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A Panel Discussion on the WPRS System

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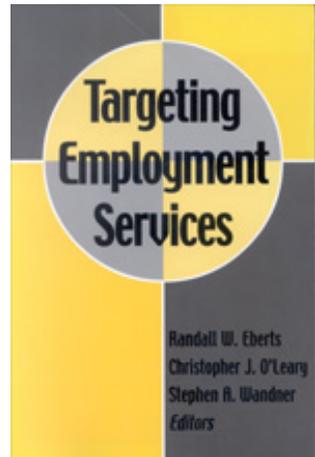
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A Panel Discussion on the WPRS System

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Pete Fleming

I am not a state practitioner, although I have worked for states in the past. The purpose of our panel today is to bring you the perspective of the state practitioners on profiling. My role in the U.S. Department of Labor regional office, in fact, is one of overseeing state programs. That means focusing attention and priorities on details, and that's not easy to do, especially in this constantly evolving and changing world we live in.

I am reminded of the invasion of Normandy, one of the greatest planned events in human history, which, when soldiers got on the beach, erupted into utter chaos. That's kind of what happens in local offices sometimes. One thing we must always remember is that this system really has not been recession-tested. We should keep that as a backdrop. However, in one sense Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) gives us a way to do intensive planning in advance.

WPRS is only as effective as we maintain it and keep it up to date. That's where we usually fall down, and I confess we have done that in

the Atlanta regional office by not maintaining the intensive oversight and priority setting that we need to do. We need to do a better job of that.

In the Southeast, statistical profiling models are now used in all eight states. In 1998, we profiled a million claimants of whom one-third were put in a selection pool and 45 percent of those received some service. What I don't know from the statistics is what happened to that 45 percent? I do know from other data that among all claimants in the United States who were placed in a job, the Southeast placed 32 percent, or about 200,000 people.

I believe that three essential factors make profiling work: augmenting all Wagner-Peyser funds with either Title III or other state funds, maintaining and updating the model, and close coordination between the employment service and unemployment insurance (UI) operations at both the state and local levels.

Our panelists today are Al Jaloviar, who is Director of Benefit Operations for the UI Division in Wisconsin. He will speak first. He has 38 years of service in this business—37 or 38, we couldn't decide exactly last night. Second is Dr. Helen Parker, who is the Employment Service Director in the Georgia Department of Labor. She has 25 years of experience beginning as an employment counselor or interviewer in North Carolina. She has worked in almost all phases of ES and JTPA operations. Finally, Marc Perrett is a 22-year veteran of the Oregon Employment Department and is now the Field Services Supervisor. Without further ado we will get to the panel.

Al Jaloviar

I am going to talk about how we profile in Wisconsin, what services we provide, what fund sources we use for those services, and observations and experiences about profiling.

How we profile

We use a mathematical model with the standard ingredients: a four-digit industry code, occupation, education, and total unemployment rate for the county of residence of the claimant. Our profiling system is a mainframe program, and we gather the data regarding the individual claimant in a variety of ways. We take all of our initial UI claims via

telephone through an IVR (interactive voice response) system whereby claimants provide data using their telephone Touch-Tone key pad. Therefore, claimants enter our UI data system via the IVR. Later in the telephone call, a claims specialist will access data in our mainframe database using graphical user interface screens that don't allow specialists to complete the claim unless certain required fields have been completed. Among required data are any needed for profiling.

Once each week, a mainframe program is run to assign a profiling score to each individual claimant. The system then delivers these results to 36 different sites in Wisconsin that provide services for profiled claimants. The data are sent electronically to each site, listing residents in that geographic area in order of their profiling score. The local service provider simply addresses the screen when they have slots available to provide service, and the system tells them who will be scheduled in the available slots.

Local staff enter the number of available slots, and the system tells the staff person which people are scheduled for services. The computer, which is centrally located in Madison, automatically mails out invitations to come in for services. The letters make the claimant aware that failure to attend will result in a disqualification from UI benefits. The local service provider then enters information on a mainframe screen after the end of the session to indicate who has or has not attended, and the system automatically notifies UI of any individual who failed to attend. We put a suspension on their claim and schedule them for an interview to determine whether or not there is going to be a disqualification of benefits.

