NORTH CAROLINA JOBLINK CAREER CENTERS

An Appraisal of Progress

**A Report to the Commission on Workforce Development
North Carolina Department of Commerce**

**By
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Chapel Hill, North Carolina**

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PREFACE

This report on center feedback to the Commission on Workforce Development is the product of discussions with over 150 persons who manage, staff, and oversee the operation of North Carolina JobLink Career Centers. Those individuals represented 27 JobLink Career Centers that were specifically selected by staff of the Governor's Workforce Commission to be representative of the 83 JobLink Career Centers now in operation. The 27 centers are located throughout the state and include 13 centers housed at Employment Service (ESC) offices, eight centers housed at community colleges, and six centers housed at diverse locations such as Department of Social Services (DSS) offices, Workforce Investment Act (WIA) locations, and others. In the report these latter centers are referred to as "diverse" centers. Attachment 1 identifies the partner agencies and individuals who participated in the feedback survey of JobLink Career Center sites.

The survey was designed to obtain direct feedback from center managers; partner agency staff who work at the centers; Workforce Development Board (WDB) chair-persons; and Service Delivery Area directors on topics related to center operations, partner agency involvement, leadership and management, and recommendations on improving center performance. All center interviews were conducted in June and July 2000 by MDC staff and field associates.

The survey process called for feedback discussions with center managers and partner staff followed by similar discussions with WDB chairpersons and SDA directors. Interviewers also noted their observations regarding the interior and exterior appearance of centers; the appearance, location, staffing, and equipping of resource areas; and other factors related to attracting and serving center customers. To ensure consistency of the data-gathering process from center to center, interview guides were used to lead feedback discussions and to direct interviewers in making their general observations of center appearance and capacity.

Attachment 2 is a draft case study of Mississippi's state-funded Skill/Tech one-stop workforce development system. It is included as an example of an alternative approach to one-stop service delivery that enjoys strong public/private sector support and uses annual state Legislative Accountability Reports to mark progress and achievement.

We thank the center managers, partner staffs, and WDB chairpersons and SDA directors who took the time and effort to meet with us to share their knowledge and insight about the important work they are engaged in. We appreciate their courtesy, hospitality, and candor. We hope, as they do, that their feedback will prove to help strengthen an already strong North Carolina JobLink Career Center system.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In June and July 2000, MDC Inc. surveyed JobLink Career Center staff and Workforce Development Board chairpersons and Service Delivery Area directors at 27 locations to gain their feedback on current operations, partner agency involvement, and other topics related to the development of North Carolina's one-stop workforce development system. Centers surveyed were selected to be representative of the overall JobLink Career Center system.

The survey found that overall North Carolina has put in place a sound JobLink system infrastructure. Viable centers have been established across the state at a variety of host agencies. In general these centers were found to offer business and individual customers a wide variety of workforce development services and resources. Self-service resource areas were found to be a well-developed and well-used element of the JobLink center repertoire of services, and as a group community college centers excelled at this.

Overall, partner agency representatives who staff the centers were found to be committed to the JobLink concept and philosophy; to have developed effective team approaches to service delivery and management in a majority of the centers; and to have established a high level of customer service at most sites. Center staff and Workforce Development Board feedback indicates that they take pride in what has been accomplished – often in spite of a lack of state-level cooperation among partner agencies, they pointed out. But their feedback also indicated that they are not satisfied with the status quo.

They indicated that the JobLink system has some growing pains that need to be addressed along with some long-standing statewide issues regarding on-site participation and partner agency support. The feedback points out that some centers are more advanced, better managed, and have better partner agency support than others. Bringing a small subset of underdeveloped centers up to standard is needed to put the overall system on sound operational footing. There is an increasing general need for attention to accountability, monitoring, and the establishment of center goals and performance expectations.

Nevertheless, at this state of the transition to one-stop service delivery, North Carolina is well positioned with its JobLink Career Center system and is in position to take the steps needed to insure continued development and improvement.

Recommendations drawn from center staff and Workforce Development Board feedback follow:

- Action should be taken from the highest level necessary to ensure state-level partner agency cooperation. State-level partner agencies should provide the

leadership and commitment necessary to help realize the promise of the JobLink Career Center concept.

- A comprehensive program of training and technical assistance should be undertaken to ensure that Workforce Development Boards, partner agency management committees, and JobLink Career Center managers and staff are equipped to successfully carry out their JobLink responsibilities and ensure continuous improvement of center services.

- Statewide and locally focused marketing, public relations, and outreach efforts should be undertaken to promote JobLink Career Center services to employers and individual customers.

- Up to three "lighthouse" JobLink Career Centers should be designated and used as demonstration and training laboratories to test and demonstrate alternative approaches to one-stop workforce development service delivery and to train JobLink Center managers and partner agency staff.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A large majority of the 27 JobLink Career Centers that were surveyed have made significant progress in establishing attractive, well-located, resource-filled centers, at least part-time colocation of most primary partner agencies, team-based approaches to service delivery and management, and customer service as a center emphasis. Customer traffic at the centers has steadily increased since their implementation, and centers have reached out to business and industry in consistent and creative ways. In general, the situation at these 27 centers indicates that North Carolina has gone a far piece down the road to establishing an effective statewide system of one-stop workforce development centers.

But the survey also indicates that those who work in the centers on a day-to-day basis aren't satisfied with their current situation. They report that most centers still have a way to go before they fully meet objectives regarding center practices such as full-time on-site partner participation, sustainable funding through cost-sharing, at least a semblance of integrated service delivery, and strong team-based and outcome-oriented management. In addition, a small number of centers were found to be lagging behind the others in more basic areas such as center management, meaningful colocation, an adoption of JobLink philosophy, and in a small number of cases exterior and interior center appearance.

It is important to note that the above assessments come from center partner staff and Workforce Development Board chairpersons and are born from a desire to see the JobLink Career Center system not only do well, but continuously improve. As a result, where critiques appear in this report, they may be the best evidence that the JobLink system has established a viable personality in its center staffs and a culture of

commitment to improve its performance. Attachment 1 identifies the partner agencies and individuals who participated in the feedback survey of JobLink Career Center sites.

Interviewer Observations on JobLink Centers

Interviewers found that most of the sites they visited had the overall appearance of innovative JobLink centers or that they were on their way to attaining that status. This was true for almost all diverse[1] centers and community college centers and for over half the Employment Service (ESC) centers. In addition, although some centers were in traditional agency surroundings, the majority appeared to have established a clear JobLink presence and personality.

Exterior/parking: JobLink signage was observed almost always to be appropriate and visible. At a small number of centers, no sign was observed or signs were placed too close to another marker to distinctly point out the center's presence. A majority of the community college centers were observed to be modern and professional in appearance. Parking was observed to be accessible and plentiful in all but two center locations.

Interior: A majority of the centers were observed to be spacious and attractive. This was true for nearly all diverse and community college centers but for less than half the ESC centers. Nearly all ESC centers, however, were noted for having resource areas immediately visible upon entering the center. Office space in only two of the 27 centers was observed to be small and crowded.

Observations of the Physical Setting at 27 Centers

Centers	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC
The JLC looked like				
An innovative JobLink office	**15**	**5**	**6**	**4**
An emerging innovative JLCC	**5**	**1**	**1**	**3**
A host partner agency	**7**	**0**	**1**	**6**
Exterior appearance				
Good signage	**15**	**2**	**5**	**8**
Close to major streets	**8**	**3**	**2**	**3**
Location familiar to customers	**6**	**3**	**0**	**3**
Modern, professional appearance	**5**	**0**	**5**	**0**
Building is hidden or unattractive	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Signs absent or not distinctive	**4**	**1**	**1**	**2**
Interior space and layout				
Interior space is spacious and attractive	**15**	**5**	**6**	**4**
Reception/resource areas immediately				

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[1] Centers that are not located at either community colleges or Employment Service locations.

visible upon entering	**11**	**0**	**0**	**11**
Office space is small, crowded	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**
Customer parking				
Parking is spacious, excellent	**9**	**0**	**4**	**5**
Parking is adequate	**12**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Parking is just outside the doors	**4**	**0**	**0**	**4**
Parking is inadequate	**2**	**1**	**0**	**1**

The Host Agency/JobLink Center Match: The interviewers observed that there appears to be a good match between host agency operations culture and the JobLink philosophy at nearly all diverse and college sites. They observed that at over half the ESC locations there appeared to be either a good match or host agency commitment to JobLink service delivery concepts, but concerns were voiced at these sites (as well as at one diverse center) about state-level host-agency support. The interviewers also observed that at five ESC centers they did not find the JobLink philosophy readily apparent in center practices.

Observations on JobLink Philosophy/Host Agency Match

Centers	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC
Good agency/JobLink match	15	5	8	2
Host agency is committed but concerns voiced about state support	7	1	0	6
JLCC philosophy not apparent	5	0	0	5

Roles and Activities of Partners

On-Site Participation Levels: The survey found that on-site participation by partner agencies is mixed and that full-time on-site participation by all the principal partners[2] remains a goal to be reached by most JobLink Centers and by ESC centers in particular.

The six principal partners have representatives on-site at all 27 surveyed centers on either a full-time *or* part-time basis. But the level of participation by individual partners varies greatly, and feedback indicates that some partners at some centers treat established schedules of partner on-site time casually. ESC, Department of Social Services (DSS), Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and community college partners are on-site on a full-time basis significantly more than are Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Department of Public Instruction (DPI) partners.

The full-time participation by partners at the different types of centers (diverse, ESC, and community college) offers another view of this. The six diverse centers (those not hosted by ESC or community colleges) were found to be more likely to have full-time on-site participation from more partners than either community colleges or ESC centers, although community college centers were a close second. Rates of full-time participation by partners at ESC centers lagged significantly behind the other two.

Electronic Linkages: All partners at most centers have telephone and Internet access. In addition, ESC, WIA, and DSS partners at a majority of the centers and community college partners at a significant minority of the centers have the capacity to access their respective agency's database from their center location to aid customers. The feedback indicates that no centers have integrated electronic linkages that provide access to information at all partner agencies. Electronic linkages did not, however, seem to pose a significant problem at the centers.

Partner Agency Support: In general, center partners reported that the one-stop concept is viewed very positively by their home agencies. But in a few cases some offered a more critical view of two of their counterparts, VR and ESC.

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[2] Community Colleges, Employment Security Commission, Department of Social Services, Workforce Investment Act, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Department of Public Instruction.

Partners at one center reported that state-level VR had instructed the local affiliate to remove the JobLink sign from its office and to stop answering the telephone with a JobLink center greeting. At six other centers VR was described as uninvolved. Partners at five centers said that ESC at the state level is reluctant to comply with unspecified WIA requirements and cost-sharing.

Other issues that arose from fewer centers included general comments regarding references to state agency directives prohibiting cost-sharing; prohibition at some centers against partner access to unsuppressed ESC Job Order Bank information; and restricted staffing commitments.

Memoranda of Understanding: Nearly all of the centers (24 of 27) have developed Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) among partner agencies to guide center activities and partner coordination.

Common issues in developing MOUs that were mentioned across the board were cost allocation, center location, center management, liability and confidentiality issues, and the reluctance of partners at the state level to reach agreement on several issues.

Some centers offered feedback that the MOU process provided a needed focus to center development and helped the partners familiarize themselves with one another and with one another's state agencies. A few said that the process fostered a cooperative spirit. However, partners at about half the centers said that development of MOUs was little more than a formality that had to be undertaken and that in some cases MOUs were prepared to be deliberately general to avoid divisive conflicts among partner agencies.

Staff Development: Feedback indicates that there is not a system-wide approach in place to provide center staff with the training they need to build the center operations or integrated approaches to partner collaboration that will be needed to fully realize the potential of JobLink.

