[John Dorrer]** Kathy, thank you. Aaron has given us a very good overview and framework and I think it's pretty clear that labor market information, workforce information, is a vast, vast landscape that's out there. And it's complex and has many, many moving parts to it. But, you know, it's fundamental for vocational rehabilitation providers who day in, day out, investing millions of dollars on behalf of people with disabilities to develop new skills, offering guidance and career direction, employment pathway. Those are the fundamental decisions that could make day in, day out. And as in the use of information, it's much a key into if you were to take \$50,000, which is not an unreasonable amount, sometimes invested in skill development, putting it in a bank, and not knowing what the interest rate or the rate of return on that investment is. Yet often, I think we find ourselves in not having a very good idea what's the rate of return in the investment is. So we've got to recognize that LMI is a very fundamental aspect of any kind of vocational career planning that we do because it really guides and holds accountable the investments that we make. And that's, I think, really a very important concept because often times, the individuals that are passing through, whether the rehabilitations systems, or workforce development systems, or a dislocated worker system, people get one shot at rebuilding

their careers or rebuilding their working life, so this investment has to be done well. So I think we've got to recognize that LMI is a very fundamental ingredient and a very, very important input in the decision making process. I think too often, because of its vastness, its complexity, people look at it and they appreciate it for what it is, perhaps in theory, and have less of an appetite in practice to use it. But I think there's no way around it, I think we really have to become aware of the sources and begin to really master many of these sources that Aaron has laid out here by way of using these as inputs in a decision making into a planning process. So we've got to make this relevant and we've got to apply it into a decision support context. And again, I want to recognize this 'cause I think one of the reasons that labor market information perhaps hasn't caught on as much as it should and hasn't become as integrated as it needs to be, it's overwhelming. As you heard, the sources from several state and private sources all provide a wealth of information. You can access these over the Internet through publications. You can get them every which way that you can possibly draw on. But it very quickly becomes apparent that as lots of this information comes at you, it becomes overwhelming. I think what often happens for well-intentioned people who want to use this kind of information, it simply becomes too much to cope with, too much to absorb. And so often times, it gets left aside and I think that's kind of unfortunate. One of the things that I want to offer up in relation to, sort of going to the next step of figuring out ways to integrate, apply, and to make more effective uses of labor market information, it's like in everything else. When we face something that's complex and perhaps out of a zone of comfort and confidence, we build partnerships and alliances with those people who do have some comfort and do have some facility with that kind of information. So, no rehabilitation provider should be going at this alone, I don't think anybody expects a rehabilitation provider to become a labor economist or statistician and to become really schooled in ins and outs of this data. I really think that the best way to learn about LMI is to connect with LMI providers and experts.

And those LMI providers and experts could be found in a number of places. They could be found within your state agency, in your state LMI shop. They could be found in the university down the road that has social sciences who work with this data. It could be found with private consultants who are out there, offering these kinds of services. But one way or another, in order to, I think, make effective use of LMI, it's got to be done in the context of a partnership where you really build strategic alliances with providers and experts. Through these experts, you can learn more about the data sources because important to know what it is that you're dealing with. All of these data sources that we reviewed here, they have strengths and they have limitations and you need to know what they are in order to be able to effectively and appropriately apply them. Learn more about the best and easiest way to access these sources because sometimes it can be a very tortured process to try to get at the kind of data that you really need. The internet certainly has made it a whole lot easier to get at it but still, I think it's very important to see how do you get it, how do you put it in the hands of people who need to make decisions with it in the best possible way. I think what often happens, people who dwell in the realm of statistical information and economic data, they sometimes have a way of making it more costly than it needs to be and so that's another thing that kind of discourages folks from using them. So we need to do a better job of making it accessible and easy for people to use. The other thing you gain I think in terms of these strategic partnerships is that you can tap into more intimate kinds of knowledge about the economy and labor market, the workforce issues, particularly, if you localize it and regionalize it. Because data is one thing but putting the data into context, putting it around and with somebody whose had long-term experiences, who've seen the ups and downs of an economy, can sometimes give you much more relevant kind of explanation and help you make better use of this data when it's contextualized for you. So I think that's another benefit that comes out of these kinds of partnerships. The other side of this is

