

## **Summary Report of the Conference Call of the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) Advisory Group**

Second Quarter 2009 Conference Call: June 8, 2009

*Convened June 8, 2009, from Employment and Training Administration (ETA), U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Washington, DC*

### **Meeting Highlights**

#### **Update from John R. Beverly, III, Administrator, Performance and Technology), ETA:**

- ETA Administrator for Performance and Technology (PROTECH), John R. Beverly, III, provided background information on the Department of Labor's Assistant Secretary-designate, Ms. Jane Oates, and the status of ETA's implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.
- Mr. Beverly briefly discussed the upcoming American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Performance Summit in Baltimore, MD, on June 17-18, 2009; the proposed Workforce Data Quality Initiative; and the Employment and Training Notice No. 36-08, "Plans to Upgrade the Unemployment Insurance Interstate Connections Network (UI-ICON)."

#### **Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES):**

- Ms. Jane Staveley, FEDES Project Manager, presented a history and technical overview of the FEDES process of data exchange between 40 participating states and three federal agencies—Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Department of Defense (DOD), and the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). FEDES provides information on Federal employment to participating states to help them meet their performance reporting requirements. FEDES is administered through a grant to the Maryland Department of Labor Licensing and Regulation, which oversees the administrative management of FEDES. The Jacob France Institute (JFI) at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, is responsible for the technical operations.

#### **State Informational Study for WRIS Access Options: Next Steps:**

- The Work Group has compiled findings and is currently developing a new, opt-in, data sharing agreement, tentatively titled WRIS II. The highlights reported by Mr. John Glen (Oregon) included:
  - 1) No changes or amendments to the current WRIS Data Sharing Agreement;
  - 2) Voluntary participation in this separate system; and
  - 3) Within WRIS II, no individual wage record information will be shared with new entities.

#### **Common Reporting Information System (CRIS):**

- Mr. Wes Day and Mr. Dave McEachern presented an overview of CRIS, an agreement between ETA and the State of Kansas, that enables access to aggregate wage record information through WRIS for the calculation of performance outcomes for ETA national and discretionary grantees.

#### **WRIS Operations:**

- Mr. Greg Wilson and Ms. Amanda Gohl discussed the WRIS Advisory Group Technical Operations Review, including:
  - 1) WRIS volume updates;
  - 2) Proposed PACIA process improvements;
  - 3) Suggestions resulting from recent SUIA and PACIA Town Hall meetings; and
  - 4) Proposed IT Town Hall to improve efficiency further.

**Third Round Amendments to the WRIS Data Sharing Agreement:**

- Mr. Greg Wilson discussed five amendment proposals for the WRIS Data Sharing agreement, which will be issued for member consideration in accordance with the provisions of the Data Sharing Agreement at Section X. Amendments. The target date for issuance is June 30, 2009.

**Additional Business:**

- Confidentiality Compliance Review (CCR) developments:
  - 1) The Montana Confidentiality Compliance Review was completed in May 2009. Reviews for Delaware, Oklahoma, North Dakota, and Washington will be conducted during the summer and autumn 2009.
  - 2) Specific findings will be shared with the respective state; best practices will be shared through the CRR Annual Report to the Advisory Group.

## Minutes of the Conference Call

The Second Quarter 2009 Conference Call Meeting of the Advisory Group of the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) was convened on Monday, June 8, 2009, at 2:00 p.m., EDT.

### **I. Welcome and Remarks from John R. Beverly, III, Administrator, Office of Performance and Technology; and Karen A. Staha, Director, Division of Performance Accountability**

**John R. Beverly, III**, Administrator, Office of Performance and Technology (PROTECH), Employment and Training Administration (ETA), welcomed Advisory Group conference call participants and reminded them of the Group's formation, through an amendment to the Data Sharing Agreement, to advise the Assistant Secretary of ETA. The Advisory Group provides a venue for communications and discussion of WRIS operations, recommendations for improvement, and other WRIS-related policy matters.

Mr. Beverly informed the group that the Assistant Secretary-designate is Ms. Jane Oates, who formerly served as Executive Director of the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education and as a member of Senator Edward M. Kennedy's staff for the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. As soon as Ms. Oates' confirmation process is completed, Mr. Beverly indicated he would invite her to participate in the Advisory Group's Third Quarter 2009 meeting.

Mr. Beverly outlined the six regional Recovery and Reemployment Forums convened by ETA to orient everyone with the provisions of the Recovery Act and with effective reemployment strategies. He also outlined the conference on performance accountability, scheduled for Baltimore on June 17-18, which will familiarize state representatives with reporting requirements and performance expectations under the Recovery Act as well as provide information on ETA's overall performance accountability system.

