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2010 Innovations Awards Application

Deadline: March 1, 2010

ID # (assigned by CSG): **10-MW-03IL**

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

1. **State:** Illinois
2. **Assign Program Category (applicant):** Government Operations and Technology – Information Systems
(Use list at end of application)
3. **Program Name** – Illinois workNet Portal and Program
4. **Administering Agency** – Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
5. **Contact Person (Name and Title)** – Julio Rodriguez, Director of Program Services
6. **Address** – 100 West Randolph Street, Suite 3-400, Chicago, Illinois 60601
7. **Telephone Number** – (office) 312-814-8421 and (cell) 773-848-3694
8. **FAX Number** – 312-814-0999
9. **E-mail Address** – Julio.Rodriguez@illinois.gov
10. **Web site Address** – <http://www.illinoisworknet.com>
11. **Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.-**

The Illinois workNet™ Portal and Program (<http://www.illinoisworknet.com>) is the primary local and statewide workforce development source in Illinois, connecting individuals, businesses, and workforce professionals to the tools and resources integral to achieve training and employment goals. Utilizing partnerships and technology with seamless and real-time access to resources has vastly expanded services through over 900 community partners that were previously only available through the One-Stop Comprehensive Centers and their satellite offices.

12. **How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2010 to be considered.**

As of March 1, 2010, the statewide Illinois workNet portal and program has been operational for **four years and eight months**.

13. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

A 2004 statewide study of the workforce system commissioned by the Illinois Workforce Investment Board (IWIB) recommended that the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) complete the following activities:

- Develop a portal for career, education and services information that can be localized for each workforce area
- Develop training and certification for Career Resource Specialists that provide navigation assistance to Illinois workNet users
- Establish portal steering group, including agency partners, to guide portal development and implementation

The Illinois workNet Portal and Program were designed and created to address the IWIB recommendations as well as local and statewide issues key to benchmarking, providing, and improving the quality of workforce services in Illinois. The core issues addressed through the portal and program implementation include:

- a) Disparate quality and timeliness of services and information provided to workforce professionals, individuals, and businesses
- b) Various levels and limited knowledge and skills for using technology with workforce services
- c) Inconsistent information and marketing used to connect individuals and businesses to the workforce development system
- d) Reliance on mandated WIA partnerships solely to disseminate and deliver workforce services
- e) Accessible format for individuals with disabilities to gain equal access to resources and services

As the economic landscape quickly changes and dramatically impacts the people of Illinois, the Portal and Program has become a catalyst to respond quickly to changing needs by delivering virtual and in-person service solutions. Recent examples include:

1. PY 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) Summer Youth Employment Program – The timeline for the disbursement of ARRA funding to states left little up-front time for planning. However, Illinois workNet responded by developing statewide online youth work readiness assessment and activities. The benchmarked outcome was 16,584 youth completing the activities and assessment with 80.5% meeting work readiness attainment.
2. Elevate America Program – The State of Illinois in partnership with Microsoft used Illinois workNet over a three month project period (July 31, 2009 – October 31, 2009) to streamline distribution of 31,437 vouchers for online computer training courses and business certification exams and trained over 900 workforce professionals to implement the program.

The chart (with question 14) below depicts the primary activities and evolution of the Illinois workNet Portal and Program.

14. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

| Dates in Chronological Order | Specific Activities and Operations |
|------------------------------|---|
| July 1, 2005- June 30, 2006 | <p>A. Completed (Phase I) Pilot Implementation of Illinois workNet portal consisting of two pathways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Job Seekers Pathway – This pathway connects individuals to local and state job preparation and search tools, education programs, and work support services. 2. Businesses Pathway –This pathway connects businesses to local and state recruitment, training, and development resources. <p>The portal features some unique benefits including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locally customizable content areas are easy to post with no web authoring experience required. • Seamless access to third-party databases, using web services, joins state agency information through a single portal to provide labor market, occupational, and postsecondary education and training information • To ensure people with disabilities, who require assistive technologies to use a computer, can use Illinois workNet, the system meets technology accessibility standards set by the State of Illinois. <p>The pilot occurred with three Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIA)/Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIB)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. LWIA 9 – City of Chicago 2. LWIA 15 – Peoria, Marshall, Stark, and Woodford Counties 3. LWIA 25 – Perry, Jackson, Jefferson, Franklin, and Williamson Counties <p>These pilot sites included physical Workforce Investment Act-funded Comprehensive One-Stops, satellite sites, community-based organizations, faith-based groups and other non-traditional partners.</p> <p>Benefits provided by the pilot project were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training was provided on using the portal with customers as a means of obtaining universal core services and on posting local content to the benefit of community members. • Community members have seamless access to state and local resources in a consumer-friendly format, all in one place. • People who use assistive technologies to access the Internet can use Illinois workNet. • Formation of partnerships and advisory group lays the foundation for input, buy-in, and transparency. <p>B. Formed an IWIB Advisory Group – Membership was composed of IWIB members, state agencies, and local workforce development organizations.</p> <p>C. Developed launch marketing plan and materials – Pilot sites held launch activities.</p> <p>D. Began development of the Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Online course – Through</p> |

| Dates in Chronological Order | Specific Activities and Operations |
|------------------------------|---|
| | <p>the advisement of LWIA and LWIB staff , the goal and curriculum outline was developed and aimed at ensuring workforce professionals have the knowledge and skills to use technology and Illinois workNet to enhance workforce services. The following workforce professional skills were identified to be targeted by the course:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the ability to help customers in job search planning, techniques and tactics • Understand and be knowledgeable of how to interact with diverse populations • Understand, use, and explain basic labor market and career information • Demonstrate the ability to use technology, including providing basic technology training and assistance • Know how to link to business, employer services and other resources through technology <p>E. Began formal evaluation of the portal and program – To ensure continual feedback an evaluation plan was developed. The evaluation plan is based on the strategic vision paper, or “blueprint” for improving workforce development. The overall focus of the blueprint is to improve the effectiveness of the State’s workforce programs, and to link them more closely with the State’s economic development tactics. The blueprint has these four main elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Focus Workforce Investment Act training investments on responding to the critical needs of the labor market, including flexible tactics for training in skill shortage areas; 2. Strengthen Local Workforce Investment Boards by providing clear direction and support, so that these Boards can become a means for improving the linkage between workforce and economic development; 3. Implement a Career Center network that is responsive to the needs of Illinois workers, makes effective use of current technology, and expands access for those most in need of such access; and 4. Improve management and accountability for workforce programs operated by Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. <p>The blueprint for improving workforce development was intended to signal a significant shift in State priorities and emphasis for the management of workforce programs in Illinois. Some of these changes envisioned in the blueprint are long-term goals, and some of the changes were intended to be carried out relatively quickly. All the changes suggested in the blueprint are important priorities.</p> |
| July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007 | <p>A. Completed Phase II Rollout of Illinois workNet Portal and Program – During July 2006 through June 2007, Illinois workNet entered a testing and expansion phase, “Phase II Rollout.” Phase II implementation included the three pilot sites plus ten other LWIAs (1, 4, 6, 10, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, and 24).</p> <p>The LWIAs selected for Phase II implementation were provided technical assistance and supports based on pilot benchmarks. The Phase II sites were selected based on performance data, geographic proximity and capacity in the areas of technology, partnerships, and staff.</p> <p>The following activities supported Phase II rollout of Illinois workNet to the ten additional LWIAs through the provision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Step-by-Step Implementation Guide |