However, partners at all diverse centers and all community college centers reported that they had received a form of cross-training that was often referred to as "cross-education." In this cross-education process partners shared information with one another on agency programs and services but did not provide training in one another's programs or systems. Many of the ESC centers, however, offered the only clear example of true cross-training – staff of one partner agency being instructed in how to perform functions of another partner agency. In this instance, partners at most ESC centers received training in how to access the ESC's unsuppressed NC Job Order Bank. In addition, a small number of centers brought in outside trainers or consultants, and a few created a training manual to be used by center partners.

I. CENTER PARTNERS: ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

Partner On-site Status

The amount of time spent on-site at JobLink centers by partners varies from partner to partner and from center location to center location. On the positive side, the survey found that the principal partners have representatives on-site at all locations on either a full-time or part-time basis. But findings also indicate that on-site schedules aren't always adhered to, and comparisons of information obtained on full-time/part-time commitments and the time partners said is actually spent on-site suggests a possible need for closer time management.

Full-time/part-time participation: The three tables below (one on diverse centers,[3] one on college centers, and one on ESC centers) present a widely varying picture of full-time participation. They show that diverse centers are more likely to have full-time partner staff participation than do either community college centers or ESC centers. For example, four partners (community colleges, ESC, WIA, and DSS) have full-time staff at half or more of the diverse centers. Only three partners (WIA, DSS, and community colleges) have full-time staff assigned to at least half the community college centers. Only one partner, ESC, has full-time staff assigned at half the ESC centers (although WIA comes close with full-time staff at 6 of the 13 ESC centers).

Reasons for the participation rates cited above vary from site to site and from partner to partner; but feedback indicated that in general reasons include differences in center space, working environment, and agency culture; agency staffing and workloads; and local partner interest (Vocational Rehabilitation [VR] and the Department of Public Instruction [DPI] were noted frequently as very limited full-time partners at all centers). In addition, there was very little evidence that concerted action has been taken to enforce full-time involvement by all partners, or to reclaim the involvement of partners whose on-site participation rate had diminished over time. A passive open-door policy to partner involvement seems to have evolved over time at many centers.

What is clearly reflected by the tables below is that full-time participation has not been realized at a significant number of centers, and that it is much better at some than others. It would be worth a further look to answer questions such as: Why do diverse centers and community college centers appear to foster greater levels of partner participation? What can be learned from diverse centers to improve participation at ESC centers?

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[3] A majority of the centers surveyed were housed at either ESC locations or community college locations. However, six centers were housed in other locations such as DSS offices or WIA facilities. For the purpose of the survey and this report, these center locations are referred to as "diverse" center locations.

Partners On-Site Participation

	Participation at Six Diverse Centers		
Partners	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	**Absent**
Community college	4	2	0
ESC	3	3	0
WIA	5	1	0
DSS	6	0	0
VR	0	6	0
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI)	0	2	4
	Participation at Eight Community College Centers		
Partners	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	**Absent**
Community colleges	8	0	0
ESC	3	5	0
WIA	8	0	0
DSS	5	3	0
VR	1	7	0
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI)	1	3	4
	Participation at 13 Employment Service Centers		
Partners	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	**Absent**
Community college	2	9	2
ESC	12	1[4]	0
WIA	8	3	2
DSS	2	10	1
VR	1	11	1
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI)	0	4	9

Partner schedules: Partners and/or center managers at almost all the centers reported that the centers have participation schedules that call for partners to be on-site at particular times. But the partners at a sizable minority of the centers said that the schedules aren't closely followed.

All of the centers except one community college and one ESC center have such schedules in place. In a couple of instances, however, center managers appeared to be the only center personnel who were aware the schedules were in place, and partners at several centers indicated that the schedules were treated with a high level of flexibility by at least some partners.

Most schedules were developed from center staff discussions and were based on customer need and partner agency commitment to the centers. In a few instances, a center manager or center management team took a lead role in developing schedules.

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[4] While it is housed at an ESC office, the Vance County JobLink Career Center reported having only part-time (20 hours per week) ESC staff commitment at the center.

Most partners reported that they meet their scheduled times of on-site participation, and partners at two diverse centers and two ESC centers reported that they exceed their planned schedules at times to meet customer needs. Commitment to the one-stop philosophy was the most common reason given for meeting schedules, but partners at a couple of centers in each of the three center types said that they sometimes do not meet their schedules due to work loads at their home agency. VR partners, with one of the lower overall rates of participation, were also named most likely to fail to meet established schedules by five centers.

Hours on-site: In an attempt to obtain a clearer and more detailed measure of partner involvement, interviewers asked about the actual hours spent on-site by partners. The findings are discussed and shared in the tables below, but they should be viewed only as another indication of the extent of involvement of partners who do spend time on-site, and not as the average time spent on-site by partner agencies. In addition, in cross-referencing data, we discovered that information provided on full-time/part-time involvement and that provided on actual hours on-site doesn't always agree.

Nevertheless, from a partner-by-partner perspective, the data in the following tables indicates that four partners spend significantly more time on-site than others. These are community colleges, ESC, DSS, and WIA. From a center-type-by-center-type perspective, community college centers seem to have a slightly stronger overall partner involvement than diverse centers, and ESC centers the weakest, primarily due to lower participation by colleges and DSS.

Number of Hours Spent On-site Per Week[5]

Community college-housed centers:

	# of Hours
Community college partner	40
ESC partner	26
WIA partner	40
DSS partner	28
VR partner	11
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI) partner	40

ESC-housed centers:

	# of Hours
Community college partner	18
ESC partner	39
WIA partner	36
DSS partner	18
VR partner	10
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI) partner	5

Diverse centers:

	# of Hours
Community college partner	37
ESC partner	30
WIA partner	35
DSS partner	39
VR partner	7
Dept. of Public Instruction	6

Nature and Capacity of Electronic Links

The survey requested feedback on the nature of three categories of electronic linkage at the centers. The first category of linkage was *telephone/access to agency website and other information links*, the second was *enables processing of applications/referrals and other off-site actions*, and the third was *enables partner to access own database*. As the following three tables indicate, overall findings are encouraging in that:

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[5] All figures are rounded to the nearest whole number. Again, please note that only centers that have a given partner were counted. For example, if a community college-housed center has no DSS person on staff, then they were not counted. A final note is that one diverse center counts full-time as 37.5 hours per week.

- All partners at a large majority of sites have telephone and Internet access.
- ESC, WIA, and DSS partners at a majority of the centers and community college partners at a significant minority of the centers have the capacity to electronically process applications and referrals.
- ESC, WIA, and DSS partners at a majority of the centers and community college and VR partners at a significant minority of the centers can access their respective agency's database from the center location.

The data also indicate that centers continue to rely on individual agency technology capacity that varies from agency to agency rather than on integrated linkages that would strengthen system unity and capability and move it toward integrated intake and application procedures.

ESC partners have telephone and Internet access at 89% of the sites; they are able to process applications and referrals at 63% of the sites; and they are able to access their own database at 85% of the sites. The corresponding figures for DSS are 88%, 58%, and 62%; and for WIA they are 86%, 59%, and 59%. The figures for community colleges are 73%, 38%, and 38%. For VR, the figures are 58%, 23%, and 38%; and for (DPI) they are 73%, 27%, and 27%.

As noted above, feedback on electronic linkage capacity at the centers presents a mix of good news and the need for improved access and capacity. Until and unless all agency operations are housed within one-stop centers – not a reasonable prospect for the near future – the development of full capacity electronic linkages between JobLink centers and "home" agencies will remain an important element in the effectiveness of the one-stop concept.

Percentage of Centers With Various Forms of Electronic Linkage[6]

Telephone/Internet Access

Partner	Percentage of Centers (%)
Community Colleges	73
ESC	89
WIA	86
DSS	88
VR	58
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI)	73

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[6] Please note that in these calculations, only centers that had the given partners were counted. For example, if a center did not have a community college partner, they were not counted when the percentage was calculated.

Electronically Processes Applications and Referrals

Partner	Percentage of Centers (%)
Community Colleges	38
ESC	63
WIA	59
DSS	58
VR	23
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI)	27

Electronically Accesses Database

Partner	Percentage of Centers (%)
Community Colleges	38
ESC	85
WIA	59
DSS	62
VR	38
Dept. of Public Inst. (DPI)	27

Partner perceptions of and support for the center concept: In another look at what motivates on-site participation, center mangers and staff were asked about how they and their agencies viewed the JobLink one-stop strategy and its demands on them and their agencies. Overall, center partners reported that the one-stop concept is viewed very positively by their home agencies, and partners at two centers jointly cited strong support for the one-stop philosophy from WIA and community college partners in particular. But in a few cases some offered a more critical view of two of their counterparts, VR and ESC.

Partners at one center reported that state-level VR had instructed the local affiliate to remove the JobLink sign from its office and to stop answering the telephone with a JobLink center greeting. At six other centers VR was described as uninvolved. Partners at five centers said that ESC at the state level is reluctant to comply with unspecified WIA requirements and cost-sharing.

Other issues that arose from fewer centers included more general references to state agency directives prohibiting cost-sharing; prohibition at some centers against partner use of unsuppressed ESC job bank information; restricted staffing commitments, and so on. While VR and DSS drew attention from partners, concern over ESC participation was clearly the most frequently voiced.

Memoranda of Understanding

Center partners were also asked about the role of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) in partner involvement and on-site participation.

Prevalence and use of MOUs: Nearly all of the centers surveyed (24 of 27) have MOUs in place. Two of the three centers that do not are in the process of developing them, and the third cited a lack of need because center management is handled by a partner management team rather than a single director, thus issues of understanding are worked out by the team. The MOUs are accessible to center staff in most locations in the event issues need to be resolved, but in a few community college and ESC centers partner staff were unaware of their availability.

Issues in preparing MOUs: Common issues mentioned across the board were cost allocation, center location, center management, liability and confidentiality issues, and the reluctance of partners at the state level to reach agreement on several issues. Partners at a number of the centers reported that MOUs were deliberately produced to be somewhat vague because partners could not reconcile divisive albeit important center issues, among them on-site staff commitments.

The use of MOUs in promoting partner coordination, teamwork, and center effectiveness: Partners at about half of the centers said the MOU process provided a focus to center development and operation and helped the partners familiarize themselves with one another and with one another's state agencies. A few said that the process fostered even more of a cooperative spirit. But partners at about half the centers said that it was more of a formality and, as noted above, in some cases MOUs were prepared to be deliberately general to avoid conflicts that appeared irreconcilable.

MOUs are intended to strengthen the working relationship among center partners, put in place JobLink partnerships that make the one-stop concept a reality, and help move the centers toward systems collaboration. Some of the MOUs (or MOU processes), however, have not realized their potential due to the threat that tackling divisive issues posed to weak partner alliances, and we suspect this situation is even more widespread than reported.

Staff Development and Management

Cross-training: Partners at all diverse centers and all community college centers reported that they had received cross-training, although two community college centers said it was more cross-education than cross-training (sharing information with one another on agency programs and services, not equipping center partners to actually conduct agency activities). Partners at 11 ESC centers said they had received cross-training or at least some cross-training, and partners at two centers said they had not received cross-training.

At many centers cross-training (or education) took the form of presentations about various agency responsibilities and requirements at weekly or monthly staff meetings. Several mentioned that partners were trained to use the ESC computer system. Others said that the cross-training was done in more informal one-to-one settings. A few centers brought in outside trainers or consultants, and a few created a training manual to be used by center partners. In the only clear example of true cross training – staff of one partner agency being instructed in how to perform functions of another partner agency – a number of partners at ESC centers described very good training they had received in the ESC's unsuppressed NC Job Order Bank.

Plans for future training indicated that it would continue at staff meetings and that staff would be encouraged to attend outside seminars and workshops. Many mentioned that training would continue on an as-needed basis or not at all. Partners at one ESC center said that each employee keeps a training file that must be updated. Similarly, one diverse center reported that their partners are required to attend 8-10 training sessions per year. Partners at another diverse center said that they would undertake training to enable each partner to perform intakes and provide core services for each other's agencies.

Based on center feedback, there does not appear to be a system-wide approach in use to provide center staff with the training they need to build the center operations or integrated approaches to partner collaboration that will be needed to fully realize the potential of JobLink. It would seem to be an area worthy of strong consideration.

