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Vol. 14, No. 2

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Evidence about the Effectiveness of Public Training Programs for Incumbent Workers

Publicly supported training for the most part is provided to nonemployed individuals. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—like its predecessors, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA)—targets public training funds toward individuals having difficulties becoming employed or facing worker dislocation. The rationale for this targeting is clear: shortening spells of nonemployment is likely to reduce public employment-conditioned transfer payments and increase the efficiency of the labor market. Furthermore, public subsidies overcome human capital investment borrowing constraints that may be especially severe for nonemployed individuals.

In addition to investments in job training for nonemployed individuals, the public also supports job training for employed workers and has done so for several years. One example of this type of support is economic development initiatives that include job training grants aimed at business attraction or expansion. These often take the form of customized training contracts with community or technical colleges for training the workers who will be employed in

expanded or newly opened facilities.

More recently, for retention and competitiveness reasons, states have turned to the subsidization of incumbent worker training. The dynamics of economic change, especially the relative shift away from manufacturing and toward services, are leaving some states with obsolete manufacturing capacity and, often, relatively highly paid dislocated workers who lack skills or have high mobility costs that impede their employment prospects. In response, states are investing public funds in training activities for existing workers to try to retain businesses.

Estimates suggest that the private sector invests approximately \$50–\$60 billion a year on training (*Training* 2006); our own data suggest that only a small fraction of this spending (less than \$500 million, or about 1 percent) is publicly subsidized. The purpose of this article is to document this estimate and to provide evidence about the social rate of return on those investments. In fact, we find the rate of return to be substantial, suggesting that perhaps there is an underinvestment in incumbent worker training subsidization.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics from Subsidized Employee Training Survey, by Year

Characteristic	Year			
	2001	2002	2003	2004
State spending (\$, millions)	433.2	367.4	340.8	324.3
Total firms	7,440	9,018	7,042	7,793
Total workers trained	521,989	540,331	470,266	477,047
\$/firm	58,540	40,732	48,409	41,630
\$/worker	830	680	725	680
Workers trained/firm	70.2	59.9	66.8	61.2
Number of states reporting	21	23	23	22
Percent of U.S. population	53.14	55.54	55.54	54.88
Extrapolated total U.S. spending ^a (\$, millions)	815.2	661.5	613.6	590.9

^a Calculated as total state spending from the first row of the table divided by percent of U.S. population in the eighth row.

State Investments in Incumbent Worker Training

Moore et al. (2003) document a total of 36 states that funded incumbent worker training in 1998–99 with a total budget of about \$317.8 million. The U.S. GAO (2004) surveyed all 50 states plus the District of Columbia and found that 23 states used employer tax revenues to fund “employment placement and training programs” in 2002. Those states reported spending \$278 million on these activities, of which \$202 million was on training. Note that these two sources are not directly comparable because the Moore et al. study refers to customized training expenditures that may come from any source of revenues, whereas the U.S. GAO study focuses exclusively on employer tax revenues.

In summer 2005, we surveyed all states about incumbent worker training. Thirty states responded, 22 of which provided expenditure information. Those 22 states reported spending \$324.3 million on incumbent worker training in 2004. An extrapolation of this figure on a population basis yields a national estimate of approximately \$591 million. This figure is considerably larger than either of the sources cited above, but according to our survey, the total spending had decreased every year for the prior four years. Between 2001 and 2004, there was a 30 percent decline. Table 1 shows that the annual levels of spending on subsidized training in the responding states fell from about \$433 million to \$324 million (nominal dollars).

In all, our data suggest that states, on average, fund about 200–300 firms per year at a level of \$40,000–\$60,000 per firm for incumbent worker training. The firms train 60–70 individuals, on average. Of course, these averages mask considerable variation across the states, but we believe they give the reader a sense of the types of subsidies in which the states are engaging.

Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund

Massachusetts has a program with a scale that is close to the “typical” state. In 1999, Massachusetts initiated a competitive grant program to support incumbent worker training. The Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund program is funded by an employer contribution of 0.06 percent on unemployment insurance taxable wages (a maximum of \$8.40 per year per employee). In FY 2005, the program distributed through a competitive solicitation about \$21.2 million to 209 companies to train 25,669 employees. By regulation, the grants require a 100 percent match from companies and may not exceed two years in length.