| Dates in Chronological Order | Specific Activities and Operations |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentations (both face-to-face and via live Webinars) to Local Workforce Investment Boards and partners and training on use of the system and local content management ▪ User guides and other materials to help LWIAs with building best practices ▪ Provision of the marketing plan and templates ▪ Technical assistance to LWIAs ▪ Access and support to publish local content to the Portal ▪ Online monthly reports on progress submitted by each LWIA ▪ Provision of small grant for computers, in particular, for non-mandated partners that are community-based organizations <p>B. Portal enhancements and feedback included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online job search and resume development tool • Updates to the Businesses side of the portal through a phased plan that integrated improvements identified by Illinois’ businesses • Spanish translation • Continued work with disability advocacy groups and Illinois Department of Human Services Department of Rehabilitation Services to ensure ongoing accessibility • Usability study after system improvements are made to ensure a high level of customer satisfaction • Created a new Workforce Professionals Pathway – This pathway was setup to put resources online and make them accessible to all Illinois workNet partner locations. <p>C. Completed Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Online Course - The self-paced, online course is composed of an introduction and units which cover the following topics: using Illinois workNet; using the Illinois workNet Key Sectors Pathway; conducting a job search; and locating education, training and services. The only requirements to take this course are to be employed with an Illinois workNet Partner and have access to the Internet. The course averages about five hours to complete. For people who have never taken an online course, this course is designed to be easy to take and to understand.</p> <p>Each unit is has lessons with five-question quizzes that are not graded, at least one learning activity, and a unit quiz with ten questions that are graded. A passing score of 80%, based only upon unit quizzes, is required to pass the course. Upon successful completion of the course, a Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Certificate is earned as well as one Continuing Education Unit from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Department of Continuing Education. The course is a valuable resource, so after completing the course workforce professional still have access for as much as one year.</p> |

| Dates in Chronological Order | Specific Activities and Operations |
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| July 1, 2007– June 30, 2008 | <p>Completed Phase III Rollout of Illinois workNet Portal and Program -Major goals were carried out to ensure the Illinois workNet system became the entry to workforce services in Illinois:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Completing phase three of the statewide rollout to all Local Workforce Investment Areas, making the Illinois workNet portal a comprehensive, widely accessible system B. A rebranding and marketing strategy that renamed “One-Stop”/Illinois and Employment Training (IETC) Centers into Illinois workNet Centers C. Producing a plan for full integration of the Illinois workNet portal into the daily activities of the one-stop system D. Developing high-growth industries pages on the Illinois workNet portal <p>A. Illinois workNet Portal Statewide Rollout - The completion of the statewide rollout of the Illinois workNet portal assured widely accessible workforce and economic development resources to all LWIAs across the state. Besides comprehensive Illinois workNet Centers, portal sites also include satellite locations, community-based organizations, faith-based groups, educational entities, social service agencies, and other non-traditional partners. About 440 entities provided access to the Illinois workNet portal, expanding statewide services well beyond the traditional "comprehensive one-stop system".</p> <p>B. One-Stop/IETC Rebranding to Illinois workNet Centers - A rebranding and marketing strategy was developed and started in this program year to create an identifiable brand and increase access to and awareness of the services offered through the statewide implementation of the Illinois workNet system. This strategy consisted of the following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing One-Stop/IETC signage with Illinois workNet signs and logos at all comprehensive centers and WIA-funded satellites • Developing and making rebranding/marketing materials available to all LWIAs • Advertising and local launch events <p>To augment the local tactics for rebranding and marketing, Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity sponsored launch events to highlight and raise awareness of programs, services, and partnerships provided through the Illinois workNet system. Each event was well attended by businesses, local partners, service agencies, chambers of commerce, community members, and press. The events featured state and local speakers, and business and individual success stories. Widespread news coverage informed community members and businesses of the rebranding and the resources and services available to them through the Illinois workNet portal, local Illinois workNet Centers, and partnerships.</p> <p>Illinois workNet in Action - United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1268, Belvidere - Illinois workNet staff and their local partners were integral components in the response that followed the layoffs at the Chrysler plant in Belvidere. The combined efforts of these partnerships, including the local Illinois workNet Center (The Workforce Connection), the LWIB, local governments, educational entities, economic development and community partners, and state agencies, provided immediate assistance to dislocated workers. Through the portal and physical center, dislocated workers were able to avail themselves of the full spectrum of rapid response services from pre-layoff through post-layoff.</p> <p>This event clearly demonstrated how the Illinois workNet system with local partnership is able to ease access to services and information to help dislocated workers with their immediate, short-term and even long-range vocational needs. By connecting individuals to</p> |