Mr. Beverly also reported on the Workforce Data Quality Initiative, proposed in DOL's fiscal year 2010 budget, to assist the Department of Education with the development of a longitudinal database by linking education information systems with workforce information systems. The Department has worked closely with the Department of Education in development of this initiative to ensure the work is complementary rather than duplicative. Mr. Beverly indicated more detail would be provided to determine how best to perform a value-added contribution for a longitudinal view of how education and training has labor market payoffs, and to identify institutions with good graduate labor market outcomes and learn from them.

Mr. Beverly reported that on March 23, 2009, ETA issued Employment and Training Notice No. 36-08, "Plans to Upgrade the Unemployment Insurance Interstate Connections Network (UI-ICON)." The upgrades introduce web-based protocols to ICON system.

**Karen Staha**, Director, Division of Performance Accountability, briefly reviewed the agenda and requested a sequence revision for item V. in consideration of Ms. Jane Staveley of the Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES), who was joining the conference call from Italy.

### **V. Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES)**

**Mr. Wes Day**, Division of Performance Accountability, gave a brief overview of the Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES), an initiative that provides information on Federal employment to participating states to help them meet their reporting requirements; and, introduced **Ms. Jane Staveley**, the FEDES Project Manager. Ms. Staveley summarized the history of the project from its inception in 2003; provided a thorough technical overview of the process it has developed; and fielded questions from Advisory Group members.

The FEDES program involves data sharing agreements between participating states and three Federal agencies: the Office of Personnel Management (OPM); the Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Center; (DMDC); and the United States Postal Service (USPS). Currently, 40 states are participating in FEDES. The technical operations are administered by the Jacob France Institute (JFI) at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, under authority of the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR). To participate, states can negotiate data sharing agreements with DLLR. Quarterly data exchanges are conducted through a secure process to meet the needs of these states for their reporting requirements.

Responding to questions, Ms. Staveley reported that the third quarter data submission period would be open, as regularly scheduled, from June 29 until July 3, 2009, with no adjustment around the July 4 holiday. She stated that all data is retained for up to one quarter, in the event questions arise during that time period, and is then destroyed. She invited members seeking further information to visit the FEDES Web site at <http://www.ubalt.edu/jfi/FEDES>, or to e-mail any questions to her at [jstaveley@ubalt.edu](mailto:jstaveley@ubalt.edu).

## **II. Approval of Minutes from the First Quarter Meeting, March 5, 2009; Status of Advisory Group Charter/Business Protocol**

Ms. Staha advised that Draft Minutes of the March 5, 2009 meeting had been distributed by e-mail on March 13, 2009. Having received no comments or corrections, she called for approval. **Mr. Adam Leonard (TX) made the motion to approve; Ms. Jessica Tarter (SC) seconded.** There were no objections.

**Ms. Staha also announced that the Advisory Group's Charter/Business Protocol had been approved** by the members and was now adopted as the official Charter. In addition to their votes of approval, a few states had submitted proposed future revisions to the Charter, notably addressing the inflexible requirement for two in-person meetings per year. These objections are currently under review and a summary will be forwarded to the Advisory Group. At present, the meeting requirements are specified in the Data Sharing Agreement at Section V. Governance.

## **III. State Informational Study for WRIS Access Option: Next Steps; Working Group Report**

**Mr. John Glen (OR)**, chair of the Advisory Group's Working Group, outlined the group's purpose, survey results, and next steps.

In July 2008, Oregon and Washington had shared with the WRIS Advisory Group a draft amendment proposal to the current Data Sharing Agreement, which would expand the definition of PACIA to include programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. However, since the draft proposal would be in direct violation of several states' regulations, a group was formed to compile a briefing paper to determine how best to revise the amendment.

A Working Group of Advisory Group members, Clinton Flowers (MO), John Glen (OR), Adam Leonard (TX), and Rick Little (UT), developed a survey to investigate options for widening the use of aggregated extracted wage data to include performance reporting for additional, specified, federal programs. In response to these findings, the group has begun to develop a new Data Sharing Agreement that could be entered into voluntarily by states wishing to participate; at this time, the new network is informally referred to as "WRIS II." The Working Group and the WRIS Operator are coordinating to ensure that appropriate system boundaries are developed so that the additional program agencies of states entering into "WRIS II" will not have access to aggregate extracted wage data from states that do not enter into the new Data Sharing Agreement.

#### **IV. Common Reporting Information System (CRIS)**

**Mr. Wes Day, Performance and Accountability, and Mr. David McEachern, AJLA–TS, Kansas**, explained that the Common Reporting Information System (CRIS) is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ETA and the State of Kansas' Department of Commerce that enables access to aggregate wage data obtained through the WRIS and FEDES in order to calculate common performance measures outcomes for ETA's national and discretionary grantees.