there's no one piece of information that's ever going to handle all your decision support needs. And more often or not even the complexity or the kind of decisions you have to make, you've got to connect your particular needs with multiple information sources and expertise. And again, in these kinds of partnerships, it's critically, critically important to tap in to all of that kind of wealth of knowledge and expertise and the kind of intimate connection. Don't forget, these are the people who work with those kinds of data everyday. It's not, your job to know the ins and outs of this data, it's their job to know the ins and outs of those data. It's your job and it's their job to come together and integrate what it is that they know with it is that you need and I think that's a very critical part of this puzzle that hasn't been well developed. I think the information producers and the information consumers have lived too far apart for too long and I think there's really a critical need to bring the folks together and do more integrated work around this stuff. State LMI Units as a Resource for VR. Let me just sort of review some of these things a little bit. And basically, invite you if you haven't, to visit your State LMI shop and get to know the people who are responsible for generating the data, responsible for doing the analysis, responsible for doing the kind of research. Invite them in and have them give you overviews, have them give you some detailed grounding in what's going on and build these relationships. There's no substitute for them. In terms of what you can access about your regional economy, it's population and workforce demographics. Lots of different sources as we've already heard for that, lots of better data because it's coming on a more frequent basis, it's coming through better samples and as a result, we have more reliability in this kind of information than we could have in the past. Employment, unemployment, labor force statistics, these data are provided on a monthly basis. They're providing it at the state level, at the regional level and in the case of New England, at the community or town levels. So there're lots that we know about the status of employment, unemployment, and labor force. Occupational employment and wages, while lots

of formal data is collected from something called the Occupational Employment Statistics Program, this basically result from typically every six months. Samples of employers being interviewed and being asked about what their occupational employment staffing looks like, what the wages of those occupations are, and this is updated on a constant basis. The sample size or the sample response rate is a mandated at 75 percent responses so it's one of the most reliable sources about occupational employment wages that you will ever find. Out of that same data come the Occupational employment projections and the outlook. And again, I want to just emphasize that these numbers that come out and are published and appear on Web sites, all well and good, often times, you have to look at the story behind the story, there are assumptions, there are all kinds of analysis and input that's provided from local area analyst about applying these to the legal economy. So take advantage of that kind of qualitative elaboration, explanation that often comes with consulting with an analyst. And an analyst, too often, is not just involved in gathering the data but very regularly is tied in to the regional economic assessment for a whole host of different projects and consumers that are out there looking for this kind of data. And so by tapping into these expertise, what you end up getting is the accumulation of lots of experiences, lots of different projects, lots of different scenarios that are looked at in a local economy that can help you gain deeper insight about the nature of the labor market that you're interested in and the economy that you're obviously looking to connect your clients to. I think vast, vast potential for LMI and VR partnership. The VR plans and strategies that require to be produced for your funding sources, they need to be developed in an economic labor market, workforce context for states and regions. They cannot be done in a vacuum and so as part of doing these, you should not be sort of [inaudible] with paragraph or sections that kind of give you a boilerplate description of the economy. This is the kind of partnership where you're working with LMI experts to help do the analysis