Table 2 Characteristics of Grants

Characteristic	Average
Size of grant (\$)	59,294
Employees trained	100
Grant length (days)	549
Cost/trainee (\$)	1,284

The Upjohn Institute was awarded a contract to conduct an evaluation of the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund Program.¹ This evaluation included site visits to nine firms that had been awarded grants and quantitative analyses of administrative data. The administrative data included information from the firms’ applications for the grant and from an evaluation report that firms are required to complete to get final payment when their grants have ended.

Table 2 provides general descriptive information about the grants that were in the administrative data. The average grant was just under \$60,000, trained about 100 workers, and lasted 18 months. On average, the grant supported training costs of \$1,284 per worker. In the typical grant, the company’s match would be comprised of the employees’ wages during training, so those costs would not be included in this figure. As would be expected, these averages mask considerable variation across firms.

What kinds of firms received grants? Table 3 provides descriptive information. Relative to the number of employers in the private sector economy, manufacturing employers are overrepresented. Over 65 percent of the grants have been awarded to manufacturing firms, whereas only 14 percent of the state’s private sector firms are in manufacturing. The average employment size of the firms was about 310, but it ranged from 2 to over 11,250. About one-third of the grant recipients have less than 50 employees, whereas only about 12 percent have more than 500. The median employment size is 115. Just under 10 percent of the firms with training grants were nonprofit organizations, and about 9 percent were unionized.

The evaluation study offers the Commonwealth of Massachusetts several

Table 3 Characteristics of Firms Receiving Grants

Characteristic	Percentage
Industry	
Food, textiles, apparel	4.0
Wood, paper, chemicals, plastic	12.7
Metal products, machines, electrical	48.5
Manufacturing, total	65.2
Retail: Books, music, general	7.2
Finance and insurance	5.2
Other services, except public admin.	14.3
All other	8.1
Nonmanufacturing, total	34.8
Union status	
Unionized	8.7
Nonunion	91.3
Region	
Central	15.1
Greater Boston	28.3
Northeast	15.6
Southeast	21.1
West	19.9
Profit status	
Nonprofit	9.4
For profit	90.6
Ownership	
Private	79.1
Public	20.9
Employment size, mean	309.4

administrative recommendations intended to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the program. In addition, as part of our program evaluation, we estimate rates of returns received by firms, workers, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which acts on the behalf of its taxpayers. Using self-reported data from the companies that received grants, we calculate that workers receive approximately a 5.4 percent return to their participation in the training funded by the state and their employer. Firms received benefits in the form of profits on the increased productivity of trained workers and on the revenues received from retained or expanded employment. We estimate that their return was approximately 16.6 percent on the investments made with grant-matching dollars.

Massachusetts received fiscal benefits in the form of tax receipts from expanded economic activity. In fact, we approximate that since 1999, the state has generated about 5,570 new or retained

jobs, at a cost of about \$8,750 per created job. We estimate an increase in state expenditures to support the population growth engendered by the employment growth. Netting this figure out of the increase in state revenues yielded a fiscal return of about 38.9 percent.

The estimated returns to workers, firms, and the state have considerable uncertainty associated with them because rather broad assumptions were used in developing the estimates, although we attempted to be conservative in these assumptions.

Summary

The evidence presented here implies the following:

- Public subsidy of incumbent worker training, especially in export-based firms, may be an effective economic development tool for states.
- The rates of return that accrue to states for their training subsidies are

substantial and may indicate that states are underinvesting.

- Despite reaping substantial rates of return, our survey of states suggests a sharp decline in the level of funding for such training.

More information on this project may be found at <http://www.commcorp.org/researchandevaluation/pdf/ResearchBrief4-08.pdf>.