What we do

We provide pretty much the basic ingredients: an orientation to our system, guidance on how to use the system, general labor market information, and an individualized reemployment plan, which is entered into our system and tracked electronically. We have in-depth assessment for those whom the initial reemployment plan indicates need further assessment and help. We offer job search workshops, guidance in resume writing, labor market counseling, job placement, and training programs. The fund sources that we use are Wagner-Peyser and JTPA-EDWAA (Job Training Partnership Act–Economic Dislocation and Worker Adjustment Assistance). We use \$500,000 a year from our UI

penalty and interest fund, and in fact I just attended the first meeting for negotiating to use \$250,000 from the UI program to finance some workshops for ES services to UI claimants for fiscal year 2000, which starts July 1 in Wisconsin.

Our observations

Profiling has served to be a mechanism that has resulted in a cohesive service delivery system between UI and our EDWAA, JTPA, and Wagner-Peyser partners. In particular, this has shown itself in the field offices, where the services are provided. In the past there has been distance and competition among programs as opposed to cooperation and coordination, but with profiling, we all act as a team in getting these services delivered.

Another thing we hadn't anticipated is that profiling is providing added services to our many smaller communities in Wisconsin. The WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification) system, which in Wisconsin is a 60-day notice of a plant closing or a substantial layoff, has some limits in terms of the size of the company that is covered. Through the plant closing notice or the substantial layoff notice, we find that profiling characteristics help us identify many clients who would not have come to our attention before. We are now finding those people through profiling and are able to provide services to them.

We keep track of our profiling results by service delivery site as opposed to statewide, but we ultimately compile statewide figures. Some locations were showing wage replacement rates in excess of 100 percent, so we examined the reasons they were doing so well. It turned out that such areas usually had a large plant closing that was either non-skilled or nonunion, and that low wage rates were being paid. The labor market in general was paying a higher wage.

On the other side of that, we've seen a location with excellent performance show a high exhaustion rate of profiled claimants and a placement rate lower than the state average. The reason appears to be the result of a plant closing or layoff of a highly unionized business with high pay rates and workers whose skills cannot command similar rates in the market, or because there are no other jobs requiring those particular skills. Such individuals often participate in training because they're covered by Trade Adjustment Assistance. So we find that highly unionized and highly skilled jobs often result in a lower than average

replacement rate and a greater than average participation in skills training.

Our statewide wage replacement rate is 85 percent for individuals who go through profiling. Three-quarters of all people profiled return to work within four quarters of their entering profiling. Sixty percent of those are employed in a new industry, and the average duration of unemployment claims for the individuals profiled is 14 weeks. That compares with a statewide average of 11 weeks, and a statewide average of 21 weeks for individuals who exhaust benefits. So these profiled individuals are identified as most likely to exhaust, yet the average claim is only 14 weeks long. Our statewide average for all claimants, which includes those who are screened out because of job or industry attachment, is eight weeks.

Helen Parker

Georgia had a little bit of a leg up when WPRS came into being, because we were already using state dollars to operate a claimant assistance program (CAP), which was an intensive 14-week service strategy for claimants with Georgia wages only. WPRS gave us an opportunity to expand that and use it as a core for WPRS. Not creating from scratch turned out to be a huge advantage for us. I want to walk through some of the characteristics of our process. It is very different from Wisconsin, and I was taking notes because we are going where they're going in terms of telephone claims, and I haven't yet figured out how that's going to work.

As a response to WPRS, we established reemployment units in all of our offices, which include the staffing that had been our claimant assistance staff (our state-funded staff), our Wagner-Peyser staff, and 80–90 equivalent positions from Title III dislocated worker state funding. When we first set up the reemployment units, each individual participating in the unit carried his or her funding sources. So when we lobbied for cross-training and cross-functioning, the theory did not translate easily to practice. In reality, any time a dislocated worker walked into the room, everyone pointed to the Title III staff person. Some people were still operating in their silos even though they were now in a unit. In order to fix that, we split-funded all of the positions so there are no more Title III-funded positions that can be pointed to.

There are no more claimant assistance positions, and in that unit there are no distinct Wagner-Peyser positions. Everybody is funded by all three, and it's amazing what removing that label has done to get people to really work together and to see services as a whole and not as silos.