In their briefing, Mr. Day and Mr. McEachern referred to the CRIS flowchart distributed to Advisory Group members in advance of the meeting, and explained the process steps employed by the CRIS. The flow chart is attached to the Draft Summary Report. Both Mr. Day and Mr. McEachern invited further questions from Advisory Group members through their e-mail addresses or by telephone.

#### **VI. Proposed Revisions to Submittal and Response Operations: IT Town Hall, Technical Report of the WRIS Operator**

**Mr. Greg Wilson, Performance and Accountability Team Leader, and Ms. Amanda Gohl, Project Manager**, reviewed the WRIS Operator's Technical Review that had been e-mailed previously to the members. Highlights included:

- Town Hall meetings and trainings: Three Confidentiality Compliance Review (CCR) trainings have been conducted in recent months, in addition to a PACIA Town Hall meeting (March) and a SUIA Town Hall meeting (April). A third SUIA/State IT Town Hall is proposed for Wednesday, July 29.
- The volume of WRIS processing was reviewed, indicating that requests, matches, and responses have all increased significantly since the program inception in 2004. The Monthly Matrix Reports have returned to detailed reporting, as requested by several Advisory Group members.
- As indicated in the presentation, the next scheduled submittal due date for states is July 6, 2009, and will be posted July 13. Suggestions have been discussed for improvements to the PACIA process to lessen the impact on the SUIAs during the two weeks before, and after, querying the Distributed Data Base Index (DDBI).
- Additional proposed modifications emerged from the PACIA and SUIA Town Hall discussions. These include limits that could be imposed on Hub Web site traffic to help even out each state's processing load. Edits to the SSNs in DDBI input files were also discussed, and a suggestion was made to delete "test" SSNs.

Mr. Beverly asked the Advisory Group to confirm with their state IT colleagues if these modifications might be feasible, in the interest of bringing more efficiency to operations. He thanked participants and recommended Advisory Group members try to participate in the IT Town Hall meeting proposed for July.

**Clinton Flowers (MO)** voiced support for Town Hall sessions or other opportunities for states to meet with their IT shops as a group. Mr. Wilson confirmed that the proposed July meeting would be conducted in Webinar format.

#### **VII. Third Round Amendments to the WRIS Data Sharing Agreement**

Mr. Greg Wilson, Division of Performance Accountability, briefly discussed the five current Third Round amendment proposals for the WRIS Data Sharing Agreement. The amendment proposal titles are:

- 1) Prohibiting Wage Data Storage on Devices That Can Be Compromised
- 2) Expanded Definition of "Aggregate Data." (References to employer data should be included in the definition of "Aggregate Data," which, at present, includes only employee data.)

- 3) Clarifying the Legal Authority of Data Sharing Agreement in Section II.
- 4) Increasing Flexibility for WRIS Meetings and Distribution of Minutes. (References requirement for two in-person meetings and two teleconference meetings each year.)
- 5) Expanding the Agreement to include the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Mr. Wilson briefly explained that the process to amend the Data Sharing Agreement is detailed in Section X of the Data Sharing Agreement. This process was followed strictly during the First and Second Round Amendments and will be adhered to for the Third Round. The proposed issuance date for the Third Round amendment proposals is June 30, 2009. Since many of the Advisory Group members are new to the process, Ms. Staha offered that an Amendment process summary, with a related timetable, would be made available to the Advisory Group in advance of issuance of the amendment proposals. Mr. Beverly confirmed that the amendment proposals would be posted on the WRIS Web page, as were the First and Second Round proposals.

### **VIII. Additional Business**

**Mr. Wilson** reported that the on-site Confidentiality Compliance Review (CCR) for Montana had been completed in May; additional states that have volunteered for 2009 on-site reviews are Delaware, Oklahoma, North Dakota, and Washington State. He requested that if states wish to schedule an on-site Confidentiality Compliance Review in 2009 or 2010, they should contact WRIS Administration through [WRIS@dol.gov](mailto:WRIS@dol.gov) or telephone 202.693.3750. It was further reported that the details of each state's respective Report would be shared only with that host state. However, a general CCR Annual Report would be issued to the full Advisory Group that compiled best practices from the on-site reviews and other useful points of information. Ms. Staha pointed out that the reviews are in the nature of technical assistance rather than full audits. Mr. Beverly confirmed that the Advisory Group is actively looking for innovative practices and will share such state practice information as appropriate.

### **Adjournment**

Receiving no further responses or questions, Ms. Staha thanked members for their participation and invited them to send any follow-up questions via e-mail to [WRIS@dol.gov](mailto:WRIS@dol.gov).