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| | <p>online resources, employment-related counseling and workshops, and training in high-growth industries, the Illinois workNet portal offers real-time solutions to those seeking services.</p> <p>C. Integration into Daily Workforce Activities -A coordinated integration plan that included technical assistance, training, and provision of supportive services was developed to ensure the Illinois workNet system becomes an integral component in all workforce services. To this end, the following activities were completed toward integration of the Illinois workNet system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 757 workforce professionals completed training to become Certified Illinois workNet Advisors • An online Certified Illinois workNet Content Manager Course was established that allows for new local content managers to gain immediate access to training and earn one Continuing Education Unit from Southern Illinois University(SIU)-Carbondale Continuing Education • An online instructional video series was created to help users to more effectively and efficiently access Illinois workNet resources • Customized Rapid Response web pages were added to the portal for easier access and individualized customization. <p>D. High-Growth Industries (now Key Sectors) - One primary goal was to develop an online format to promote high growth jobs and training. This was accomplished through the development of High-Growth Industries pages which are a component of the Illinois workNet portal. The site features a CareerBuilder™ interface for job seekers to locate and apply for jobs in Illinois' demand sectors. It is also used by local Business Service Teams to post job openings at no cost to employers in their LWIAs.</p> |
| July 1, 2008– June 30, 2009 | <p>The Illinois workNet portal and program supported state and LWIA efforts to respond to the immediacy of the changing economic environment. The portal offered unique features, such as locally and geographically tailored information, that benefit individuals, businesses, and workforce professionals. Seamless access to third-party tools, including occupational and labor market information, resume building, interest inventories, job postings, and training programs, ensures ease of use and minimizes redundant systems. The portal supports the use of assistive technologies, meets Illinois Information Technology Accessibility Act requirements, and now offers four pathways to information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals - Learn about careers; prepare for and find jobs; connect to education and training; identify work support services, such as child care and health care; and find economic recovery information and guidance for laid off workers. This pathway is also available in Spanish. • Businesses - Connect to recruitment, employee training, economic recovery, and business development resources. • Workforce professionals/educators - Access online training and integration resources to enhance services. • Key sectors - Highlights career pathways, job postings and openings, regional economic snapshots, and training programs in Illinois' key sectors. |

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| | <p>This program presented a national opportunity to identify economic issues and implement solutions. In Illinois, as the economy and workforce development needs rapidly changed, Illinois workNet acted as a mechanism to proactively inform individuals, businesses, and workforce professionals. During the program year, the following major goals were carried out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Enhancing Laid Off Worker Assistance resources to provide a pathway and guidance to help individuals achieve their re-employment and training goals. B. Using online discussion forums to inform and involve workforce professionals with policy changes related to American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) initiatives. C. Developing a Business Layoffs and Closings Map to provide an interactive geographic representation of the current impact by industry of the economic downturn on Illinois businesses and workers. D. Retooling the Illinois' Key Sectors as the economic growth strategy evolved. E. Beginning setup of technology-based Summer Youth Employment Program Work Readiness pre- and post-assessments, and activities. <p>A. Laid Off Worker Assistance</p> <p>As the number of businesses downsizing has increased as a result of the economic downturn, Illinois workNet quickly responded by enhancing the “Laid Off Worker Assistance” area of the portal. This area provides individuals affected by a job layoff with guidance and a pathway to achieve re-employment and training goals. The page uses a series of interactive icons to enhance usability. Once any icon is clicked, the user is directed to a short video (available in English and Spanish) and next steps linked to related resources throughout the portal. This area also includes a Company Specific Layoff Information page that links to locally customized pages aimed at guiding workers to resources for them, before and after a layoff. To ensure workforce professionals know how to use and handle community outreach, guidance, and resources such as locally customizable laid-off assistance flyers are available through the Illinois workNet Workforce Professional’s Pathway. LWIAs use the guidance and resources as they involve local partners and plan for mitigation of business downsizing.</p> <p>B. Online Discussion Forums</p> <p>As the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 impacted WIA programs, online formats including discussion forums ensured real time information availability to workforce professionals and provided a format for quick turnaround of questions and answers. Immediate access to current information is a critical aspect of ARRA and its impact on the Summer Youth Employment Program is an example of a fast-paced program that used online forums, live webinars, and dynamic web content to keep workforce professionals across the state apprised. With the aid of these resources, youth providers were able to implement their programs in a short duration.</p> <p>C. Business Layoffs and Closings Map</p> <p>The Business Layoffs and Closures Web Page provide an interactive representation of the current impact of the economic downturn on Illinois businesses and workers. This repository of job layoffs and business closures are intended to ensure that both Local Workforce Investment Board (LWIB)/LWIA staff and State of Illinois staff have timely and adequate information concerning any job layoffs and business closures in Illinois. The job layoff and business closure information identifies all WARN and Trade Adjustment Act Certified</p> |