and to help walk you through how do you connect this analysis to service strategies and service plan and really make this much more organic, make this much more interactive as a means to make it a real part of this important decision system that you will preside over. VR Managers and Frontline Staff Information Access and Training. Clearly, with the vastness and complexity of this information but it's relevant, it's really important to have access to high quality, timely, and comprehensible information. And it's important to develop skills around the skills on the application of the information, the integration of this information. And because none of this sits still, all of this is moving all the time. New data are becoming available. There are changes in the context that needs to be explained and the context of projections and trends that I put forward. This ongoing time of training is critically important and you'll hear a little bit from us later on about, basically, having come together with vocational rehabilitation providers who came and saw us and said, "Look, we have people out there making lots of complex decisions. They need to know much more about the economy. How can you help us provide skills that's more knowledge, much more of an intimate connection for this data?" And Christine McKenzie will talk to you about how we set these LMI academies in motion. And finally, the VR Outcomes Data as labor market information, I can't discuss enough as to what a solid source of labor market information that can become the outcomes that you report in terms of job placements by industry, by occupation, wages associated with those places, critical inputs in terms of more deeply understanding just how your decisions play out in the labor market. And when those kinds of outcomes data are connected to your states wage records, where you're now able to do in a very low cost manner, matching of that individual to wage records, showing their employment history by quarter, type of industry that their working in, what their earnings, what their movements and mobility patterns are across occupations, across industries, across geographies, provide to a very solid basis for longitudinal analysis to be able

to more deeply understand the consequences of your investment decisions. So, I just want discuss that as well as a very important part of the puzzle that needs to be put together. And, all of these, as I said, comes about not from periodically or once a year paying attention to labor market information or having one training session or, touching base on this once in a while. I think it has to become an integrated part of the culture of performance of VR units and it's got to be done, as I said, not in isolation, it's got to be done in partnership, it's got to be consulting, integrating the expertise that is I think out there and are available to, I think, make an important contribution.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Thank you, John. Next, I'd like to introduce Christine McKenzie who's a Program Manager at the Department of Vocational Services at the Maine Medical Center. And Christine is going to talk about Understanding and Using Labor Market Information. Christine?

**[Christine McKenzie]** Hi, good afternoon. I appreciate being asked by John to be to be on this call and I think that both John and Aaron have set up this part of the discussion nicely for what I have to say. I think Aaron really talked about what it is that you're trying to look at when you are asking the questions about labor market information. I think John talked about why it's helpful to integrate it, and I want to talk about how to do that integration. About a year ago, we participated in an RFP process in the State of Maine through the Office of Adult Mental Health Services, through our State's Department of Health and Human Services. And it was an RFP to look at increasing the rates of people with mental illness at work and at school. And the first thing we did after we got the award was to take a trip up the road to Augusta which is about 45 minutes and meet with John Dorrer and to talk to him about this whole integration piece with VR or rehab counselors and employment specialists, and I'll use those interchangeably. We were about to embark on a statewide initiative in which we were going to hire seven employment specialists or rehab professionals to

work in mental health centers throughout the state and hopefully increase the rates of employment for people of mental illness. And in doing that, we quickly realized that those efforts could never be realized unless we were able to come at this with the framework of how can we effectively use labor market information to achieve the outcome of successful employment for people with disabilities. And I think that Aaron talked specifically about a set of information, which he talked about the local employment dynamics. That really if you think about what it tells you, it describes a culture of a business. It tells you who's there? How old they are? How long they've been there? How much money they make? What training they needed to get into it? And that when you take a person, an employment specialist or rehab professional, that are doing this day in and day out and sitting across from somebody who says, "I would like to do this." The next piece of that puzzle is to say, "In where do you best fit based on what you're circumstances are?" And we wanted to share with the new employment specialist on this project the fact that you must begin right away to think about this information. And I think that the behavioral message that we gave the folks in those projects from the beginning was you are going to receive some startup training with this project as most projects do. But the first training you're going to sit in is what we're going to call the "Labor Academy Training." And that was the training that was designed and I'll get in to what those specifics look like to say to the individuals doing this decision, the rehab professionals, "You have got to utilize labor market information in your practice day-to-day. And it's not just something that you learn once but it's something that you use everyday." And so, John's point being that how do you take lots of information that can be overwhelming at times and learn how to incorporate it for your specific needs, and certainly, the people that you are serving. So, if we could just turn to the first slide, Robb, context, broader context. I think we know we have a new president and that this information was used in his campaign and I think I put it in and started it at the beginning to say, "Always be thinking or at least