Another benefit of CAP is that it had an automated tracking system that we could enhance and use for WPRS. This system provides tracking through the 17th week of the structured staff intervention program, and it also links to unemployment insurance. So there is a running record of the services that are delivered, and automatic reporting to the UI system if someone fails to report for a service or fails to follow through on a job referral. Naturally, we don't have too many of those negatives.

One of the most unique features of our program is that we profile at intake. When someone comes in to file a claim and register for the employment service, which is done in a single act with a single employment specialist, the profiling model is run at that point while the claimant is there. If the profiling score is such that the individual does need to be referred to reemployment services, or if the individual seems otherwise in need of reemployment services, then the individual is literally physically walked to the reemployment unit. That was something our local offices insisted on because it was the "bread and butter" key that we learned through the CAP; they didn't want folks getting out the door before they got a shot at them. We have followed through on that with WPRS and with the reemployment services strategy.

We now have an operation where the same service strategy and the same scheduling is used for our CAP customers, for our Title III customers, and for our WPRS-referred customers, and it is transparent to the customers. They don't know which program they are actually in, and they don't need to know. We insist, both at the local level and in our state monitoring, on same-day services; being able to profile at intake allows us to do that. Each individual who is referred to the reemployment unit on the day they file their claim gets the assessment and an orientation. There is a customized service plan developed, and in most (but not all) cases there is a fairly thorough effort at job referral and job development for that individual.

During that initial visit, customers are also introduced to our self-help resources. Each of our local offices has a resource area to which each client is introduced during the first visit to the office. That has

proved to be extremely successful, but it is a very labor-intensive process. It requires a good deal of staff intervention to provide these services. I am very interested in some of the electronic tools that are in production to be able to assist with that.

Just to give a few numbers to put things into perspective, last year more than 60,000 people were referred to the reemployment units across the state, and about two-thirds of those were a result of profiling. There were nearly 6,000 workshops conducted across the state for individuals going through the system and nearly 119,000 counseling sessions with individuals who went through the reemployment units. So it is labor-intensive, and it is much more of a high-touch strategy than a high-tech strategy, although we are getting better at the high-tech. Our employment rate has remained pretty consistent over the last two or three years at around 60 percent, and that's more or less the same for all claimant groups.

One of the commitments we made to the legislature when we initiated CAP is that we would try to track and report back on UI trust-fund savings resulting from placing claimants in jobs more quickly. Our guarantee was that we would return at least as much as was given to us for CAP. The first year they gave us 10 million and we gave them back 14 million. Last year we gave them back just over 31 million in trust-fund savings. So the legislature's happy, and when the legislature is happy, so are we.

This year we are still on track. The entered employment rate for the first part of program year 1998 is running about 60 percent, and trust-fund savings are a little over \$20 million. We feel good about what we are doing, and it's got to get better. The Workforce Investment Act does change the scenario, so we'll soon have to step back again and assess what else needs changing.

Marc Perrett

I am going to talk from a bit more general perspective; that is, from reemployment services for the claimant, rather than how profiling gets done. Oregon was one of the first five or six states to start worker profiling back in 1994. From the start we had a fair degree of success. The unemployment insurance (UI) and employment service (ES) units, which work for the employment security agency in Oregon, and the

JTPA partners, which are independent, cooperated to set up a system to identify and refer claimants to reemployment services and obtain good outcomes based upon individual needs.

The intervening years have witnessed several changes, one of which was, quite honestly, a drop in interest from our JTPA partners. It ended up that all the systems in Oregon for worker profiling were done by ES, and that was at a time when ES had limited resources and the capacity to serve clients was being stretched in directions other than UI claimants most likely to exhaust benefits. About the same time, the Wagner-Peyser funding was pretty flat. Fortunately, the state of Oregon decided that we needed to do more for both our employer and claimant customers, so we, like my panel colleagues from other states, received more state funding for our activities.

Oregon established a "Supplemental Employment Department Administrative Fund," and in 1996 we started using some of that money in close relationship with worker profiling. We are still using the list of profiling scores, as we always have, to identify those most likely to exhaust UI and bring them in for reemployment services.

We also work the WPRS model results from a slightly different angle. We identify those less likely to exhaust UI as prime candidates for job matching and refer them to existing job orders. This seems to work relatively well, however, this strategy proved to be very staff intensive, as Helen has alluded to. In the past year or two, we have backed off from aggressively serving both ends of the profiling list. Instead of each client looking at the job orders, we found ourselves individually matching one claimant at a time to the job orders, and it just took too much time.