| Dates in Chronological Order | Specific Activities and Operations |
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| | <p>Events as well as any other layoffs or closures for which LWIBs/LWIAs receive notification regardless of the number of individuals affected by job loss. The overarching benefit is this data management tool simplifies an up-to-date and real-time overview of the economic impact that LWIAs are experiencing. Further, this aids with facilitating allocation of resources in responding to businesses and employees impacted by layoffs and closures.</p> <p>D. Key Sectors</p> <p>Illinois' Key Sectors are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • projected to have significant job openings, • or affect the growth of other industries, • or are existing or emerging groups of industries being transformed by technology and innovation or economic conditions requiring new skill sets for workers. <p>The sectors include: Agriculture, Health Care, Information Technology, Manufacturing, and Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics. To adapt to the changing economy, the Key Sector Pathway was retooled to emphasize both ongoing, in-demand occupations and the shift from job growth to job openings. To increase outreach concerning these sectors, a set of locally customizable marketing materials is available to workforce professionals to download from the portal. As programs evolve to update training and bolster these sectors, the portal provides the primary means for timely statewide information.</p> <p>E. Summer Youth Employment Program Work Readiness</p> <p>To provide youth consistent and significant work readiness resources, the end of this Program Year marked the start of developing online pre- and post-assessments, and activities for Summer Youth Employment Program Work Readiness Programs. The Illinois workNet system was selected as the platform to ensure statewide access to all participating youth, and to all workforce professionals carrying out local programs.</p> <p>Development of assessments and activities began by aligning the Work Readiness Skills Goals for WIA and ARRA to portal resources. As a result, the assessments and activities cover the skill goals in a format available to youth online and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Exploring Careers and Training • Introduction to Job Search Preparation & Resume Writing • Introduction to Job Searching and Applying for a Job • Introduction to Interviewing for a Job • Introduction to Workplace Skills <p>About 800 workforce professionals were provided training using one-hour webinars and ongoing, no-cost, 24/7 access to training materials and resources to implement the program. Using Illinois workNet as a consistent program design element will ensure that participating youth are exposed to technology-based work-readiness resources and a standard for effective program design is will be achieved across the state.</p> |