II.   CENTER OPERATIONS, RESOURCES, AND EMPLOYER RELATIONS

To gather information on the operation and readiness of the 27 JobLink centers that were surveyed, partners were asked for feedback on center operations, customer flow, customer traffic, partner collaboration, and employer relations and outreach. Findings from these discussions follow.

Center Operations

Center Business Hours: As shown in the tables below, most centers operate on a normal 8-hour-per-day/five-days-per-week basis. However, three community college centers and two of the centers based at "diverse" locations reported remaining open during evening hours at least one day per week on a regular basis to accommodate customers. In addition, at least some centers at all three center types (diverse, college, and ESC) have extended the normal day or work week to accommodate increased traffic, conduct job fairs, or respond to emergency situations.

Nontraditional hours of operation at some diverse and community college locations include Saturdays during the summer to work with youth and training activities during evening hours (when centers are also open to other customer traffic). ESC centers operate on nontraditional hours in response to specific needs such as plant closings or seasonal hiring periods, but partners assigned to some ESC centers reported that they conduct activities beyond the normal 8-hour day at other agency locations, e.g., training programs at community colleges. One ESC center reported trying Saturday morning operations for a period of time, but it proved to be unnecessary due to a low demand for services.

The feedback shows that center location does appear to play a role in the hours centers are open and available to employer- and job-seeking customers, and that those hours largely conform to the culture and practices of the host agency.

Hours of Operation

Diverse Centers

# Centers	Hours of Operation	Nontraditional Hours
2	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM – M-F	None
1	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM – M-Th	8:00 AM to 12:00 PM –F
1	8:00 AM to 6:00 PM – M-F	None
1	8:30 AM to 5:00 PM – M-F	None
1	9:00 AM to 4:00 PM – M/W/Th/F	9:00 AM to 8:00 PM --Tu
1	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM – M-Th	8:00 AM to 12:00 PM – F

Hours of Operation

Community College Centers

# Centers	Hours of Operation	Nontraditional Hours
1	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM – M-F	None
1	8:30 AM to 5:00 PM – M-F	None
2	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM -- F	8:00 AM to 7:00/30 PM -- M-Th
1	8:00 AM to 4:00 PM -- F	8:00 AM to 8:00 PM – M-Th
1	8:30 AM to 5:30 PM -- M-Th	8:30 AM to 12:30 PM – F
1	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM -- M-Th	8:00 AM to 4:00 PM – F
1	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM – M/W/F	8:00 AM to 8:00 PM – Tu & Th

ESC Centers

# Centers	Hours of Operation	
3	8:00 AM to 4:30 PM – M-F	None
4	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM – M-F	None
1	8:30 AM to 4:30 PM – M-F	None
5	8:30 AM to 5:00 PM – M-F	None

Intake Procedures: With only a few exceptions, centers use a similar intake procedure, but host agency practices and/or resources influence it.

The general practice is for first-time customers to be greeted at a reception desk, queried about their interests and needs, and then referred to the resource area for self-service or to a JobLink partner for either specific service or more intense examination of their needs and interests. Only one of the 24 centers that gave feedback on intake procedures did not have a structured process for conducting intake, but it does follow the intake and service delivery trail of customers with "paper tracking."

Host agency influence on the above general intake process takes one of two forms in most instances: They use structured intake forms to obtain information from first-time customers for referral-making, or "interviews" between receptionist and customer to accomplish the same thing. Almost all of the diverse and community college centers used the structured intake form process, while a majority of the ESC centers use the interview-based process.

Both procedures appear designed to benefit from the practices and strengths of host agencies. Diverse and community college centers tend to use partners on a rotating basis to staff the intake function or to support full-time intake staff. As a result, the use of structured intake forms for gathering information ensures that the quality of data gathered for referral decision-making is consistent. At ESC centers the interview process is based on the use of available ESC intake personnel who staff intake in nearly all instances.

Other procedures that were reported by community college and ESC centers include the use of coordinated partner assessments to guide services following the first visit, partner assistance in completing initial intake forms, and the use of an automated system to track customer services and referrals. (Three centers did not provide feedback on intake procedures.)

The following table shows the intake procedures in place at various JobLink center settings.

Intake Procedures

Procedures	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers

Intake Form-Based Referral	**5**	**6**	**0**
• Receptionist helps first-time customers complete intake forms to help identify needs and refers to self-help area or partner staff based on assessment of intake form data. Customers who have previously completed intake form referred to appropriate partner or self-help area for requested services. (Receptionist supported by partners on occasion.)			
Interview-Based Referral	**0**	**0**	**9**
• Receptionist refers customers to self-help area or partners based on customer request or conversation-based assessment of needs.			
Miscellaneous	**0**	**1**	**3**
• Automated system at front desk that tracks customer services and status used to make referrals.			
• Customer-driven/Coordinated assessment.			
• First-visit referrals based on customer request; subsequent referrals based on coordinated partner assessment of need.			
• Customers referred directly to partners for assistance in completing intake forms and case management regarding service agenda.			
• Informal intake process backed by paper tracking.			
No Response to Question	**1**	**1**	**1**

Customer Flow Through Center Services: Although there are differences in the procedures used by centers to move customers into and through core, intensive, and training services to make them job-ready, center feedback indicates that a majority of centers (slightly over 60%) make achieving job placement at the earliest level the determining factor. This is true for a majority of the centers at all three host agency types (ESC, CC, and diverse).

The table below provides a detailed review of these processes by center type.

Processes Used to Determine Services for Customers

Processes	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers

Based on Case Management	**7%**	**1**	**1**	**0**

Initial service-level placement is guided by a
customer profile assessment. The need
for further assistance moves customers to the
"intensive" level; a formal assessment of need
will move customers to training level.

Level placement depends on a customer's
case manager.

WIA staff members assist with Level placement.

Initially Based on Customer Request	**15%**	**0**	**2**	**2**
Further Service Based on Case Management				

Movement from one level to the next based
on coordinated partner assessment.

Based on customer request and
possible partner recommendation.

Based on Placement Success at	**63%**	**4**	**5**	**8**
At Earliest Level				

Standard checklist is used to move
customers to intensive services after
3 unsuccessful core services.

Move to intensive and training services
follows a battery (3) of core services based
on partner judgment of need.

Based on intake assessment and results
achieved at the core level.

Miscellaneous	**15%**	**1**	**0**	**3**

Based on JobLink team consultation.

   Yet to be defined.

   No formal process.

Customer Traffic: Centers were asked for feedback on customer traffic in two ways to produce data for comparison and to determine the extent to which centers gather such information. First they were asked if customer traffic in general had increased since the opening of the center. Then they were asked about the traffic of customer groups (job seekers and employers) individually.

In response to the question on general customer traffic, center feedback was that customer traffic has increased at nearly all locations. The two primary reasons given for this were an increasing awareness among center customers of center resources and local economic shifts that affect the labor market. (Note the table below on customer traffic at the different center types.)

Has Customer Traffic Increased Since the Center Opened?

% of All Centers	Divers e Centers	Colleg e Centers	ESC Centers

Yes	81%	6	8	8
No	15%	0	0	4
Unsure	4%	0	0	1

But the additional feedback on "job seeker" and "employer" (customer groups) traffic was very different, as the table below shows. Where 81% of the centers claimed traffic growth in response to the more general question (the above table), when they were asked for feedback on "job seeker" and "employer" traffic separately, that percentage dropped to 41%. Revealingly, "unsure" responses grew from 4% to 51%. What made the difference?

Customer Tracking: To help find out, centers were asked about the methods they use to measure customer traffic. Their responses (summarized below) indicate that one primary reason is that many centers have inadequate or no tracking procedures in place. Nor does it appear there is a standardized, system-wide procedure in place to measure center traffic that could be used by centers for management-related monitoring or by the state for comparing the experiences of centers throughout the state. A summary of the centers' feedback on methods in place to monitor customer traffic follows.

Diverse Sites: No standard measure is in place for determining the rate of traffic flow at all the diverse centers, although centers use a variety of different methods. Among those cited were MIS quarterly and monthly reports, tabulations of daily sign-in sheets, and head counts of employer turnout at job fairs. One of the centers said no tracking was done.

CC Sites: Over half the community college centers surveyed said that they have no procedure in place to track job seeker or employer traffic. Those that do track customer traffic use intake sign-in procedures, ESC's tracking system, and quarterly reporting.

ESC Sites: Partners at five centers said that no information was available for tracking customer traffic or else did not respond to the question. Others reported using sign-in information obtained at the point of intake; the number of employer job openings received; and quarterly reports, the ESC database, and computer tracking.

Has Job-Seeker/Employer Traffic Increased Since the Center Opened?

	% of All Centers	Diverse Center s	College Center s	ESC Centers
Job-Seeker Traffic				
Yes	41%	4	3	4
No	4%	0	1	0
Unsure	55%	2	4	9
Employer Traffic				
Yes	41%	4	3	4
No	4%	0	1	0
Unsure	55%	2	4	9

Note: Although data for both job seekers and employers in the above table

are identical, separate questions were asked and separate responses received.

The following comments, drawn from survey questionnaires, are provided to offer additional insight into partners' rationales for traffic increases:

Diverse Sites
- Ours was a newly established location; went from zero to good flow
- Increased traffic from growing Hispanic population, plant closings, marketing of center
- From 5,500 first year to 19,000 this year
- Center went from 90 customers the first month to 780 per month currently
- Can't document increase

CC Sites
- A high unemployment rate has been a major factor in the increase along with the transition of people from JTPA to WIA.
- Best guess is that it's tripled.
- No "before/after" documentation to show increases (by 4 centers).
- Customer traffic has doubled since January.

ESC Sites
- Changes in traffic are not related to establishment of the JobLink center but to economic shifts, increased computer banks, etc. (4 centers).
- Traffic increases have been steady (and measured) on a monthly basis since 1998.
- A low unemployment rate has kept traffic down.
- Traffic increases noted among people who use the resource area (especially to prepare resumes) and employed persons who are seeking better jobs.
- Most of the benefit of increased traffic has been realized by partner agencies (not host ES).

- The resource area is generally packed.
- Word-of-mouth and the center's resource area are playing a (major) role in the increase.

Individual Partner Traffic: The partners at surveyed centers were asked if all partners had experienced traffic increases since the center's opening and, if not, which had not. The results again point to a need for improved tracking for management and continuous improvement purposes, but it also points to on-site participation being a key to increased customer traffic. With some exceptions, in general the partners that have not experienced increases are also those who are at the center the least.

Reasons given for some partners not experiencing increases appeared to be related to the local economy and to some customers' tendencies to go the partners' home location for services rather than to the JobLink center. This seemed to be especially true for Vocational Rehabilitation customers and "regular" Department of Social Services customers. (There was, however, distinction drawn between regular DSS customers and DSS WorkFirst program customers, who do visit JobLink in increasing numbers.)

It was also noted that records are not maintained at all sites to show increases in center customer flow in general, much less to show the customer flow of individual partners. Such record-keeping could be useful in center management and in encouraging partner participation, and positive results could be valuable marketing tools.

Have All Partners Experienced Traffic Increases?

	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Yes	37%	3	3	4
No	37%	1	2	7
Unsure	26%	2	3	2

Which Partners Have Not Experienced Increases?

	CBO	VR	DSS	CC	Don't Know
Diverse Centers	0	0	1	0	0
College Centers	0	2	2	0	0
ESC Centers	1	1	1	1	1

CENTER RESOURCES

The Centers' Resource Areas: All but one of the surveyed centers had a distinct area set aside to house a self-service resource area. Nearly all were located in an easily accessible place, usually but not always near the entrance of the JobLink center and in close proximity to the intake and reception area. There were exceptions: One center located within a small ESC office did not have the space for a distinct resource area, and two community college centers had resource areas located on a second floor of the building.