Worker profiling in Oregon has expanded slowly over the last four to five years. As state managers we can encourage or mandate how much emphasis is put on it, but its degree of fit in the package of all ES services has fluctuated. Currently, profiling has again moved further up the list of priorities, and as state managers we are encouraging, and expecting, offices to do more and more.

We welcome the Wagner-Peyser recognition that claimant reemployment is an important aspect of what we have to offer. We talked about the supplementary state money. In Oregon it makes up 60 percent of our ES budget, but it is also a potential curse. It means that we

can do a lot of things that other states can't. Many of our achievements are probably largely a result of this extra money, but it does make us very responsive to the state governor and state legislature. We have a legislative session once every two years, and we're very, very reactive to their needs. At any point in time, or at least every two years, we see the potential of this money being diverted. So state funding is not nearly as stable as Wagner-Peyser funding.

In July of 1997, Oregon had 37,000 claimants who entered employment, which is not bad for a state the size of Oregon. This was as many entered employments as Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa combined. That's pretty fantastic, and I think our entered employment rate is not what Georgia's is, but it is well above the national average. We still admire the success of states such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Alabama. We can't imagine what's causing their success. Is it something in the drinking water down there? Also Missouri, Wisconsin, and Texas are other states that are doing outstanding work on claimant reemployment efforts. All of these numbers come from the annual report of the U.S. Employment Service, which is a great resource from an overview perspective. I thank David Balducchi for providing such concrete evidence of program success.

One of the things we do in Oregon is establish annual goals for each office. The expectations are formalized in specific numbers that we set as targets for each office on two outcomes: claimants placed and claimants who have entered employment. Currently we have an output-based system, and we count the actual number of claimants placed and entering employment. We have not adopted relative measures of outcomes such as entered employment rate or claimant placement rate. Our hesitation to do that comes from the concern that such measures would push us toward those clients who are easiest to serve, rather than serving as many as we can serve. However, we do want to study reemployment success by local office over time and against other offices. Such comparisons are increasingly important as we move closer to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) implementation.

Again, let me mention that our supplementary state funding is one of the major reasons we have been able to accomplish what we have. Another reason is the labor exchange. We still feel that our primary function is to be an employment office. Whether it is in the form of a

job and career center, a one-stop system, or an Internet service, our key function is matching job seekers with jobs. About 30 percent of our referrals and 50 percent of our placements come from job matching.

In addition to our staff working with employers and job seekers, we also have a self-referral system. We have a Web site with job vacancy listings and job seeker listings, and both types of listings may be either self-entered or staff-entered to the Web-based data system. For referrals to job interviews, we have not moved as far as some states have toward a reliance upon self-service. It doesn't get the outcomes that we want for our customers. We have also somewhat rejected the concept of case management. It takes too much time for what we get out of it. We sometimes do case management for some special contracted groups, especially vocational rehabilitation clients and disabled veterans, but we do not use that approach for our UI claimant and ES client populations.

Two other things that contribute to our output are our job and career centers. Our resource rooms have been a big hit in Oregon, especially with many of the folks that never thought they'd be coming into an employment office or accessing our services, especially those searching for jobs in an occupation with a nationwide job market and those in high-tech industries. The most popular services are labor market information, job finding classes, PC resume preparation, access to America's Job Bank, and, of course, regular job listings. When we have a little bit of tracking and friendly, effective staff assistance, we get both customer satisfaction and a high level of measured program outcome performance.

We believe in accountability within the state, and we are disappointed with some of the proposed WIA performance indicators. In particular, the plan to not count many of the services that are provided by the system is perplexing to us. We feel a need to focus on customers but also to be accountable for what we do through reporting to both the federal and state levels. There is some concern that the proposed performance measures within WIA could actually jeopardize the success of the system rather than contribute to success. To some extent, that also ties in with profiling.

When I was a local office manager, I welcomed profiling. It enabled me to take a triage approach to serving a broad population with a limited number of resources. But as we move toward performance ac-

countability, I think it is going to boil down to more of an outcome-based or result-based system, which looks at the results rather than the process. I welcome this approach wholeheartedly. However, I see a danger that some offices, especially one-stops, may be looking to get the biggest bang for the buck, and profiling may not be one of those things. I say this while realizing that duration is a performance indicator that gets discussed at the national and state levels but seldom gets adopted in a formal manner. I believe worker profiling is valuable. It has been a successful tool in our claimant reemployment efforts in Oregon.