we are always thinking about a broader context of how does the President, how does the Congress and Senate support the whole idea of employing people with disabilities?" And I think that that remains to be seen but we know one thing that's been stated since he's been in office is that he is having a daily meeting about the economy every single day. He's attacking that subject. So we know he believes that employment is important and critical to the health of everyone. I think we could agree to that. And so, it remains to be seen with the economic similar strategic package and how that will have implications on what we do and what directions we go into. Next slide please. I put this question on because I think it's the framework from where I started as a Program Manager working with employment specialist to say, "You're in the business of employment, and how many hours a week in a 40-hour week are you either researching or in businesses?" I love when Denise Bissonnette who has written about the subject of "Job Development" in such a clear and articulate way who says that "this is not about job openings but about opportunities." And I think that in order to have a relationship with a business, you have to know about the business. And in order to do that, you need to use the labor market information and a host of other information that we'll talk about how you can use in your day-to-day practice. So, when you're talking to rehab professionals and you say, "How many hours of the week are you looking at businesses or actually or in businesses or connected to businesses?" And that's less than five percent of the time that makes me wonder. I proposed that we're in businesses and researching and learning about businesses as much as we're in the business and meeting with clients and helping people to achieve jobs. Next please. Sample questions. We wanted to be able to answer after this labor academy training. When we sat down with John and we said, "Okay, John. Here's what the project looks like. Here's who's coming in. Here's who we're hiring." and here are the kind of questions we want them to be able to answer amongst others. But these are the kind of questions, when you sit down with your own folks in your LMI,

be specific about what kind of questions do I want my staff or myself to be able to answer. In that way, you can tailor the training around what it is you want to know on a day-to-day basis. So here they were and I put this on the screen to say, "Use this as a kind of a baseline you're in an agency and on the call today, use these questions to gather baseline data about what does the staff that's working in this field know about the employment rate in my state and in my region? And why is it different regionally? And how do the businesses in that region impact what the unemployment and employment rate is? What are the top three industries in my state? How does the U.S. Census Data inform what the industries are going to be?" So if we look at the State of Maine and knowing one thing about the State of Maine which is they will have and are going to have the most elderly population of any ratio of any state. We know that if we look at the employment, the top 25 occupations in this state, one of those highest occupations is going to be those folks who are home health aged. And it makes sense based on who lives in our state and who was staying in our state and what does the population of the people who are in our state look like and how does that inform and drive what employment and what occupations there are in the state. What industries are projected to see job growth in the next five years? If I'm coming to somebody to ask for help with going back to work, I hope that they know what industries will be growing. And I hope that they'll teach that to me so that I can make a better-informed choice about what kind of career I'll be going in. How do I prepare clients for tomorrow's workforce? What would you have to know if you were entering the workforce right now compared if you were entering the workforce 20 years ago? You have to know how to be on the webcast, this is my second webinar. So you'd know how to do this type of work which I think is exciting to be able to talk to people across the country about the work that we do, and inform one another, and make connections that we never would have made before this call. I mean John would have never asked me to come on and talk about this project if we