Note

1. See Hollenbeck (2007) for a report on a program evaluation of the Workforce Training Fund.

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Ann Markusen

Better Deals for State and Local Economic Development

*This article highlights some key issues discussed in the author's new book, *Reining in the Competition for Capital*, which is available now from the Upjohn Institute. Read the first chapter at <http://www.upjohninstitute.org>.*

In early 2007, North Carolina “won” a \$600 million Google server farm at a cost of around \$260 million in tax abatements and grants by the state, the city of Lenoir, and Caldwell County. The city and county forgave 100 percent of Google’s business property taxes and 80 percent of its real estate taxes for three decades, even though Google will create only 210 jobs, many of which require advanced degrees that only a fraction of current residents possess. In

Effective economic development requires strenuous reforms to produce good, long-term jobs and improve efficiency and equity in the process.

negotiating the deal, Google demanded that lawmakers keep its name secret from the public, even from residents who were asked to sell their homes and properties for the project.

This case is typical of heightened global incentive competition in which companies face off against state and local governments in a “market for jobs.” Increasingly, state governors and local mayors in countries as diverse as Australia, Brazil, and India are being pressed for similarly large grants and tax breaks under conditions of minimal transparency and where governments lack expertise to make good deals.

And in large metro areas, similarly huge sums are bid to influence where low-wage retailers like Wal-Mart and

Cabela’s locate, with no net benefit to the region and negative consequences for existing smaller retailers.

Are incentives good, bad, or a mixed bag, and how do we know? In *Reining in the Competition for Capital*, top U.S. scholars and practitioners working on this issue explore the reasoning, evidence, and practice under incentive competition. Though working from disparate disciplines and points of view, all oppose either banning incentives altogether or continuing with the status quo. Rather, we argue, effective economic development requires strenuous reforms to produce good, long-term jobs and improve efficiency and equity in the process.

The Reasoning

There are three schools of thought regarding incentive competition. One school, stated succinctly by Burstein and Rolnick (1995), argues that incentives are both inefficient (they transfer consumer surplus to firms that would locate there anyway and interfere with optimal siting) and inequitable (they impose tax and public service burdens on existing firms and residents). This camp proposes that Congress tax away all such incentives, rendering them ineffective. Another school, an analogue to the famous Tiebout hypothesis about fiscal competition among fragmented local governments, argues that the status quo is efficient and should be left as is.¹ The intricate logic of these positions is explored in the Markusen and Nesse and Thomas chapters of the book.

A third school of thought argues that in an integrating world economy where central governments are devolving responsibility for economic development

Available now from the
W.E. Upjohn Institute:

Reining in the Competition for Capital

Ann Markusen, Editor

Chapter 1: Ann Markusen and Katherine Nesse, “Institutional and Political Determinants of Incentive Competition”

Chapter 2: Kenneth P. Thomas, “The Sources and Processes of Tax and Subsidy Competition”

Chapter 3: Peter Fisher, “The Fiscal Consequences of Competition for Capital”

Chapter 4: Adinda Sinnavee, “How the EU Manages Subsidy Competition”

Chapter 5: Timothy J. Bartik, “Solving the Problems of Economic Development Incentives”

Chapter 6: Rachel Weber, “Negotiating the Ideal Deal: Which Local Governments Have the Most Bargaining Leverage?”

Chapter 7: William Schweke, “Do Better Job Creation Subsidies Hold Real Promise for Business Incentive Reformers?”

Chapter 8: Greg LeRoy, “Nine Concrete Ways to Curtail the Economic War among the States”

Figure 1 Corporate Income Tax as a Percent of Total State Tax Revenue, 1975–2005

SOURCE: Data prior to 1991 from U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (1992, p. 120); data for 1991–2005 from U.S. Census Bureau (2006).

onto lower-level governments, often without the resources to do so effectively, we have no choice but to champion state and local governments' rights to shape their relatively open economies. Bartik, in his chapter, argues that increasing local employment can yield substantial net social benefits, especially if jobs go to existing local residents, if costs of serving incentivized businesses is less than the new revenues they generate, and if no better uses of public resources are on the horizon.