| Dates in Chronological Order | Specific Activities and Operations |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| July 31, 2009 – October 31, 2009 | <p>The following primary activities occurred between July 2009 and March 1, 2010:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Elevate America Statewide Computer Skills and Certification Exams Program B. WIA Works for Illinois web pages C. Disability Resources Pathway D. Develop a Community of Users <p>A. Elevate America Statewide Computer Skills and Certification Exams Program –The Illinois-Microsoft Elevate America program is a public-private partnership between the State of Illinois and Microsoft. The purpose of the program was to provide a no-cost opportunity for individuals to increase their technology skills. This is a national program providing vouchers (which are used like coupons) to be redeemed by individuals to complete Microsoft online courses and Microsoft business certification exams. Illinois workNet built web pages for individuals and developed an online voucher distribution system that automated how workforce professionals assigned vouchers to customers and how customers received them.</p> <p>The distribution of vouchers took place between July 31 and October 31, 2009. During that time period, Illinois workNet quickly trained hundreds of workforce professionals to use the automated system so they could assign vouchers to their customer accounts. Illinois workNet offered step-by-step instructions to redeem vouchers and stored them in customer accounts so there was no way to lose a voucher. This system supported instantaneous reports so at any point in the program state leadership and workforce professionals could view exact quantities and types of voucher distributed in summary or detail. Individuals benefited from instantaneous access as well to their vouchers, online courses, step-by-step instructions, and access to testing centers.</p> |
| January 1, February 1, 2010 | <p>B. WIA Works for Illinois web pages – WIA Works for Illinois is an awareness campaign to ensure citizens, businesses, and leaders are aware of the important benefits and need for workforce services. Illinois workNet developed the pages and a new Interactive map that connects citizens to over 900 community partners. A Success Story upload tool and display provide an opportunity for people to share their employment and training success stories. Webinars provided workforce professionals training on using WIA Works.</p> |
| January 1, 2010 - February 24, 2010 | <p>C. Disability Resources Pathway – To better connect individuals with disabilities to employment and training opportunities, Illinois workNet developed and launched the new Disability Resources Pathway in partnership with Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services. The pathway includes videos and provides state and local information about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Incentives Planning and Assistance • Disability Benefits and Information • Disability Rights and Advocacy Resources • Youth in Transition • Interactive Map featuring community partners across the state, that provide specific services for people with disabilities |
| February 1, 2010 – March 1, 2010 | <p>D. Develop a Community of Users – For each new and g topics, online discussion forums are available to all workforce professional partners from the portal. Opportunities to connect to Illinois workNet content and news are available through Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. To help other workforce professionals use these social media venues, a series of Social Media Basics webinars began, a social media guide was made available, and an online Social Media guidance page.</p> |

15. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The Illinois workNet Portal and Program offers new and creative approaches to ensure statewide benchmarks for the delivery of workforce services. The foundation of the approach is transparent state and local partnerships that foster collaboration, trust, and sharing of resources. The program has been successful in bringing together a diverse set of agencies and organizations and providing a means for them to better reach community members who need their services. By solidifying partnerships, the program focuses on carrying out creative and timely solutions. Some of the new and creative approaches include:

- a. Expansion of access to workforce services by:
 - Tying in-person services and online services to a single brand, Illinois workNet
 - Offering all workforce professionals within the local partnerships, free access to online courses, webinars, and other in-person training opportunities
 - Networking workforce professionals who otherwise would not have ongoing communication opportunities
 - Providing marketing materials to all partners through online access
 - Inviting partnerships outside the norm, including libraries, faith-based organizations and others who, among their services, connect their customers to employment and training resources

- b. Dynamic and real-time access to information, resources, and tools
 - Providing easy content publishing access to local and state partners to ensure dynamic, locally relevant information
 - Using web services to display multiple external databases in a consumer-friendly format
 - Inviting state and local partnerships and providing their information through one access point, rather than people having to go to multiple websites
 - Using single-sign-on so customers log in once to get direct access to multiple external tools
 - Enhancing the portal based on current trends and needs to ensure
 - Using the portal as a means to approach systematically large-scale projects to benefit as many customers as possible
 - Ensuring accessibility guidelines are consistently met for those who use assistive technologies to gain access to the Internet

16. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The expenditures for start up from completion of the original charter totaled \$728,015.00.

17. What are the program’s annual operational costs?

Approximately \$2,000,000.00.

18. How is the program funded?

Workforce Investment Act federal funding allocated by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

19. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

20. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Equipment – Edit and production web servers setup up in a secured hosting environment, staff use computer workstations, and programmers use workstations setup for web development environments.