Staffing: Feedback indicated that resource areas are "staffed" on a full time basis by personnel from the host agency supplemented by center partner staff; by center partners on a rotating basis; and to a lesser extent by WIA-funded JobLink staff members. In a few cases staffing for the resource area is not assigned to a particular person, but assistance to customers is provided by whoever happens to be available when it is required.

At diverse centers resource areas are staffed in a variety of ways, including by a full-time resource room attendant and full-time receptionists (in cases this was accomplished by using partner staff on a rotating basis). In one instance, in lieu of assigning specific staff to oversee the resource room, case managers assist customers with the resource room after they have passed through the intake process. Persons not assigned to a case manager are assisted by whoever happens to be available.

Resource areas at community college centers follow much the same pattern, but in a majority of the cases resource areas are staffed full-time primarily by community college personnel who are supplemented by other center partners. In one instance, a WIA-funded staffer oversees the resource room a majority of the time and is supplemented as needed by other partner staff.

At ESC centers, ES personnel are available to assist customers in the resource areas most of the time and are supported by other partners on occasion. At four ESC centers, however, no one is assigned specifically to the resource area. Partners at three of these centers reported that when help is needed whoever is available provides it.

Resource area materials and equipment: All centers are equipped with computers in resource areas for self-help use by customers. Some resource areas also have fax machines, copiers, and telephones; and some are equipped with conveniences such as headsets to enable customers to use educational/training software without bothering others, and innovative "work caddies" that provide useful hints for using resources.

As detailed in the table below, the usefulness and variety of materials available in resource areas were judged to be "good" or "very good" in a large majority of the centers visited. However, the variety and quantity of materials (especially instructional materials) and the availability of useful technology appeared to be above the average at community college centers.

Variety and Quantity of Materials and Technology

| | **Resource Area Materials and Equipment** | | | |
	Limited	**Adequate**	**Good**	**Very Good**
Percentage of All Centers	**7%**	**11%**	**56%**	
26%				
Diverse Centers	0	1	4	1
College Centers	0	0	3	5
ESC Centers	2	2	8	1

Self-Service Capacity of Resource Areas: As noted in the table below, **t**he user-friendliness of resource areas at nearly all centers was found to be very good and all were judged to be at least adequate. The resource areas were observed to be one of the major strengths of the JobLink Career Center system and their relative ease of use is an important element in drawing job-seeking customers to the centers. This should be a major marketing point.

At some diverse and ESC centers, partners pointed out needs they were working to address. At diverse centers partners believed they needed to adapt resource areas to better accommodate the disabled and to better equip and/or staff them to increase their use by nonreaders. At ESC-based centers needs identified were for more space and materials and for more staff support to help individuals use resource area resources.

User Friendliness

Centers	Poor	Moderate	High
All Centers	0	4	23
Diverse Centers	0	0	6
College Centers*	0	0	8
ESC Centers**	0	5	8

* One CC-based center, rated "high to moderate" on the survey form, is rated "high" here.
** One ESC center, rated "moderate to high" on the survey form, is listed as "moderate" here, while another ES-based center rated here as "high" was described as "very high" on the survey form.

Employer Relations and Outreach

Practically all (96%) of the surveyed JobLink Career Centers reported that employer relations activities to market center resources and services are carried out by center partners either on an individual basis or as a coordinated center effort.

The employer relations activity reported most frequently by centers was "employer visits" (by 56% of the centers); and next were job fairs designed for youth, adults, and specific industry sectors (by 33% of the centers). Nearly a quarter of the centers cited their work with economic development in close association with either county economic development groups or the economic development activities of Chambers of Commerce.

Other forms of employer relations activity mentioned by four or fewer centers included working with and through employer organizations; marketing JobLink resources via seminars for employers; hosting center visits and opening centers for use by employers for worker recruitment and workplace literacy training; and one center uses annual employer luncheons as an outreach strategy.

Of particular interest is that partners at only one of the 27 centers cited its Workforce Development Board as playing a role in the center's employer relations work. WDBs may be more involved in JobLink-related employer relations work than this would make it appear; but nevertheless it indicates that WDB members – especially employer representatives – are not viewed by center staff as an integral part of their centers' employer relations strategy. Note the following table for additional details on employer relations activities carried out by the centers.

Employer Relations Activities

Activities	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Employer Visitation	**15**	**2**	**5**	**8**
By Center	7	2	3	2
By Individual Partners	3	0	1	2
Relies on ESC ER Activities	5	0	1	4
Job Fairs	**9**	**2**	**4**	**3**
Work with Economic Development Groups	**5**	**3**	**2**	**0**
Work With/Through Employer Organizations	**3**	**0**	**2**	**1**
Employers Use Center for Employee Recruitment, etc.	**2**	**1**	**1**	**0**
Hold JobLink Seminars for Employers	**2**	**0**	**1**	**1**
Host Employer Visits to Center	**1**	**0**	**1**	**0**
Use WDB in Employer Relations Work	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Center Technology Links Employers and Job Seekers	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Conduct Annual Employer Luncheons	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**
Employer Relations Not an Emphasis	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**
of Center	**1**	**1**	**0**	**0**
Response Unclear	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**

Employer Outreach: Building strong labor exchange and training relationships with the employer community is central to the success of JobLink centers. As a result, center partners were asked specifically about their employer outreach activities to see how this key relationship is progressing and to gain insight regarding the level of coordination and teamwork that exists at the centers in their job placement and training interactions with employers.

The survey found that, taken as a group, the 27 surveyed centers appear to be evenly divided between coordinated center approaches and independent partner approaches. Eleven reported using independent partner approaches and 11 use coordinated center approaches. Three use some of both approaches; and one reported, "there is a lack of outreach by the center."

However, diverse and community college centers were found to use coordinated approaches to a much greater degree than those at ESC locations, as the following table indicates. Specific reasons were not offered for this, but it is reasonable to conclude that the ESC's long-term involvement and capacity for labor exchange would place it in a position to be a lead partner in this area, whereas at diverse and college centers there would be a more collaborative approach. It should also be noted that at a few ESC centers, partners reported that they had designated ESC the responsibility for employer outreach, thus the "independent" label in these cases is somewhat misleading.

The importance of employer outreach is not who does it, but rather that it is collaborative in nature and represents the center; that customers of all center partners benefit equitably; and that the effort promotes a good, effective relationship between the center and area employers.

Employer Outreach

Approach	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers

Coordinated Employer Outreach	**41%**	**4**	**6**	**1**
Employer Outreach By Individual Partners	**41%**	**1**	**1**	**9**
Both Coordinated and Individual Outreach	**15%**	**1**	**1**	**2**
Lack of Outreach by Center	**4%**	**0**	**0**	**1**

The Prevalence of Shared Job Order Banks: The coordination of job solicitation and placement activities by center partners is essential to developing and maintaining productive relationships with employers. One method for coordinating such activities is the use of shared job order banks. As the table below shows, a large majority (20 of 27) of the centers that were surveyed use some form of job order bank for listing new job orders and sharing them among center partners.

For reasons that are not completely clear, however, the data reveal that half of community college centers (4 of 8) have not developed coordinated job banks, while nearly all diverse and ESC centers have them in place. Limited information was provided from the five community college centers that would explain why this is so, but partners at one said that they try to coordinate job orders as best they can, but for the most part each partner does its own thing.

It would be interesting to look into why such a relatively high number of the surveyed community college centers have not developed shared job banks up to this time, or, viewed another way, why they have fallen behind diverse and ESC centers in developing them. Regarding the latter view, the argument could be made that 11 of 13 ESC centers are offered a ready-made job bank system with the availability of ESC's NC Job Order Bank. But that is not the case for diverse centers, where over 80% of those surveyed have shared job bank systems in place.

This situation raises interesting and possibly instructive questions about how the missions, priorities, and resources of host agencies may affect the emphases and operations of JobLink centers. It also highlights a responsibility faced by partners at all centers: To utilize and build on the resources and culture available at the host agency, but also to identify and fill in the service and resource gaps a host agency might have. In this case it would seem that sizable number of the community college centers have job bank gaps yet to be filled. At some ESC centers it may be the need to fill teamwork or partner participation gaps, and at diverse centers the need may be to increase center capacity and on-site resources. Identifying and meeting such needs could be part of ongoing monitoring and technical assistance designed to help ensure that all centers develop, maintain, and continuously improve program elements central to their mission.

Use Made of Central Job Order Bank

	All Centers	**Diverse Centers**	**College Centers**	**ESC Centers**
Centers Use a Shared Job Order Bank	**20**	**5**	**4**	**11**
Centers Do Not Use a Shared Job Order Bank	**7**	**1**	**4**	**2**

The Nature of Shared Job Order Banks: Roughly three-fourths of the shared job banks at surveyed centers are electronic systems, and a quarter of them are manual.

Manual procedures rely primarily on the use of center forms for recording and sharing job orders that are supplemented by bulletin boards for posting job orders in resource areas. However, it should be

noted that most centers that use manual procedures also share the job orders they develop with the ESC's NC Job Order Bank.

Three centers (one community college center and two diverse centers) developed their own electronic/Website-based job banks. But a majority of the centers that use electronic systems (15 of 18) rely on the ESC's NC Job Order Bank either directly or through ESC staff. And the ESC job bank plays a role at other sites as well. A majority of the centers that reported they have no shared job bank system also reported that on occasion they use their ESC partner to gain information from the ESC job bank. Three of the five centers that operate manual job banks are also linked in one way or another to the ESC's job bank.

Nature of Shared Job Order Banks in Use

	All Centers	**Diverse Centers**	**College Centers**	**ESC Centers**
Center Developed Electronic/Website Procedure	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**
-- Committee developed web-based procedure				
-- Center's Internet-based "JobLink Online"				
Center Developed Manual Procedure for Sharing **with Partners and with ESC Job Bank**	**4**	**2**	**2**	**0**
-- Partners get packet of job orders each 2 weeks				
-- Center director coordinates job orders for partners				
-- Partners list job orders on center form and post in resource area and on ES job bank				
-- Center job orders posted in resource area/access to ES job bank				
-- Partners develop job orders independently & list in ES job bank				
Center Uses ESC (unsuppressed) NC Job Bank	**13**	**1**	**1**	**11**
-- Partners have access to unsuppressed listings, but rarely use it				
-- Only ES and W2W partners can access unsuppressed ES job bank information				
-- All partners access unsuppressed listings, but only ES partner makes referrals to employers				
ESC Partner Manages Job Order Process for Center	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**
-- All job orders are handled by ES for center partners				
-- One center reported that access to unsuppressed ES job bank information is being worked toward at state level				
No Central Job Bank Shared by All Center Partners	**5**	**1**	**4**	**0**
-- Some partners (VR and W2W) have access to unsuppressed ES job bank listings.				
-- One center reported that access to unsuppressed ES job bank information is being worked toward at state level				

Reasons Given for Not Using Shared Job Banks: As the following comments (drawn from survey questionnaires) indicate, partners at centers that do not share a central job bank put much emphasis on ESC restrictions on unsuppressed access to its NC Job Order Bank as the reason. Although these centers represent a minority of the total surveyed, many of their counterparts shared similar opinions on this. The issue raises important questions about the depth of collaboration in some of the JobLink centers as well as ESC's role as one partner among many.

> But putting too much emphasis on what many centers reported as ESC's unwillingness to share unsuppressed access to its job bank as the reason for not having a shared job bank could be somewhat misleading and counterproductive.

Possibly misleading because partners at nearly half the 27 centers reported that they do have unsuppressed access to the NC Job Order Bank. Most are at ESC centers, but partners at one community college center and one diverse center also reported having such access. Why ESC would permit it in those 13 cases and not elsewhere is a question worth asking. But at the same time, it should be acknowledged that ESC does permit partner access at nearly half the surveyed sites. It could be counterproductive because overemphasis on ESC, especially as an uncooperative partner, can sap the energy and enthusiasm of center staffs as well as WDBs and detract from their good work – the survey uncovered evidence of this. Such emphasis can also distract center partners from finding workable solutions through negotiation or, if necessary, by developing alternative (albeit duplicative) job bank procedures. This issue was one of the most frequently raised during the survey and should be reviewed at both the local and state levels. Partner commentary on reasons for not sharing job banks is cited below:

Diverse Centers
- The ESC does not allow access to its unsuppressed job orders.