hadn't met about the labor academy. Next slide please. So background, I gave you a little bit of background in terms of the Office of Adult Mental Health and the startup of the project and look in the increasing rates of people with mental illness and how we're using these labor academies to train the staff that we're going to be working with, the clients that we're serving. The second piece is that in the project early on we said, you know what, it makes sense that we gather up in each region, these are large regions, all of the folks who are doing this type of work. Anybody that is working with people with disabilities around return to work, and we want to, based on a larger effort in our state, we wanted to build a microcosm of people practitioners who we're working in the field of employing people with disabilities and we called that an Employment Service Network and of those people around the table. They were the employment specialists that was on the project, the State VR Councilor for that region. The Community Work Incentives Coordinator or what's commonly known as benefits councilors, those folks that work with individuals who are recipients as SSI or SSDI and returning to work and what those incentives are to do that. The apprenticeship representative from our CareerCenter, that's the whole National Program. The Disability Program Navigator, a consumer and the employment specialist that we have on our sort of community treatment teams which are mental health teams throughout the state of Maine in the regions that we're serving. So, we put this contrary of people together and said, "Let's all of us go through the labor academy training so that we can equally start of on the same foot in terms of what information is important to us and actually use each other as resources. There were people around this table that we're using labor market information and had been for years differently than somebody who else sat at the table." So, it's really to say, "We'll go to the training together and then we'll meet as a group in each one of these regions to further use this information effectively." And that's one of the things that this group gets together and does on a regular basis is talk about

how are we using that information to inform the work that we're doing throughout this whole region. You know as resources get tighter and tighter and tighter, it's harder not to collaborate? And personally, it doesn't make any sense whether the budgets were tight or not. So we had the labor academy trainings throughout the State. It was a collaboration between the state, the Department of Vocational Services in Maine Med, and the Department of Labor. And what it was really asking was how do I access labor market information data and tools as part of my day-to-day practice? And we'll talk about what that agenda looks like in the next slide. But before I get there, I want to talk about in terms of the information that you are able to access and then how to look at it in a broader context and then how to tap into the resources. So it's one thing to go on and see the labor market information and read about different companies and businesses. But then what do you do in your practice? One of the things we're really clear about that there were small business development centers that were located throughout the regions of the state that we were in, since we were statewide. And we wanted to have access because we know in Maine, small business drives a large part of the economy and that small business, for whatever purpose, we needed to be having a conversation with the folks that were part of helping small businesses develop and thrive. So, we invited ourselves to--it's funny--I guess it's worth noting how this got started. Here in our department, we have a business advisory committee and on our business advisory committee is a long-term member who is also the dean of the business school in the university locally, right here in Portland. And we were talking about this project to our business advisory committee and in the meeting he said, "Well, you need to be speaking to the small business development centers and I'll set that meeting up and you can decide how you want to strategically talk to the representatives throughout the State." So through that connection, we were able to get ourselves invited to a forum in which all of the representatives of the state were getting together to talk about small business and we

talked about this project. Since then, we've invited those representatives to the employment service networks so that they could get a better understanding of not only the clients that we serve but, importantly, why to tap in to this project and to this initiative as helping to create jobs for people with disabilities but just helping to fill the labor market needs that surround our State. So that was one thing that we did and interestingly enough, the other night on the news, they are talking about how small business naturally is being threatened by the economy and that there were going to be workshops being held and that there will be employers of small businesses at workshops, which we then turned around and said, "How can we make sure that we're present in those workshops, so that we can talk about an untapped resource for workforce. And really what small businesses are experiencing because it doesn't make sense to approach businesses unless you know about business." And we use that to do it. The other piece about is how can we be relevant to businesses? If we studied businesses, mine separate from the part around disability, but we studied businesses and business cultures. How can businesses access what we do as rehab professionals? How can it be helpful? The city of Portland contacted us, I think probably about a year ago, and said, "You know, we have somebody, an employee, and we want to talk about how to handle depression in our workplace." It was probably one of the most intimate trainings I've ever done and we were in the room for three hours, stayed there for one hour. And there was enormous interest in how people can get along better with people in their workforce with mental illness or not mental illness. So, how can we be a service to those businesses and not just looked upon for one narrow, and I don't believe what we do is narrow, but how can we be seen broader? The next slide please. This was the agenda for the labor market academy or the labor academy trainings. And so this was the title page. The next slide will show you their topics for discussion. So based on our conversation with John and with Merrill who did the training, this is what we came up for topics for discussion. What is it that