Comments on Part I

The Changing Role of the Public Employment Service

David E. Balducchi
U.S. Department of Labor

During the 1990s, state employment service (ES) agencies, authorized by the Wagner-Peyser Act, delivered reemployment services to an increased share of unemployment insurance (UI) claimants. To expand this growth, the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) FY 2000 congressional appropriation contained new, special grants to state ES agencies totaling \$35 million to deliver reemployment services to an estimated 156,000 additional UI claimants.

The term *reemployment* is not new to the ES system. In the summer of 1933, DOL advanced the reemployment services concept by establishing a temporary placement division within the U.S. Employment Service called the National Reemployment Service (NRS). By November 1933, NRS had established 2,000 federal reemployment offices to match millions of Great Depression-era unemployed workers with agencies hiring workers for a multitude of public works projects (U.S. Department of Labor 1933, p. 1). Once a state established a public ES system, federal reemployment offices were turned over to the state ES agency. The NRS proved to be a successful incubator for the federal/state ES system. By 1939, a national ES system operating under the Wagner-Peyser Act was in place, and the NRS was abolished (Haber and Kruger 1964, p. 28). Through the ensuing decades, as the nation's economic circumstances changed, so did the application of ES policy.

In the mid 20th century, labor exchange services became intertwined with manpower policy, and a larger share of workforce development funds was directed to skills training (Haber and Murray 1966,

p. 431). In the late 1970s, economic restructuring and resultant unemployment enkindled a dialogue about the effectiveness of public employment and training programs that led to a series of reemployment demonstration studies conducted by DOL in the 1980s. Evidence emerged that early identification and referral to reemployment services of claimants likely to exhaust UI benefits was a cost-effective public intervention.

In November 1993, new federal legislation required states wishing to maintain eligibility for receipt of UI administrative grants to establish Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) systems. The law required UI claimants who were identified by state WPRS systems to be at risk of UI benefits exhaustion to participate in reemployment services or risk losing UI benefits (Balducchi, Johnson, and Gritz 1997, p. 473).

In January 1994, the Clinton Administration pressed for an expansion of the reemployment concept. In the President's State of the Union address, Clinton pledged to "transform America's outdated unemployment system into a reemployment system" (Clinton 1995). The administration introduced an employment and training reform bill in March 1994 called the Reemployment Act.¹ While the bill was never enacted, the reemployment concept became wedded to the emerging one-stop concept being designed to consolidate the delivery of federal and state employment and training services. These concepts were embodied in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998.

TRENDS IN LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES

States collect data on UI claimants who have registered for work during the program year (PY) (i.e., July 1 to June 30), and send quarterly statistical reports to DOL summarizing labor exchange services activity.² Noteworthy labor exchange services trends can be seen through data reported in Table 1 on three activities: 1) received some reportable service, 2) job search activities, and 3) entered employment.

- *Received some reportable service* is defined as having received interviewing, counseling, testing, referral to jobs or training, job

Table 1 Labor Exchange Activities of Eligible UI Claimants Registered for Work

Activity	Program year				
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Received some reportable service	4,270,711 46.2%	4,012,523 52.4%	4,004,707 54.0%	3,985,194 54.9%	3,599,511 54.0%
Participated in a job search activity	1,588,223 37.2%	1,740,209 43.4%	2,149,171 53.7%	2,306,738 57.9%	2,262,883 62.9%
Number who entered employment	890,504 20.9%	885,721 22.1%	879,562 22.0%	924,322 23.2%	918,294 25.5%
Total UI claimants	9,235,977	7,662,050	7,413,036	7,254,009	6,663,475

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor (1996, 1999).

search activities, or other similar services. It is the closest proxy to “reemployment services” tracked in state ES agency activity reports (U.S. Department of Labor 1993, p. III-11).

- *Job search activities* is a subset of *received some reportable service*. It includes “resume preparation assistance, job search workshops, job finding clubs, provision of specific labor market information, and development of a job search plan” (U.S. Department of Labor 1993, p. III-11).
- *Entered employment* is defined as the number of UI claimants who enter employment after having received a reportable service (U.S. Department of Labor 1993, p. II-12).