Community College Centers
- ESC functions as the general point for job orders. Each partner agency does its own thing and passes job order information on to the ESC.
- ES does not share unsuppressed job order information. Partners have access only to information provided to general public; must go through ES personnel for information/placement assistance (three centers reported this).
- Only VR and W2W partners can access unsuppressed ESC NC Job Order Bank information. Other partners must go through ESC staff.

Employment Service Centers
- ES maintains the job orders and access to unsuppressed Job Bank information. Welfare to Work is the only partner that has been given access. (College partner as this center [College of the Albemarle] noted that it placed over 150 people in employment, for which the JobLink center will get not credit due to the Job Bank situation.)
- Non-ES partners were trained to use the unsuppressed job bank system, but they did not use it, and over time use of the Job Bank has come to be regarded as an ES function. (This was reported at a center that does have a shared job bank in place.)

Unsuppressed Access to ESC's NC Job Order Bank: Among the goals of colocation at JobLink Career Centers is the coordination of resources to avoid expensive and unnecessary duplication, provide customers of all partners with full and equitable service, and ensure fast and effective service delivery. As noted above, because of the perceived value of the ESC NC Job Order Bank to all customers, there is much interest among center partners in obtaining its benefits.

As shown in the table below, center feedback indicates that partners at nearly half of the centers surveyed (48%) do have access to unsuppressed ESC Job Bank information. Based on ESC partner feedback, factors involved in providing access include confidentiality, security, and system management, all of which can be affected by center location. This seems to be reflected by survey findings: All partners at 11 of the 13 ESC centers have been given access to the unsuppressed job bank, but partners at only two of the 14 diverse and community college centers have such access.

If the restrictions on access are simply matters of management control, security, and confidentiality, and not specifically of center location, one win-win "access" solution for non-ESC centers can be found in the approach taken by the JobLink center partners at Southeastern Community College.

Access to unsuppressed ESC job order information is not granted to all partners at this center, but the ESC ensured that all customers would receive the full benefit of job bank assistance promptly and equitably by having an ESC representative on-site to serve customers on a full-time basis. The Southeastern approach enables ESC to maintain the institutional control some reported is necessary, and at the same time customers of all partners have equitable access to placement information. It's a good example of JobLink partner collaboration.

Access to Unsuppressed ESC NC Job Order Bank

	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Yes	48%	1	1	11
No	52%	5	7	2

The Impact of Shared Job Banks on Placements: Somewhat surprisingly in view of the interest demonstrated in the ESC job bank, feedback affirming the notion that shared job banks enhance placement activity was provided by less than half of the centers. Only a small minority, however, clearly said that sharing a job bank had not proven to aid placement activity.

As the data below indicate, a rather sizable minority (41%) said that they were "unsure" or that the question wasn't applicable to their situation. That nearly half the centers surveyed either do not recognize the value of shared job banks or find that they "aren't applicable" to their situation is troublesome.

Does a Central Job Order Bank Enhance Placement Activity?

	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Yes	48%	5	3	5
Unsure	15%	0	2	2
No	11%	0	0	3
Not Applicable	26%	1	3	3

Partner Job Order/Placement Experience: The following table shows that partners at a majority of the centers said that they have seen increases in their job orders and placements since the centers opened. Partners at only four centers indicated that they had not experienced increases; but more interestingly, partners at a fourth of the centers said that they simply didn't know.

The explanations for why centers had experienced increases in job orders and placements suggest that the host agency of a center has less to do with increases than do other factors. These include the level of collaboration that exists at a center, the availability of useful information (for both customer self-service and center staff use), the awareness customers have of a center and its resources, local economies and unemployment rates, and marketing.

Reasons given by partners at the few centers that had not experienced increases reflected two major causes: A lack of awareness of the center and its resources (by employers and job seekers), and insufficient on-site participation by some agency partners.

The first point calls for increased and/or improved marketing. Regarding the second point, at a few centers some partners were described as "being on call," meaning that they could be reached by phone, but were rarely at the center. At other centers on-site involvement had decreased over time to the point that the "partner" or "team" concept was severely threatened. Both conditions affect overall center operations, including placement activity, and should be considered a threat to center operations.

A particularly worrisome finding reflected by the data below is that partners at a fourth of the centers surveyed did not know whether job orders and placements had increased since their center had opened. One center manager candidly said that the center kept no records of job placements or job orders. This suggests that these centers do not have management procedures in place to measure their success at achieving what would seem to be basic JobLink goals and objectives.

Affirmation of Increases in Job Orders/Placements

	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Yes	55%	4	5	6
Somewhat	4%	1	0	0
No	15%	0	0	4
Don't Know	26%	1	3	3

LEADERSHIP, OVERSIGHT, AND MANAGEMENT

In the decentralized JobLink Career Center system, center leadership, oversight, and management are crucial to successfully making the transition to the multiagency collaboration required by one-stop service delivery – and to ensuring that centers achieve a high level of performance and institute continuous improvement practices. The survey sought feedback from center staff, managers, and WDB chairpersons (chairs) and Staff Directors on the leadership, oversight, and management that has been provided by local partner agency management committees, by host agencies/center managers, and by Workforce Development Boards.

Management Committees of Partner Agencies

Partner agency administrators at the local level make up "management committees" that provide oversight and coordination assistance to support centers. As discussed below and depicted in the following tables, there is evidence that this is being accomplished at a number of sites. But feedback from center staff and managers also indicates that while management committees are in position to smooth the way for center progress, many are yet to take up the challenge as fully as may be needed.

Management committee activities: Management committees meet periodically to review and discuss center issues and provide center oversight and guidance to varying degrees from center to center. But as the table below indicates, it is the agencies that host centers that most often provide daily oversight. This is the case at all diverse centers, at all but one ESC center, and at half the community college centers. All but one of the other community college centers receive oversight from management committees; and at the one exception, management oversight is provided by a partner elected from among all partners every six months.

Partners at most of the centers (80 percent) reported that the management committees hold meetings on a consistent basis but that attendance is good at only just over half the locations. Vocational Rehabilitation partners were cited as often absent from the meetings throughout the surveyed sites, and Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and Department of Social Services (DSS) partners were also mentioned as having weak participation records. Partners at three centers (one of each type) reported that management committee meetings are not held regularly, or if they are, center personnel are not aware of them.

Center feedback also indicates the level of effort management committees have put forth in helping the centers address ongoing center concerns is uneven. As the table below shows, centers perceive that the meetings are used most often to keep partner agencies in touch with one another and/or for information-sharing and in only a few instances to grapple with center matters such as reviewing center performance or to providing help in initiating new center activities. Three centers reported that the meetings had little impact on center activities.

Those management committees that are playing an active role in center oversight and problem solving should be commended and highlighted as worthy examples. And there can be little doubt that using meeting time to keep agencies in touch with one another or for information-sharing can be beneficial. But considering the weak attendance levels at meetings and that the purpose of many meetings appears to be limited to networking, it would seem that there is room for more to be accomplished by many of the management committees – especially in areas they can affect directly such as improving the spotty on-site center involvement records some partners have and in addressing continuing resource needs of centers.

Agency Management Committee Activities

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Daily center oversight and guidance				
By Host Agency	22	6	4	12
By a management committee	4	0	3	1
Other (elected partner)	1	0	1	0
Management committee meetings held regularly?				
Yes	22	4	7	11
No	3	1	1	1
Not aware of any	2	1	0	1
Partner attendance at management committee meetings				
Well attended	14	3	4	7
Full-time partners attend	3	1	1	1
Not well attended	2	0	1	1
Partners attend WDB	4	1	1	2
No regular meetings	3	1	1	1
No response	1	0	0	1
How management committee meetings enhance center performance				
Keeps partners in touch	11	2	4	5
Helps the JLCC review performance	7	2	1	4
Specific concerns are addressed	7	3	2	2
Sharing of information	6	3	3	0
Initiate new undertakings	4	1	2	1
No visible impact yet	3	0	3	0

JobLink Career Center Management

Center management approaches: JobLink centers appear to use two primary approaches to management: A supervisory model with a manager at the head and a team approach that provides management through group decision-making. However, most of the centers that use the supervisory model said that managers receive significant input from partners in planning and decision-making, while coordination of day-to-day operations is left to the manager. It is notable, however, that approximately 20% of centers reported that they are not supervised or that there is no clear management structure in place or being utilized. Five of the six centers that reported this are located at ESC offices.

Center staff coordination: Partners at all community college and diverse centers and at slightly over half the ESC centers (seven) reported that they hold regular staff meetings to share information, discuss topical issues, coordinate activities, or for training. Partners at six of the ESC centers reported that they do not hold regular staff meetings, and partners at five of them reported holding no staff meetings at all. Similarly, attendance at staff meetings at a majority of the college and diverse sites was reported to be good, but only three of the 13 ESC centers reported that it is.

This feedback offers encouraging news about partner collaboration at a majority of the 27 centers that were surveyed, but it also strongly suggests that there is work yet to be done, particularly at ESC centers.

Day-To-Day Center Management

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Description of center management				
Manager provides direct supervision	10	3	3	4
A management team supervises	11	3	4	4
Partners are not supervised	4	0	0	4
No clear management structure	2	0	1	1
Center staff/partner meetings held regularly				
Yes	21	6	8	7
No	6	0	0	6
Information-sharing	11	4	3	4
Discuss current issues	4	1	1	2
Coordinate activities	3	0	0	3
Training	2	1	1	0
Attendance at staff meetings				
Well attended	13	5	5	3
Full-time partners attend	6	1	2	3
Attendance is variable	2	0	1	1
Not well attended	1	0	0	1
No staff meetings held	5	0	0	5

Day-To-Day Center Management

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
How staff meetings enhance center performance				
Enhances partner communication	12	5	4	3
Helps the JLCC review performance	4	3	1	0
Specific concerns are addressed	7	2	5	0
Sharing of information	8	3	3	2
Initiate new undertakings	5	0	4	1
Coordination of schedules/activities	2	0	2	0
Improves partner relations	4	0	1	3

Workforce Development Board Leadership

Two perceptions of Workforce Development Board (WDB) leadership and involvement in center activities were obtained; one from center staff and one from WDB chairs and staff directors. Center staff perceptions will be reviewed first, followed by WDB perceptions.

Center Staff Perceptions

Because of the importance of on-site partner participation and employer involvement to center effectiveness, discussions with center staff and managers about WDB support tended to focus on these areas. As noted in the discussion and tables below, the feedback was good, but mixed, and raised the issue of where centers are to look for support in a decentralized system.

WDB center involvement: Partners at a large majority of the centers (22 of 27) said that WDBs provide leadership through policy guidance, oversight, or direct assistance to their centers. A majority of the centers also reported that WDBs had worked to encourage partner participation through WDB subcommittees, via charters and Memoranda of Understanding, and through WDB discussions. And a slightly smaller majority reported that WDBs took action to encourage employer participation via center marketing or personal contacts between WDB members and employers. Other less-used methods were employer surveys, involvement with Chambers of Commerce, and job fairs.

But that good news is countered by feedback from a large minority of the centers (almost 40%) that they knew of no specific effort by their local WDB to encourage partner participation, and feedback from another large minority (45%) that WDBs are not involved in encouraging employers to use JobLink center resources.

WDBs as center champions? There is reason to question how (and to what extent) WDBs should be involved directly in center activities, and good arguments can be made in favor of limiting WDB involvement to policy, planning, and oversight. In addition, in regards to center feedback on their involvement, WDBs may be more involved than center staff realize. Nevertheless, an important issue that was raised by discussions on WDB involvement is that centers need help in critical areas and are unsure about where to find it. If not from agency management committees, WDBs would seem to be the place to address weak on-site participation of partners; and with their employer-majority membership, WDBs could be very useful in marketing centers to employers. But if centers do not look to their area WDBs for support in such matters, where do they look?