we want our rehab professionals to know when they exit this training and what do we want them to do on a day-to-day basis differently than what they maybe did in their other jobs or continuing what they did? And then the next slide shows you specifically what those topics look like. So that if you are thinking about doing this, you already have something potentially that you could take to your own LMI to say, "You know, here's an example of something from a different state." and just use it for solely for that purpose. Strategies is the next slide. And the last slide, pre- and post-test. Where are the staffs that you are working with currently? How much do they know and how often do they use that? I mean, I'm sure that you can think of several other questions that I don't have in the slide that would give you an idea of how people really understand businesses, and use them as basic. Don't make it complicated. Take those ones from the slide that say, "You know, what are the top three industries? What's the unemployment rate? Where is the job growth?" Training, collaborate with the Department of Labor. I can't tell you how helpful it was to our department and to this whole statewide initiative. And I think that it is a part of what we do. And it has not changed the practices but the integration of labor market information has furthered how they do traditional rehab work. Tie it to job performance standards. I think it's important to say in your own evaluation process of employees, "How are you using the labor market information?" And be specific of how much time you expect it. What type of knowledge that you expect those people that are working in this field to bring to their job on a yearly basis? Make it accessible. We had a conversation with one of the participants; it's Karen Fraser who works on the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services in the State of Maine. We had a conversation offline about this presentation, I was talking to her and she said, "Make sure Christine that you talk about folks in the workforce that may not be adept at accessing all this information." So how can everybody gain access to this information if they're not comfortable getting on to the computer and search the web? How can you make this

information accessible to all the people that you work with? So I think that one of the things that we do, we have a publication called Maine Biz which is a great publication to give you information about industries and entrepreneurs and small business and large business and all types of information, and they have a daily, not a blog but--you can get it sent to you daily newsletters every single day. And for example, today, it's sent to you, so you don't have to do anything, you sign up to get it today. It was Cianbro, which is a manufacturing company, cuts 110 jobs, Maine contractor to plead guilty to fraud, UMO's Kennedy wooed by Kansas. They're talking about all types of different industries that are coming into Maine and those businesses there in Maine and those of the today's top stories and they break it down by region. So it's incredibly accessible and it has a lot of very, very valuable information. And every morning when you turn on your computer, it's sitting staring you in the face saying, "You need to know about these subject matters." and it's easy to get to. Use other staff in your agencies that are savvy at doing this. We're working with transition in news all the time and they tend to be much more savvy when we're talking about going into businesses, they know how to access this information much easier than we do. So it's very helpful to have people that can mentor other people in your staff. Make it a focus in supervision. When you're sitting down, talk to your staff about how are you using this information? Make it a part of the overall training in your agency. And then how can labor market information help me be seen as more credible to businesses? When you're going into businesses, I think the amount that you know about the business they're in before you get there and you've done your homework before you get there, and you can talk about their business on a large scale in a meaningful way, you're much more credible to their business. The last slide is just our contact information. And again, thank you very much and I appreciate being asked on the call.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Thank you so much Christine and John and Aaron for a very informative presentation. And now, I'm going to turn it briefly over to Robb who's going to talk to you about how to submit some questions and we do have a couple of questions queued up but Robb, if you could just give them instructions.

**[Robb Sewell]** Sure. Essentially, you have two options for submitting questions. One is on the lower left hand corner of your screen, there's a little button there that says "Raise Hand". So you can click on that then I'll be able to see who has a question and I'll call on the participants and instruct them how to ask their question. The other option is if you prefer, you can submit your question by using the chat feature on the left portion of your screen. Just simply type your message, select chairperson and click send.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Thanks Robb. So I have a couple of questions in practices for Aaron or John. Both Christine and Aaron talked about Local Employment Dynamics or LED data, how does someone get access to that LED data and does every state have LED data?