Technology and Software Used - Microsoft Content Management System, SQL, ASP.net web development environment using Visual Studio; hosted Adobe Connect Pro is used for webinars, Angel Learning Management System is used for hosting and developing online courses for workforce professionals, Systran online translation tool is used for language translation, office productivity software includes: Microsoft Office Suite, VISIO, Photoshop, and Camtasia (for developing video shorts). Programmers use Visual Studio, Visual Safe Source, and other applications development software.

21. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes, the innovators name is Julio Rodriguez,

- a. Telephone Number – (office) 312-814-8421 and (cell) 773-848-3694
- b. E-mail Address – jrodriguez@illinois.gov

22. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Each state has a statewide workforce website. However, we are not aware of any states that carry out these unique and creative approaches:

- Leveraging technology to strengthen partnerships
- Supporting local content publishing to as many local and state partner staff who want access to post
- Using web services to connect users seamlessly to multiple external partner resources
- Melding the importance of in-person and online services under one brand to improve consumer awareness
- Networking workforce professionals within the traditional workforce system with an expanded network of professionals who also help people connect to employment and training
- Using the portal as a means to strategically implement large-scale statewide programs
- Requiring the system to use a flexible, dynamic approach to adapt to the ever-changing workforce environment

As a result, there are no other state websites comparable to the Illinois workNet Portal and Program.

23. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The program has been fully implemented. However, because the system is dynamic it is will continue to change and evolve base on the changing environment and needs of its users.

24. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

| Issues Identified With Question 13 | Effectiveness |
|--|--|
| a) Disparate quality and timeliness of services and information provided to workforce professionals, | <p>The Illinois workNet Portal and Program has directly impacted and improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to accurate and timely information to all citizens of Illinois in all geographic regions. The portal displays both local and state content published by 45 representatives from 26 Local Workforce |

| Issues Identified With Question 13 | Effectiveness |
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| <p>individuals, and businesses</p> | <p>Investment Areas, two state agency partners, and Illinois workNet team members. In the past, this information may have never made it to customers. Local and state partners with access to publish content are trained to ensure consistent knowledge for posting to the portal. Based upon a Content Management rubric used to determine the level of local content beneficial to community members, 73% of Local Workforce Investment Areas are contributing moderate to extensive content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State and local partnerships are strengthened offering more opportunities to share, and increase timeliness, of information for each other and for customers. Partnerships have grown to 972 partner sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47 Comprehensive Centers • 74 WIA-funded Satellites • 464 Other Access • 387 Dissemination <p>There is no downside to improving the quality and timeliness of services. However, the portal does not replace in-person services; it augments them. Managing quality and timeliness of services has to occur with each local partner as well.</p> |
| <p>b) Various levels and limited knowledge and skills for using technology in conjunction with providing workforce services</p> | <p>All workforce professionals, employed by Illinois workNet partners, can complete the Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Online Course. The course provides them the knowledge and skills needed to use Illinois workNet with their work and to model using technology for their customers. So far, 1,405 workforce professionals have completed the Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Online Course and another 600 are in process of completing the course. Other positive outcomes of using online training include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illinois workNet expedited training approximately 900 workforce professionals during the Elevate America Program. • Timely webinars are available to all local partners and have been invaluable in training and updating thousand of workforce professionals on a wide-range of topics. Topics range from portal updates, Summer Youth Employment Program, using Social Media, to helping individuals with disabilities. Illinois workNet has hosted over 300 webinars. Through the Summer Youth Employment Program webinars alone, about 800 workforce professionals were trained. <p>Initially, there was some resistance to using online training as the primary means to reach workforce professionals statewide. However, as people have increased their comfort level using technology and reduced travel. Workforce professionals have come to expect training to be timely and online. This has become the preferred means of staying current and learning more about workforce development in Illinois.</p> <p>Online trainings are augmented at the local level through networking</p> |