Because of the decentralized, collaborative nature of JobLink Career Centers, there is no single agency or institution that those involved in day-to-day center activities can look to as a champion to help solve difficult multiagency problems. Under the current arrangement, the local WDB would appear to be the closest thing to a champion that the JobLink centers have.

Center recommendations to WDBs: The most frequently heard recommendations were for WDB intervention at the state level to improve state agency cooperation and support for overall local center involvement; help in marketing JobLink locally (and from a smaller number of centers, help in marketing specifically to employers); and WDB support to encourage increased funding of centers.

Staff Feedback on WDB Involvement and Support

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
How the WDB provides leadership				
Provides policy direction and guidance	7	0	3	4
Reviews reports	6	2	2	2
Uses a JobLink Committee	5	2	0	3
Led the chartering process	4	0	1	3
Meets with JLCC staff	4	2	1	1
Helps with partner coordination	3	0	1	2
Not aware of any WDB efforts	5	0	2	3
Has the WDB encouraged partner participation?				
Yes	17	5	5	7
No, not aware of any	10	1	3	6
Established expectations for partners	3	0	2	1
Stays in touch with partners	2	0	1	1
Some partners are WDB members	2	1	0	1
Provides training for partners	1	0	1	0
Contact through JobLink Committee	2	2	0	0

Table continued on next page.

Staff Feedback on WBD Involvement and Support

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Has the WDB encouraged employers to use JobLink centers?				
Yes	15	4	5	6
No	12	2	3	7
Active role in marketing	8	1	1	6
Through personal contacts	7	3	2	2
Sends out a newsletter	2	0	0	2
Conducts employer surveys	2	1	0	1
Works with Chamber of Commerce	2	0	1	1
Job fairs	2	1	1	0
Recommended WDB action:				
Help at state level re partner agency commitment	7	0	5	2
Do more to promote and publicize JLCC	6	2	2	2
Help raise more funding	6	2	2	2
Encourage employer involvement	3	1	0	2
Help establish training programs	2	0	1	1
The WDB is doing all they can do	3	1	2	0

Workforce Board Perceptions

WDB leadership and support: WDB chairs reported that all WDBs have provided leadership and support to centers. But their feedback on the type of leadership that is provided suggests that there is not strong agreement among the boards about the best way to do so. For example:

- Chairs of nine boards said that leadership was provided via the chartering process.
- Eight reported that leadership was provided through center report reviews.
- Six said board leadership was provided via direct interaction with centers and staff.
- Four or fewer reported other examples – the use of a JobLink committee; providing policy guidance; etc.

As the following tables show, when asked specifically about the actions their boards had taken to encourage greater on-site *partner* participation, the chairs reported using a variety of ways to encourage partner participation, but there seems to be no strongly shared thought on how to get at this issue. On the other hand, although the chairs reported using a number of actions to encourage *employer* involvement, most reported using one of two primary practices: personal contact to encourage employers to use the centers (by 12) and presentations to employers at civic clubs and other gatherings (by 10).

The encouraging news in the above is that WDBs are involved in the centers and are taking steps to deal with two important center issues. The discouraging news is that there is still much work to be done in both areas, and great inconsistency in on-site partner involvement seems to be taking on permanency. Regarding the latter, the variety of approaches taken by WDBs to encourage on-site partner participation may reflect that they are using locally tailored approaches to meet different local needs. But it is more likely that it reflects a lack of authority at the WDB level to address the issue more directly. In effect, WDBs appear to be doing what they can.

These issues raise questions about how well these volunteer boards have been equipped to provide the leadership centers need and about the support they receive from the state level in carrying out their responsibilities. Have models of effective workforce development board practices regarding one-stop

center operations been shared with the state's WDBs? How well have WDB members been prepared to provide the local and state support that the JobLink center approach requires? These and other questions would seem to be worth exploring.

Board Perceptions of WDB Leadership and Activities

	All Centers	**Diverse Centers**	**College Centers**	**ESC Centers**
How the WDB provides leadership				
Led the chartering process	**9**	**0**	**4**	**5**
Reviews reports	**8**	**2**	**2**	**4**
Meets with JLCC staff/visits JLCC	**6**	**4**	**1**	**1**
Requires partner proof of performance	**4**	**1**	**0**	**3**
Provides policy direction and guidance	**3**	**1**	**0**	**2**
Through rechartering process	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**
Uses a JobLink Committee	**1**	**0**	**1**	**0**
WDB actions to encourage partner participation				
Uses political influence/bully pulpit	**5**	**1**	**3**	**1**
Set up MOU process	**4**	**2**	**2**	**0**
Through private sector influence	**3**	**1**	**2**	**0**
Meetings and relationships with partners	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Set up a partner committee	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**
Some partners are WDB members	**2**	**0**	**0**	**2**
Promotes assessment	**2**	**0**	**2**	**0**
Does WDB take action to encourage employer involvement?				
WDB takes action	**24**	**6**	**7**	**11**
WDB doesn't take action	**2**	**0**	**1**	**1**
No response	**1**	**0**	**0**	**1**

Table continued on next page.

Board Perceptions of WDB Leadership and Activities

Action taken	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Personal contacts, network	12	4	5	3
Presentations at civic clubs	10	3	4	3
Works with Chamber of Commerce	7	2	1	4
Holds meetings with employers	6	3	0	3
Sends out a newsletter/brochure	4	1	1	2
Conducts employer surveys	2	0	0	2
Job fairs	2	1	0	1
Active role in center marketing	1	1	0	0

Board feedback on center operations and employer reactions: Most WDB chairs reported that they consider the JobLink approach to be a significant improvement over the workforce development system of five years ago, but a few (5) believe that it is still too early to tell. Asked about the greatest achievement to date, the greatest number cited the colocation of agencies as the main achievement, while about half as many noted improvements in customer service at the centers.

Twelve of the WDB chairs reported that employers that use the one-stop centers have found them to be an improvement over past approaches. An additional ten chairs noted that employer awareness of the JobLink approach is still in the formative stage and will grow as word spreads. All, however, indicated that there is much work yet to be done in building an employer customer base.

Best practices of centers and boards: Asked about the best practices of the centers, a majority of the WDB chairs noted the good working relationships that have developed among the agency representatives who staff the centers. Other best practices cited less often were customer service and a combination of team management and partner involvement.

Regarding best practices of the WDBs, the chairs pointed toward WDB efforts to help convey a business perspective to center operations (including developing business plans and emphasizing customer service), "empower" center staff, monitor performance, and establish ongoing communications with centers. None of those practices, however, were clamed by more than five boards. Five chairs were unable to cite best practices.

Board Perceptions of JLCC Impact and Best Practices

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
The JLCC approach as an improvement				
Achieved colocation	11	0	3	8
More focus on the customer	6	3	3	0
More universal, reaching higher-skilled	2	1	0	1
Easier for agencies to work through issues, collaborate	2	0	2	0
More attuned to employers	1	0	1	0
No clear improvement, too early to tell	5	1	1	3
Private sector views of JobLink				
Employer awareness limited – recognition is slowly growing	10	2	4	4
Employers who know find JLCC an improvement; like the one-stop idea	12	3	6	3
Larger employers more aware of the change	2	1	0	1
Best practices of JobLink centers				
Good relationship among partners – team perception	14	5	4	5
Customer-focused system	8	2	4	2
Support from host agency	2	0	2	0
Colocation of the agencies	2	0	0	2
Use of partner management team; high level of partner involvement	5	1	1	3
None cited	1	0	0	1
Best practices of WDBs				
Empowering the JLCC staff	5	3	2	0
Bringing in business perspective	5	2	1	2
Monitoring performance	4	1	0	3
Ongoing communication with JLCC	4	0	2	2
Encouraging customer orientation	4	2	1	1
Push the JLCC to improve	3	0	2	1
None cited	5	1	2	2

Board Recommendations: Nearly half of the WDBs believe they should become more involved in encouraging business and industry participation and in expanding center marketing activities in general. Other suggestions (but only by three or fewer chairs) included center visitations by boards; board member help with developing indicators of performance, with planning, and with fund-raising.

A number of the board chairs said they were unsure about the technical assistance needs of the centers in their areas, but five or six suggested that assistance to centers is needed in marketing and in the use of computer technology. Other recommendations (by three or fewer chairs) included help in improving resource areas, in increasing on-site partner involvement, with strategic planning, and in improving intake instruments.

When asked about changes they would recommend as board members to improve the JobLink system, the two recommendations made by the largest number of chairs were for greater cooperation among partner agencies at the state level (by 18) and for improvements in on-site participation by partners at the local level (by five).

Board Feedback on the System and Centers

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
What the WDB could do to improve JLCC performance				
Increase involvement of private sector and expand marketing efforts	13	3	2	8
Visit the JLCC sites more	3	1	1	1
Develop performance indicators	3	0	2	1
Increase fund-raising efforts	2	1	0	1
Help with planning	2	0	0	2
Improve partner commitment	1	0	1	0
Technical assistance needs of the JLCC				
Marketing programs to the public	6	0	1	5
Help in using computer technology	5	2	1	2
Improving the Resource Center	3	0	0	3
Increase partner participation	3	1	2	0
Improving intake instruments	3	2	0	1
Strategic and program planning assistance	3	0	1	2
Recommended changes to improve performance				
More cooperation at state level	18	6	5	7
Increased partner on-site attendance and commitment	5	2	2	1
Create state-level funding stream	3	1	0	2
Consolidate state workforce agencies	3	2	1	0
Implement common intake system	2	1	0	1

Performance Expectations and Goals

Discussions with center staff regarding performance expectations and goals brought out some surprising and revealing findings that raised more questions than answers about current center management, center planning, operational emphasis, and the current state of center monitoring and accountability.

Goals and performance expectations: Partners at only eight of the 27 centers reported that they have or are aware of written center goals and performance expectations. Further, when the eight centers that have goals/performance expectations in place were asked to describe them, they consistently described process measures, i.e., services provided, customer wait time, and so forth.

Goals that are in place came about from the work of management teams, through the development of center charters, through a WDB/partner agreement, and via partner negotiations. Based on center feedback, these efforts appear to have been directed at establishing guides for "what" would be done and "how," with little emphasis on customer outcomes or results.

For reasons that aren't clear from survey data, more diverse centers were found to have the goals and performance expectations described above in place than were college or ESC centers. Two-thirds of the diverse centers had goals/performance expectations in place, but only three of 13 ESC centers and one of eight community college centers did.

As noted above, the feedback on goals and performance expectations raises more questions than it answers. For example:

- How are these collaborative centers managed in the absence of clear and mutually understood performance expectations and goals?
- How do the centers determine when they have succeeded, and at what?
- How is planning effectively carried out without clear and understood goals?
- What drives center operations, partner commitment?
- Without center goals and performance expectations, how are centers' operations objectively monitored and evaluated?

Center Goals and Performance Expectations

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Performance expectations/goals of JLCC				
Have written expectations/goals	8	4	1	3
Do not have written expectations/ goals	19	2	7	10
Types of goals and performance expectations				
Services provided	2	1	0	1
Employer involvement	2	2	0	0
Partner involvement	2	1	1	0
Customer wait time	1	0	1	0
Quality service	1	1	0	0

Table continued on next page.

Center Goals and Performance Expectations

	All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
How goals were established				
Management team developed	3	2	1	0
Outlined in the Charter	2	1	0	1
Agreement between partners and WDB	1	0	0	1
Negotiated among partners	1	0	0	1
How often performance is measured				
Quarterly	6	2	1	3
Ongoing	2	2	0	0
Other outcome measures of success in lieu of goals				
Tabulations of people coming in, services provided	11	4	4	3
Customer survey	10	4	3	3
Individual agency tracking	3	0	0	3
Discussions at staff meetings	1	0	1	0
Suggestions box	1	1	0	0

Attachment 2 to this report is a draft case study of Mississippi's Skill/Tech one-stop system. While it is included with this report as an example of one state's early venture into developing and operating a one-stop service delivery system, it also cites data from the Skill/Tech system's annual assessment. That report, called the Legislative Accountability Report, is submitted to the state legislature each year to underscore the value of one-stop workforce development to the state and its employers. And it points out how performance measures and goals can be used not only to mark progress and ensure continuous improvement, but also for marketing and to garner state funding support.