**[Aaron Fichtner]** No, not every state does. We now have 48 states; Massachusetts and New Hampshire are the two remaining states that have not yet joined up. However, for the 48 states, there is access via the U.S. Census Bureau Web site. So this is public access for anyone. All you have to do is Google Local Employment Dynamics, it will get you there. The LED is basically a partnership between states who send the wage records of every worker in the state off to the Census Bureau, where it's matched with social security information about residence of the worker, age and sex of the worker, and it provides two very, very important analytical products. One is the quality workforce indicator, which basically gives us a good picture of employment and hiring activity and the details of who's being hired. So from that standpoint, it's actually very

dynamic, very good, it gives you a lot of details about hiring and who's being hired and what wages they're being hired. There's also something called OnTheMap which gives you a very good picture of where workers live and where they work and what the commute flows are between different kinds of regions. With a lot of flexibility in using that tool to be able to look at various geographies and look at the characteristics of workers and look at the characteristics of jobs, and we are able to generate something, Commute Shed and the Labor Shed and lots of products that can give you very quickly some pretty deep insight about what the local labor market dynamics are looking. And, yes, it lags about a year's time. But what I keep telling folks who keep complaining about why aren't those informations really current? I take them to my window and there's a thermometer outside and I'd say, "Look, this is the current temperature." Well, what does that tell you? It doesn't tell you much than the temperature right now. It's actually good that we have some of those data lagging in the way that it is because it gives us a chance to really look at, in context, trends over time and that's really, I think, the far more valuable information rather than a snapshot of events that's happening immediately. So it's very good from that standpoint.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** John, it's sort of in the same [inaudible], there are the questions regarding--you've mentioned wage data and VR data. And one of the questions was, is there any wage data available on employees with disabilities versus employees without disabilities? Would that match between the wage data? And the VR administrative data be able to answer that question or do you have other suggestion?

**[John Dorrer]** Yeah, there is some effort on the way to dig more deeply into this social security data to perhaps in effect capture disability information so that we would be able to single out the employment and earning status of the people with disabilities. But we're not there yet. You can do it at the state level by in effect merging your client record from the

Vocational Rehabilitation Program with the state's wage record. Because that database of VR clients gives you very rich detail about the demographics, the work histories, the nature of disability and then you merge with the wage records data. And I think you can start get both the historical profile as well as the ability to analyze longitudinally into the future. But that's really relationships for state VR units to work out with their LMI shops. It's a very rich source of data that should be explored.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** One of the questions that being asked also is whether you know of or maybe somebody in the audience might know, maybe they can either respond. Is anyone working with universities training people to be rehab counselors to incorporate understanding labor market information into some of the essential services that they're providing?

**[John Dorrer]** I'm not aware. I'm sure there are people doing very creative work around this. I'm just not aware of any when it comes to mind.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Another question is, you know, labor market information is usually presented in a rather imposing format, are there key or other examples to extract the useful data?

**[John Dorrer]** Well, I think for us, the lesson to me was when Dick Balser and Christine McKenzie showed up in my office and we had a long ranging conversation about what their needs were. And coming to understand much more from the user perspective, what they want, how they want it, what they don't want. Take some time and it takes building a relationship so you can satisfy those customer needs. I don't know whether they are, [inaudible] shortcut Web site that's going to make all this easier. I think the best way to do this, comes about through this relationship building where we become more connected with each other and we cross our divides and we get challenged by consumers exactly on some of these issues where, your stuff is too complex, it's too rigid, it's too stuffy, it doesn't touch my

audience. We need to talk frankly to each in those terms so that we could make the right moves in breaking this world. Aaron, do you have anything to add to that? There're some states that have been doing a pretty decent job.