In PY 1997, 6.6 million UI claimants registered for work, and 3.6 million received a reportable reemployment service. Between PY 1993 (the year preceding WPRS implementation) and PY 1996, the percent of UI claimants who received reemployment services increased by 8.7 percentage points despite steadily improving economic conditions. The biggest uptick in activity occurred in PY 1994. Since that year, the share of UI claimants receiving reemployment services has stabilized at approximately 54 percent.

The period PYs 1993–1997 witnessed a significant increase in the use of job search activities by UI claimants. In PY 1993, only 37.2 percent of UI claimants who received a reemployment service received it

in the category of job search activities. In PY 1997 this percentage was 62.9, an increase of 25.7 percentage points.

The entered employment rate for UI claimants who received a reportable service increased from 20.9 percent in PY 1993 to 25.5 percent in PY 1997.³ So despite decreases in the volume of claimants and the number of services delivered, the effectiveness of services steadily improved over the period.

REASONS FOR GROWTH IN RECEIPT OF SERVICES

The growth in the share of UI claimants who received reemployment services may be due to four interrelated events.

- Federal/state implementation of WPRS. During 1993–1996, state and local implementation of WPRS systems necessitated establishing new services (e.g., job search workshops). In a WPRS report to Congress, the U.S. Department of Labor (1997a) observed that state ES agencies were the dominant providers of reemployment services to UI claimants.
- Employment and Training Administration policy leadership. Since 1993, the Employment and Training Administration of DOL has issued numerous WPRS policy and technical guides, hosted national conferences to promote effective practices, and required states to establish individual reemployment services plans that “increase the number of UI claimants that enter employment, reduce UI benefit duration, and speed the referral of those UI claimants who need additional help to training providers or other support services” (U.S. Department of Labor 1997b, p. 4). In response, most state ES agencies delivered services to an increased share of UI claimants.
- One-stop grants. Between PYs 1994 and 2000, the Employment and Training Administration distributed to the states \$826.5 million in one-stop grants, under Wagner-Peyser Act authority, to replace their fragmented employment and training program structures with one-stop delivery systems. States used these grants to make infrastructure improvements and to introduce

electronic labor exchange services. Many states selected their state ES system as the platform for erecting their one-stop delivery system. Under WIA, the nation's nearly 2,400 local ES offices were either designated as one-stop centers or affiliated sites.

- Sustained economic growth. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, during PYs 1993–1997, the nation's total unemployment rate averaged 5.5 percent. During the same period, the number of UI claimants who registered for work fell by 2,572,502, a 27.8 percent decrease. A bustling U.S. economy with a strong demand for workers has reduced UI claimant workloads, and may have enabled states to deliver additional reemployment services to UI claimants who face greater job-finding challenges.⁴

CONCLUSION

The delivery of reemployment services is a long tradition of state ES agencies. Despite a bustling U.S. economy, the gait of technological change has influenced the rate and duration of unemployment (Baumol and Wolff 1998, p. 1). According to findings by International Survey Research, there remains a persistent anxiety among workers about job security. No wonder “[d]own sizing has become a permanent feature of the corporate American landscape” (Belton 1999, p. 2). As a result, workers may likely experience periodic job changes requiring transitional reemployment services and retraining to obtain new jobs. To better administer new workforce development services, the Employment and Training Administration, state ES agencies and other workforce development agencies should consider systematic screening of job seekers to effectively identify their needs and to efficiently ration public funds.

Notes

1. H.R. 4040, 103rd U.S. Congress.
2. Labor exchange services data are reported on DOL's Employment and Training Administration Form 9002. This form reports on the activity of UI eligible claimants who have registered for work with the state ES agency and who, during the PY, are or have been determined to be monetarily eligible for UI benefits under federal or state UI laws. Wagner-Peyser Act reporting requirements are contained in *ET Handbook No. 406*.
3. This entered employment rate is different from the measure described in Department of Labor (1996, 1999). The rate reported in Table 1 is conditional upon receipt of a reportable service, and therefore may be a more meaningful measure of service effectiveness. In 2001, DOL used this methodology to calculate the PY 1999 entered employment rate for each state.
4. In PY 1997, the civilian labor force averaged 137 million workers and the total unemployment rate was 4.6 percent.

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Part II

Applications of Targeting Methods

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