IV.   FEEDBACK TO THE COMMISSION

Partners at surveyed centers were asked to give feedback to the Commission on changes they see as needed at this point to ensure center and system performance; how the JobLink Career Center approach compares to earlier workforce development approaches; the value that the JobLink approach adds to partner agencies; technical assistance needs of the centers; and on best practices of the centers. Center responses on these topics follow.

Changes Needed to Improve Performance Effectiveness

There was a strong call from local partners at diverse, college, and ESC center locations for improvements in state-level leadership and support, for improved state-level partner commitment to the system, and for support for center capacity building. These concerns, especially those related to state leadership and state-level collaboration, repeatedly arose throughout the interviews with center partners in addition to being cited specifically in response to questions on needed changes.

As noted in the table below as well as in the summarized partner comments that follow the table, partners cited a keenly felt need for stronger state-level commitment to the JobLink Career Center system and for stronger leadership from the highest levels in bringing about the full realization of the JobLink service delivery concept. Partners at two centers even suggested that an individual at the state level be named to "take charge" of the JobLink system to give it focused attention.

There was an equally felt need for improvements in communication and collaboration among partner agencies at the state level aimed at reducing agency turfism and increasing the support provided to JobLink centers.

Center capacity building – the desire to improve center resources and staff effectiveness – was also of keen interest among the partners. This concern included more center space; improvement in center technology, equipment, and upkeep; full-time staffing- and one-stop related staff training, among others.

Changes Needed to Improve Center Performance

Change	# of Centers
Improvements in State-level Partner Communication, Cooperation, and Collaboration	**12**
Strengthened State Leadership/Support	**11**
Increases in Center Capacity Building	**10**
Increased Funding	**5**
Marketing Assistance	**4**

Summarized Comments of Partners on Needed Changes

       Diverse Centers:
1. State Coordination
   - A state-level MOU is needed aimed at supporting local partner collaboration.
   - State leaders need to support JobLink, not just give "lip service."
   - Work needs to be done regarding confidentiality issues, translated materials, and forms.
   - State needs to commit to JLCC system and mandate full participation by partner agencies.
   - Support is needed from the Commission and state partners to minimize the effects of state-level turfism on local partners' willingness to work together.
   - State needs to develop a common intake system for all partners.
2. Capacity Building
   - More center space is needed; limited space limits performance.
   - Needs include permanent resource area staff, center equipment, and center upkeep.
   - Work needs to be done to address the Hispanic language problem.
3. WDB
   - State needs to clarify the authority of the WDB.
   - More leadership is needed from WDB.
4. Funding
   - State needs to provide a dedicated funding stream to support and sustain JLCCs.
5. Operations
   - More emphasis should be placed on training and skill building.

Community College Centers:
1. State Coordination
   - State needs to provide leadership and support for JLCC system.
   - Need customer-focused state leadership.
   - An individual needs to be in charge of the system at the state level.
   - Train DET staff in JobLink system and get them to commit to it.
   - State leadership needs to get state agencies to commit to the JLCC system.

- State should provide leadership and mandate that all partners participate fully in JobLink.
- All levels of all partner agencies should commit to full-time staff and services at centers.
- State partners need to be told to fully support JobLink centers.
- State-level partner communication needs to be improved.
- State agencies need to follow lip services with financial support.

2. Funding
   - Funding is needed for support positions at centers.
   - The state should provide funding for each center to have a center manager and customer service specialist.
   - State needs to provide funding directly to JobLink centers.

3. Operations
   - Each funding stream should use same data-collection procedures, common definitions, and common performance standards.
   - Local partner managers should be empowered to make collaborative decisions.

4. Capacity Building
   - JobLink models that reflect the one-stop vision need to be developed and used as training laboratories.

5. Marketing
   - JobLink should be marketed to employers.

6. Local Partners
   - JLCCs need to demonstrate to local partners that participation pays off in increased client flow and performance outcomes.

ESC Centers:

1. State Coordination
   - Partners at state level need to focus on what can be agreed upon and work to constructively deal with differences.
   - People in Raleigh need to learn to work together – their resistance to JobLink impedes progress at local level.
   - Currently local staff members make JobLink work in spite of state agencies, not with their help.
   - More support from state level for JobLink.
   - More support for JLCCs from state level.
   - Needs to be buy-in from state agencies.
   - More cooperation is needed among agencies to eliminate turf issues.
   - Concrete information on performance measures and methods for sharing information with state-level partner agencies.
   - State needs to develop a common intake form and resolve confidentiality issues.
   - Better state-level partner communication and collaboration.
   - Common intake form should be developed and implemented from state level.
   - "We need a consolidated state system that offers a direct line of contact and direction… one person needs to be in charge at the state level.

2. Capacity Building
   - Serious need for more electronic linkage.
   - Need more phone lines.
   - Increase focus on full array of JobLink services, not just job orders/placements.
   - State needs to develop/demonstrate different JobLink approaches: team-managed approach; rural and urban approaches, etc., and provide training for partners at all levels.
   - Training for front-line partner staff in customer servicing, satisfaction, JLCC concept, etc.

- JobLink center needs customized training courses to offer clients.
3. Funding
    - Funding for resources, equipment, space needs.
    - Funding for ongoing marketing, for technology to aid service delivery in rural areas.
    - Funding for center managers should be increased.
    - More general funding for centers from state.
4. Local Partners
    - Improved information exchange among partners.
    - There needs to be greater consistency in participation by community college representatives assigned to center.
    - More on-site participation by partners.
5. Marketing
    - An effective marketing initiative.
    - Local partners need to do better job of informing local officials about JobLink.
    - An intensified state-level effort to promote JobLink to business and industry and facilitate connections with chambers of commerce and economic developers.
6. WDB
    - WDB and state support for marketing.

Comparison of Workforce Development Systems

The survey revealed that partners at all but two of the 27 centers said that participation in the JobLink system has added value to their programs or agencies. Most often they cited improved communications with other partners and an increased capacity (through collaboration) to serve their customers as the reasons. Some noted a reduction in duplication among partners, and comments from others indicated that there is a growing camaraderie at some centers and among some partners that has produced effective center teamwork in solving problems of customers.

There was also strong agreement among the diverse, college, and ESC centers that the JobLink Career Center system is an improvement over the previous workforce development system. As the table below shows, partners at only one of the 27 centers said that the JobLink system was not an improvement, partners at one other center said they were unsure, and partners at a third said that that the system would be an improvement as soon as they ironed out implementation wrinkles. Reasons given for the improvements focused on greater agency communication and collaboration, improved customer service, and a more effective utilization of resources (note the summarized comments below).

Is JobLink an Improvement Over the System of 5 Years Ago?

Response	% of All Centers	Diverse Centers	College Centers	ESC Centers
Yes	88%	6	6	12
Will Be	4%	0	0	1
Unsure	4%	0	1	0
No	4%	0	1	0

Summarized Partner Comments Supporting JobLink Over Previous Systems

Community College Centers:
- Customers and staff prefer the customer-driven approach.
- Better for customers despite difficulties.
- Better coordination among partners; better exchange of information.
- Cooperation fostered by JobLink reduced duplication.
- Much better for customers; maximizes the use of resources by on-site staff.
- JobLink keeps people from falling between cracks.

Diverse Centers:
- Lines of communication are improved; customers don't get lost between agencies.
- Staff communication and professionalism improved; more expedient for customers.
- Improved interagency coordination and knowledge helps link customers to services.
- Maximizes resources through pooling; agencies work better in this team approach.
- Colocation permits more holistic delivery of services.
- Works great at local level, but discord at state level creates local difficulties.

ESC Centers:
- Expedited customer services and increased traffic for some partners.
- Interagency coordination better.
- JLCC system has improved agency coordination and effectively used shrinking resources. The availability of computers/Internet has enhanced programming and improved rural service.
- Better despite lack of support and cooperation at state level. Local cooperation means fewer customers are falling through the cracks.
- Better understanding of each agency's contribution to workforce development.
- Merely seeing one another briefly each week has improved partner coordination.
- More customer-driven today.
- Old system awarded contracts to agencies on independent basis.
- Former system had much duplication, little coordination, and less capacity.
- More to offer customer (resource room, interagency associations).
- More resources available to customers; issues at state level have slowed it down.

Summarized Comments That Question JobLink Superiority

Diverse Centers:

> None.

Community College Centers:

- JobLink system is not as effective due to the preoccupation with colocation and the interagency stress and anxiety that have resulted from it. It has drained energy from the effort, marginalized leadership, and diminished the sense of mission to the customer.
- Most partners could not make a comparison because they were unfamiliar with previous system, but the DSS partner saw it as an improvement because she could offer her clients more services due to partner collaboration. All generally agreed that customers like the JobLink approach.

ESC Centers:

- It will be better as the system matures; partners do have better understanding of each other's resources.
- Partners said that the JobLink system has much unrealized potential and that they can do more than just share information. Center manager said that JobLink is great, that ESC and DSS are closing the communication gap and working smarter.
- Not a system for everyone yet. Now only suited for lower 25% of population. Must be a universal system to avoid becoming perpetuation of the welfare system.

Technical Assistance Needs

The survey revealed that the top technical assistance (TA) priority of diverse, college, and ESC centers is to improve center operations and customer services delivery and that TA with technology is a strong second priority. Partners at some community college and ESC centers also cited needs related to additional funding. TA in marketing, a topic raised by a number of colleges in other discussions, was not cited as a top priority but was mentioned by partners in at least one center in all center locations. In addition, there appears to be a keen interest among a number of the partners for peer-to-peer approaches to both training and technical assistance.

Partners were also asked to provide feedback on technical assistance that they had received in the past that was of particular use. Their responses were limited, but state JobLink meetings were cited most frequently, followed by both local and state workshops in a variety of subjects.

A summary of TA needs is listed below and is followed by a review of the technical assistance partners have received in the past that was found valuable.

Technical Assistance Needs: Summarized Comments of Partners

Diverse Centers:
1. Center Operations
    - Help in knowing the basic elements centers should have in place to be effective.
    - Information on existing JobLink "best practices."
    - Training in the new MIS system.
    - TA and funding to make center and its resources more accessible to the disabled.
    - More feedback from the state on the center's performance.
    - A better tracking system and assistance with data system linkages.
    - TA in center management and operations.
2. Technology
    - Training in new technology and the Internet.
    - Funding to update technology – computers and software.
    - Electronic connections for all partners.
3. Marketing
    - TA in marketing.

Community College Centers:
1. Center Operations
    - A statewide MIS system inclusive of all partners (not just WIA) and programs and covering literacy issues.
    - Development of a state JobLink Resource Center to provide TA, develop and share best practices, "how-to" handbooks, etc.
    - Dedicated funding to center partners to assign full-time staff to center.
    - TA in developing a common intake form that satisfies the needs of all partners.
    - TA in developing a truly integrated service delivery system.
    - A universally accessible system for matching job seekers with job listings.
    - A centralized MIS system for multiple uses by JobLink partners.
    - MIS capacity to track outcomes.
    - Training in team-building, center operations, self-evaluation, and other topics to improve center effectiveness.
    - A hotline for obtaining help and information on best practices of other centers.
2. Technology
    - Technologies for disabled customers; more bandwidth; improved telephone resources.
    - Funding for a computer systems administrator.
    - Improvements in telephone services.
    - Internet training.
    - Improvements in the new computer enrollment system.
3. Funding
    - Increased funding.
    - Funding dedicated to JobLink sustainability.
    - Time and resource to attend conferences and workshops.
4. Miscellaneous
    - Assistance in planning marketing strategies.
    - Improved and timelier information from the state level.
    - Assistance from Larry Goode.