**[Aaron Fichtner]** Yeah, there are. But, you know, Florida comes to mind and the workforce board in San Diego has done some good work in trying to make data accessible. But I would agree with John, it's truly that personal interaction between those that are producing the data and those that are using the data that I would encourage. Oftentimes, when anyone sees large amounts of data, it's very, very hard to make sense of it without the person who's really familiar with it, being challenged as John said, to really help answer their question. So I would encourage also those individual relationships.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Another question comes about regarding state VR agencies and whether John or Aaron or anyone in the audience is aware of whether any VR agencies had state dedicated staff to work on labor market information. Or John, I think one of the things you said is that usually been the purview of a labor or workforce development agency and their LMI staff.

**[John Dorrer]** Yeah. I'd like to hear from some of our folks in the audience to see perhaps, some of the relationships that they have built or whether they can point us to some examples of what they're doing. I think there might be some gems out there.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** Another question relates to relationships with state's economic development or commerce agencies. One individual writes that they're currently trying to build a relationship with their state's economic development community. In terms of labor market information, do you have any advice about what might be some LMI sort of relationships or questions with their economic development office?

**[John Dorrer]** Well, one of the things that they should be really very insistent on, especially in regards to new business attraction coming into a region or business expansions for that matter, usually, the economic developers are the first on the scene and have very good information about businesses that are starting up, businesses that are expanding. Those businesses have a very good handle on how many people they're going to hire, what kinds of skills they're going to hire. They have a pretty good handle on what the tightness of labor markets might be in a particular region. And so to engage very early on in the process of these kinds of conversations and talk about a pool of labor coming from the Vocational Rehabilitation Community that can be introduced to the equation, can sometimes be a very helpful and very forward-looking piece. As labor markets get tighter and tighter and tighter, I mean we right now have an economic downturn and so nobody is thinking much about tight labor markets, but fundamental demographics as such, the baby boomers are retiring out and we'll be at a steady cliff for the next 20 to 30 years. We're going to replace those folks. And in order to make the matches between the opportunities that emerge as a result of these new opportunities, we've got to be there when the conversation takes place about the business starting up and what their needs are. So I would urge anybody in the world of rehabilitation to make that a standard practice. I think as Christine has mentioned, she now leads the Maine Biz Daily and looks for new opportunities, look for opening and I think that's just going to become part of the practice.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** One suggestion, this really isn't question, but someone asked us if we could provide them with some of the Web site links for some of the data sources that Aaron has and we'll be happy to do that. The final question really is about the intersection of supply and demand data that Aaron mentioned. And Aaron sort of made the case that it's not readily available that sometimes they're special studies. Who do you think people can turn to if their LMI shop doesn't have

the capacity to provide those kinds of special studies? We know that states do but some don't. Do you have any suggestions about how to commission such data or who could be tapped? I guess, I'm asking John or Aaron.

**[John Dorrer]** Yeah. You know, in addition to LMI shops, there are social sciences at universities that engage in this kind of research. There are private consultants that engage in this kind of research. Oftentimes, if maybe you don't have quite enough money to do that, you can engage a graduate student to a graduate program. So there's a number of different ways. It doesn't always have to be going to the LMI shop and waiting for a private--to come together but I think you can very proactive and go out, maybe set an RFP out and looking for this kind of expertise in the community. You might be surprised in terms of who's out there, who might be available to help you do this kind of work. You know, as long you have somebody that you can rely on, who could be the source of pulling data together for you, sensitizing, and pulling a ladder that's sort of a technical grad work and leaving you to ask a lot of the questions and apply, then integrating the data. It's a matter of going on talent search.

**[Kathy Krepcio]** That's great John. Thank you very much. And at this point, it looks like we don't have anymore questions. So on behalf of the NTAR Leadership Center, I again would like to thank Aaron and John and Christine for their very informative presentation and for all the questions that we received. And with that, I'd like to greet everybody a great afternoon and thank you very much for tuning in. And as Robb said, this audio and visual portion of this webinar will be available on the [ntarcenter.org](http://ntarcenter.org) Web site by close of business today. Thank you.

**[John Dorrer]** All right. Thank you, Kathy.