| Issues Identified With Question 13 | Effectiveness |
|---|---|
| | <p>events and by hosting Facilitated Certified Illinois workNet Advisor Events. These events set aside time in a computer lab for workforce professionals to complete the course.</p> <p>The challenge is keeping up with the changing environment to keep workforce professionals up to date. Online training does not negate the need for in-person interactions.</p> |
| <p>c) Inconsistent information and marketing used to connect individuals and businesses to the workforce development system</p> | <p>Templates for locally customizable, professional marketing materials are made available to all partners to download through the portal. The materials ensure a consistent message, branding, and quality of information that melds the online resources through Illinois workNet to local in-person services. The marketing materials include a wide variety of print and online options, graphic guidelines, and images used by all partners. Examples include: signage, flyers, advertisements, website graphics, and brochures. By providing direct access to consistently branded and professional materials the public perception of the workforce system is improved. Use of the marketing materials correlated to a 30% quarterly increase in portal users.</p> <p>During 2009, Illinois workNet Portal web statistics have increased with the increased use of the marketing materials:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic: 2.6 million page views per month; of which 95,782 are unique visitors; averaging over 84,000 views per day. • Active Accounts: 126,796 Individual Accounts, 2,970 Workforce Professional Accounts, 547 Business Accounts; totaling 130,313 active Illinois workNet accounts. • Get Connected (monthly newsletter publication): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Individual's Monthly Newsletter subscriber count = 79,076 ○ Workforce Professional's Monthly Newsletter subscriber count = 2,842 ○ Business Monthly Newsletter subscriber count = 3,715 <p>It is important to ensure consistent and ongoing use of the marketing materials; this requires state and local oversight of partnerships.</p> |
| <p>d) Reliance upon mandated WIA partnerships to solely disseminate and deliver workforce services</p> | <p>Illinois workNet Partnerships have grown to 972 partner sites, well beyond the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funded sites and mandated partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 47 WIA-funded Comprehensive Centers • 74 WIA-funded Satellites • 464 Other Access • 387 Dissemination <p>Illinois workNet helps community members connect to these partners through an interactive map. Partnerships include many types of organizations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleges • Community action agencies • Community technology centers |

| Issues Identified With Question 13 | Effectiveness |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability service providers • High schools • Libraries • Local and state government offices • Public assistance offices • Social services organizations <p>Through a streamlined distribution process via local partnerships, over a three month project period (July 31, 2009 – October 31, 2009), 31,437 vouchers for online computer training courses and business certification exams were provided to citizens of Illinois.</p> <p>To maintain records of partnerships and to ensure local management of partnerships, Illinois workNet uses a site management database that automates notifications to partners and prompts Local Workforce Investment Areas to follow up with them. This requires the system to automate information collection, display and follow up, and the designation of local coordinators to reach out as a local Illinois workNet Center representative. Increased partnerships require time allocated to managing them.</p> |
| <p>e) Accessible format for individuals with disabilities to gain equal access to resources and services</p> | <p>Beginning with the pilot period, Illinois workNet has worked closely with the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services and other statewide disability advocacy groups to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Annual usability studies (with all types of users) and two accessibility studies (with disabled users) provide feedback and recommendation for enhancements. All feedback aimed at improving usability or accessibility is included with the project’s annual plan of work. As new pages are built, programmers run accessibility tests to ensure ongoing compliance with accessibility requirements set forth by the State of Illinois.</p> <p>Ongoing successful efforts have led to working with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services to launch the Disability Resources Pathway.</p> <p>Through efforts to ensure accessibility and access to important resources that help disabled people meet their employment and training goals, Illinois workNet continues to encourage feedback and be an example to other states.</p> <p>Maintaining usability and accessibility requires planning, understanding user needs, and building the web pages with an accessible format.</p> |

25. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The program has grown from a beta website with two pathways for individuals and businesses to a platform for multiple state agencies and local workforce development organizations to communicate, learn, engage their customers, and strategically implement large-scale statewide programs.

26. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Obstacles that can be overcome include: developing strong state and local partnerships aimed at sharing access to resources; setting up a team to manage ongoing implementation; allocating funds for start up and ongoing implementation; and facilitating a dynamic content platform.

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- Telecommunications

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- Housing
- Human Services

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- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
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