But the market for jobs and tax base is rife with failures, the authors in this collection say. Multilocal companies, the suppliers of jobs, control crucial information in the deal-making process and have greater power in bilateral negotiations. Through the remarkable rise of site consultancy as an intermediating institution, Markusen and Nesse argue, they are able to informally collaborate in extracting spending and tax breaks, while the public sector agents bidding for jobs are unable or are too intimidated to share information with each other. The result is a strong bias toward overestimating benefits, according to Bartik. Furthermore, the flurry over deal making obscures a longer-term erosion in the business share of public

sector revenues and often impoverishes "winning" local governments' future operating budgets, especially if firms fail or decamp in a short time for even lower-cost locations.

The Evidence

There are few long-term studies or data with which to evaluate promised jobs and tax base increments envisioned in deals of the past, but hard-hitting analyses are emerging. A path-breaking analysis of a recent North Carolina economic development initiative involving more than \$1 billion in public sector liabilities found that only 4 percent of the jobs created were actually induced by the program at an exorbitant

cost of nearly \$40,000 per job (Luger and Bae 2005; Schweke chapter). In a pioneering study of 366 Ohio expansions between 1993 and 1995, Gabe and Graybill (2002) find that those receiving incentives overannounced employment targets but created no new jobs (in fact, reduced overall jobs), while those that did not receive incentives accurately forecast their job expansion and did create new jobs. Studying the extent to which incentives create jobs for existing residents, Bartik (1993) finds that in the long run, about 80 percent of new jobs in local economies go to outsiders.

The corporate income tax share of state revenues, Fisher's chapter shows, has dropped by 40 percent between 1980 and recent years (Figure 1), an erosion he attributes largely to rising incentives and related changes in taxation practices aimed at competitiveness. As a result, a larger share of the public sector service burden, including that provided to firms, is borne by households in the form of sales and property taxes. Since these are highly regressive taxes, the net result is to shift the tax burden from the highest income households to the lowest (Table 1).

Reforming the Market for Jobs

The authors document many encouraging experiments for improving incentive competition currently in place as well as reform proposals for federal, state, and local levels. Sinnavee, a top regulator of incentive competition at the European Commission, explains lucidly how the EU system of deterrence works. EU members are prohibited from giving incentives to firms except under certain circumstances and only then if they

Table 1 State and Local Taxes as Shares of Family Income

	Lowest 20%	Second 20%	Middle 20%	Fourth 20%	Top 20%	Top 1%
1989	10.2	9.4	8.8	8.4	7.5	5.5
2002	11.4	10.3	9.6	8.8	7.3	5.2
Change (%)	+1.2	+0.8	+0.7	+0.4	−0.1	−0.3

NOTE: Tax burdens are shown after the federal offset; that is, these are the net burdens on families after taking into account the deductibility of state and local taxes on federal returns for those who itemize (generally higher-income taxpayers).

SOURCE: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (2003, pp. 118–119).

apply to the Commission for permission. The exceptions involve less-developed regions, which may offer certain types of incentives—for training, research, and technology, for instance—to encourage new plants and offices. The EU system largely deters governments from bidding wars for existing plants, because under most circumstances, they would simply not be permitted. While the regulatory process is expensive, it restrains tremendous distortions and giveaways in business sitings worth many times its cost.

In the United States, many state and local governments have designed reporting requirements that raise transparency in bargaining and awards. Others have pioneered performance requirements in written contracts, often with penalties and repayment provisions. Weber, in her chapter, explores many of these and shows how they enable public sector economic developers, like good customers in any market, to get a better deal. She shows that some governments plan in advance what they want and are prepared for sudden requests and bidding wars, invest their public dollars in place-based assets rather than firm-based ones, and extend benefits only after firms have produced the jobs they promise. Clawbacks—requirements that firms that renege on contracts pay back some or all of the incentives—and job quality standards are increasingly being incorporated into deals, as is school board input on abatements and tax increment financing (the devotion of future tax revenue from increased property values to paying off bonds for improvements).

Incentive reform is a big and incremental project at local, state, and federal levels. Sunshine, claims LeRoy in his chapter, is the best antiseptic. He reviews the 12 states that already have some form of incentive disclosure, a few of those—Virginia, Maine, and North Carolina—include corporate income tax breaks. He also recommends disclosing state taxes paid to corporate shareholders. LeRoy argues that the adoption of state unified development budgets would enable citizens and decision makers to see the combination of spending and tax expenditures involved in all programs,

as a public interest group in Kentucky has pioneered for their state (Mountain Associates for Community Economic Development 2005). Markusen and Nesse and LeRoy recommend legally defining site consultants as lobbyists, blocking success fees that tend to escalate deal dollars, and ending dual agency and other practices that exacerbate market failures.

States can also restrain the contribution of incentives to sprawl. To curtail the economic war among the suburbs for retail, LeRoy recommends that states ban retail subsidies altogether except in depressed inner-city markets that are demonstrably underserved.

The federal government could considerably moderate incentive competition by creating federal carrots against job piracy. LeRoy notes that federal program funding has been held

To curtail the economic war among the suburbs for retail, states could ban retail subsidies altogether except in depressed inner-city markets that are demonstrably underserved.

up to induce states to raise legal drinking ages and implement school reform. A share of economic development funding from the Federal Departments of Commerce and Labor could be held until states adopted certain reforms.

Overall, these seminal papers respond to a growing crisis in state and local finance, where high-profile recruitments cost community too much for the jobs created, or worse, leave them holding the debt bag when firms fail to perform. State and local responsibility for economic development is a growing reality everywhere in the world, and incentives are among the most powerful tools available. Like any market, this one would benefit from clearer information and a more level playing field. The authors in *Reining in the Competition for Capital* present models, evidence, and doable reforms that can help public sector economic developers accomplish that within the decade.

Note

1. Tiebout (1956) argues that local governments in a metropolitan area compete to offer packages of public services at the best tax “price,” thus optimally allocating resources when residents “vote with their feet” in choosing where to live.

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Books on Regional Economic Development

Reining in the Competition for Capital

Ann Markusen, Editor

~ NEW ~

This book explores the causes, character, and potential remedies for the

growing spatial competition for capital. See page 4 of this newsletter for a complete list of contributing authors and chapter titles.

"This is a must read for those in local and regional

planning who want to understand how they can compete effectively. The book is of tremendous value not only for U.S. economic-development planners, but also for those in Europe and other countries with decentralized fiscal systems. I highly recommend it."

—Karen R. Polenske, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*

"Ann Markusen has done it again. [This book] is a provocative, comprehensive collection from an impressive range of experts only Markusen could have assembled. It is ideal for a course in economic development policy and well worth reading for practitioners and political leaders. I know of no other source that provides so much information and perspective on this contentious policy issue." —Andrew M. Isserman, *University of Illinois*

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Does "Trickle Down" Work?

Economic Development Strategies and Job Chains in Local Labor Markets

Joseph Persky, Daniel Felsenstein, and Virginia Carlson

State and local economic development programs offer the promise of new jobs, yet those examining the employment-

related results of such programs are often left with many questions. Who got the new jobs? Wouldn't many of those workers be employed anyway? What are the overall

benefits to the community? Do gains trickle down to those most in need? These are basic questions that, because of difficulties in evaluating the effects of state and local economic incentives, are often left unanswered.

Persky, Felsenstein, and Carlson employ a "job-chains approach" to clarify the potential justifications for economic development subsidies and identify the limitations of such efforts. In addition, they estimate the number of job vacancies created by job changers as a result of a subsidized business investment or expansion and the extent to which gains are achieved by the unemployed and the underemployed.

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State Enterprise Zone Programs

Have They Worked?

Alan H. Peters and Peter S. Fisher

"This is an important book that local economic development researchers and practitioners must not miss. In addition

to the analysis of enterprise zones, the book provides insightful comments on reverse commuting, inner-city distress, and various economic development

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"Considering the quality of previous economic development volumes published by the Upjohn Institute, 'State Enterprise Zone Programs' has a tough act to follow. The authors rise to this challenge, with a book that expands enterprise zone research and which is a suitable companion to and extension of their previous work, 'Industrial Incentives' (1998). The result is an accessible, persuasive and sometimes provocative work that employment and public finance scholars, as well as policy-makers, will find of interest."

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