ESC Centers:
1. Operations
   - TA in standardizing the MOU process.
   - TA to translate Baldridge criteria into language to make it more useful to center operations.
   - Training in management strategies and techniques.
   - Partner cross-training.
   - TA in developing a true one-stop center including partner cross-training (especially in accessing and using unsuppressed ES job bank information).
   - Training in team-building and team management, and in developing center goals that would improve center management, performance, and effectiveness.
   - General staff training.
   - TA in cross-training.
   - Development of a common intake form.
   - TA in developing system and procedures to enable customers to register for work over the computer.
   - Need more peer-to-peer workshops; sharing of experiences.
2. Technology
   - PC training, cross-training with partners.
   - On-site updated computer training.
   - Computer hardware and software training.
   - Technology to aide disabled customers.
   - There will be future need to upgrade and maintain computer workstations.
3. Miscellaneous
   - WIA (funding) support to help make the transition to a JLCC system at all levels.
   - Funding to secure more center space.
   - TA in center marketing and customer outreach, including state-level JobLink marketing.
   - Localized training (to reduce travel time and costs).
   - TA to help state agencies get their acts together and provide standardized support to centers.

Useful Technical Assistance Received in the Past

Diverse Centers:
- Case management training.
- Spanish classes.
- Funding to purchase computers.

Community College Centers:
- State JobLink meetings.

ESC Centers:
- The Winston-Salem meeting.
- Training in the ESC's unsuppressed job bank.
- Hall talk at state meetings.
- WDB-provided TA with the center's business plan and cross training.
- The role of the Commission in providing JobLink development services.
- The Sampson project trainings.

- TA in gaining computer technology (e-mail and a web site).

Best Management and Operations Practices

The survey identified a good variety of best management and operational practices among the surveyed centers, and it is suspected that more best practices are under way at these and other centers that might be duplicated to strengthen the overall system. The incidence of "team work," "team collaboration," and "team management" as noted best practices reflects the emphasis the JobLink system has placed on these activities as desired ingredients in the one-stop concept. It is interesting that all community college centers mentioned these activities among their "best practices," while about half the centers at the other two locations did so. A summary of the best practices follows:

Diverse Centers:
- Team-based management – Mountain Area JLCC
- Staff handbook – Beaufort County JLCC
- DSS Center location – Wake County JLCC
- Customer focus and "blended" staff – Winston-Salem JLCC
- Involvement of Good Work and a Disability Awareness Committee as partners and good financial support from the county – Orange County JLCC
- Shared management responsibility – Rockingham County JLCC

Community College Centers:
- Full-time ESC representative to aid in job search and placement – Catawba County JLCC
- Empowered staff and customer focus – Davidson County JLCC
- Resume services, including the option of WinWay or Word, free resume paper, faxing, computer disks and disk storage, professional assistance, and sample resumes to follow – Catawba County JLCC
- Operation by (partner) consensus; success orientation; partner communication – Columbus County JLCC.
- Career Assessment for walk-ins with no appointment needed, including a full-time career counselor on-site, excellent software (CX, Discover, NC Careers, Internet), printed materials (OOH, DOT, and others), and SDS and computer report – Catawba County JLCC
- Participatory management – Pitt County JLCC
- Career Exploration including a variety of assessments and resources (Career Explorer 2000 from NCSOIC is best) – Catawba County JLCC
- Team-based management – McDowell County JLCC
- Tutorials Software, including Word 2000, Excel 2000, Access 2000, Introduction to Personal Computer 2000, Power Point 2000, and Active Pro 2000 – Catawba County JLCC
- Teamwork and communication – Guilford County JLCC
- Typing Tutors software for typing skills, including Cosmi Typing Tutor and Mavis Beacon – Catawba County JLCC
- Local partner collaboration; strong employer relations; and evening hours – Duplin County JLCC
- Spending quality time with customers to identify their needs and capacities so JobLink can serve them best – Catawba County JLCC

ESC Centers:
- Center is empowered to act independently of the partners – Charlotte/Mecklenburg County JLCC
- Staff cooperation – Cherokee County JLCC

- Team management approach; use of committee structure (employer relations, customer satisfaction, marketing and sustainability, and training); customer satisfaction tracking and follow-up – Watauga County JLCC
- ESC sharing its codes – Wayne County JLCC
- Information exchange among part-time partners – Cumberland County JLCC
- Empowered partners; support for management team; support from WDB – Union County JLCC
- A team approach to center operations; center management; open access to job orders; customer orientation – Durham County JLCC
- Team cohesiveness – Vance County JLCC
- Team approach by self-directed staff – Anson County JLCC
- Innovative, communicative, "open-door" management; partner collaboration – Edgecombe/Nash JLCC

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT 1

Feedback Survey of JobLink Career Center Sites

Agency and Individual Participants

Site: Beaufort County	
Interviewer: Colin Austin	
ESC	Brenda Jeannette
WIA	Diana Norman, Earlis Gordon, Callie Northern
Pamlico Area Comm. Education W2W	Leticia Kelly, Cordell Moore
Comm. Action	Glenda Simmons
DSS	Barry
Title V	Jean Tibursky

Site: Boone/Watauga County	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
ESC	Lonnie Jones
WIA	Melissa Soto
DSS	Pat Coley
Voc. Rehab.	Jim Stout

Site: Catawba Valley Community College	
Interviewer: Sam Scott	
ESC	Felicia Hollar, Gary Hawkins
CVCC	Patty Brinkley, Renee Neal, Kathy Harris
DSS	Joanne McKeel, Yulanda Smith
Voc. Rehab.	Rena Moore
W2W	Melonie Long
COG	Elaine Miller, Judy White

Site: Charlotte/Mecklenburg County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	Sheila Hemphill, Sherwood Southerland. Did not interview other agencies.

Site: Clinton/Sampson County	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
ESC	Walker Biggs
Sampson CC	Lethco Wren
DSS	
Voc. Rehab.	John McBride
Comm. of Indian Affairs	Joanna Chance
Office of Employ. Training	Jerry Bryant

Site: Davidson County	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
Davidson Co. CC	Rick Travis, Joe McIntosh
ESC	Hollis Papale
DSS	Jack Pennington
Voc. Rehab.	Sandy Venable
WIA	Shelby Von Cannon

Site: Durham/Durham County	
Interviewer: Annette Taylor	
ESC	Kathy Keefe
Durham Housing	Brenda Tillman, Nancy Love
DSS	Rhonda Stevens
Voc. Rehab.	Susan Adams
Chamber of Commerce	Beth Hill, Linzie Atkins

Site: Edenton/Chowan County	
Interviewer: Colin Austin	
ESC	Ricky Coltrain
W2W	Carolyn
College of the Albemarle	Lynn Hurdle Winslow

Site: Fayetteville/Cumberland County	
Interviewer: Sam Scott	
ESC	Glen McQueen
WIA	Pauline Goodman
Fayetteville Tech	Roger Dostall, Carolyn Gardner
County Schools	Lovern Small
Educational Opp. Center	Olivia Mudd

Site: Goldsboro/Wayne County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	William Pate
Wayne Comm. College	Richard Dougherton
Div. of the Blind	Mary Jo Thompson, John Eckels
Voc. Rehab.	Linda Cousins

Site: Guilford Technical Community College	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
ESC	Mr. Carl
GTCC	Jewell Sanya, Steve Jones, Mr. Johnson
Chamber of Commerce	Albert Johnson
Voc. Rehab.	Tony King

Site: Henderson/Vance County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	Sarah Wester, Yolande Hargrove
Vance-Granville Comm. College	Tisha McDaniel, Sylvia Jones, Denise Berry
Voc. Rehab.	Margay Hanks
DSS	Beatrice Walker, Melissa Jones

Site: Kenansville/James Sprunt Community College	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
WIA	Shirley Thomas
ESC	
DSS	
Correctional Center	
W2W	

Site: Lumberton/Robeson County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	Daphne Stewart, Valeria Russ, Len Howre
Telemon	Patsy Jacob, Margie Atkinson
DSS	Jesse McLamb, Heather Johnson
Voc. Rehab.	Brenda Ivey
W2W	John Reese

Site: McDowell Technical Community College/Marion	
Interviewer: Sam Scott	
ESC	Present
WIA	Bill Robertson, Jerry Broome
DSS	Present
Voc. Rehab.	Present
MTCC	Present
Day Reporting Center	Present

Site: Monroe/Union County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	Norris Peirce
Comm. College	Bud Marchant
DSS	Linda Gay
Voc. Rehab.	Mary Walls
Comm. Action	Melia Watkins

Site: Mountain Area JobLink Center	
Interviewer: Sam Jordan	
ESC	Anthony Ward
WIA	Helen Beck, Ellen Wetsbrook
DSS	Noah Rose, Linda Briggs

Site: Murphy/Cherokee County	
Interviewer: Sam Jordan	
ESC	Dan Kirby
WIA	Charles Penland
DSS	Fannie Watson

Site: Orange County	
Interviewer: Annette Taylor	
ESC	Present
Durham Tech	Sarah Cooley
DSS	Gwen Price
Voc. Rehab.	Present
Good Work	Al Davis
Comm. Action	Joyce Windsor

Site: Pitt Community College	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	Darien Waters
WIA	Alton Wadford, Walter Graham
Project Hope, W2W	Vicki Hawkins, Dan Mayo, Tami Moore

Site: Randolph County Community College	
Interviewer: Sam Scott	
ESC	Present
RCS/WIA	Norman Hines, Nancy Landis, Tiffanie Wilson, Barbara Mrokowski, Lisa York, Harriet Reid-Bell, Augie Andrews
DSS	Tory Rule

Site: Reidsville/Rockingham County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	Lee Johnson
Rock. Comm. College	Kathy Wheeler, Donna Shively
DSS	Sandra Strater, Helen Lumpkins
Voc. Rehab.	Gary Cox
Job Resource and Training Center	Althea Harriston, Joyce Stone

Site: Rocky Mount/Edgecombe and Nash County	
Interviewer: Annette Taylor	
ESC	Steve Rogers, Tamika Peoples
DSS	Present
JTPA	Michael
WIA	Donna Long

Site: Wadesboro/Anson County	
Interviewer: Roger Sheats	
ESC	JoAnn Thomas
DSS	Larry Crandall
County Schools	Ray Clayton
	Note: ESC is only agency with full-time staff members

Site: Wake County	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	

ESC	Carolyn Ashley, Brenda Bryant
WIA	Denny Jenkins, Hugh Dowdy, Carolyn Beatty
W2W	Sandi Painter, Liz Mosler, Tony Sutton
Voc. Rehab.	Lee Wooden
Supportive Employment	Kenya Davis, Lisa Bryant
Work First	Sheila Alford, Sue Marshall
Wake Tech	Harry Whitchen

Site: Whiteville/Southeastern Community College	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
ESC	Carole Smith-Burr
Telemon	Sonya Hall
DSS	Mary Thompson, Al McKenzie
Voc. Rehab.	Twyla Hodges
SCC	Teresa Triplett, Brantley Briley, Jackie Freeman
JobReady	Julia Roberts
W2W	Gayle Worley
Four County Community Services	Penny Richardson
Whiteville City Schools	Jeannie Palmer

Site: Winston-Salem/WIA facility	
Interviewer: Sandy Babb	
WIA	Martha Jo Campbell. Did not interview other agencies.

ATTACHMENT 2

DRAFT REPORT

Mississippi's Skill/Tech

Workforce Development Centers

DRAFT

By
Sam J. Scott
MDC, Inc.

June 2000

CONTENTS

Preface

The Community College workforce development system that is reported on in the following pages resulted from extraordinary collaboration by state government, higher education, business, and the nonprofit sector to study, plan, and implement a program to improve the literacy and job skills of Mississippi's workforce, the competitiveness of its industry, and the promise of economic security for its people.

This work began with a trip by community college presidents and the executive director of the Mississippi Community College Foundation to Germany to observe that country's education and training system; a tour that led the College Foundation to organize the public/private sector Millennium Group for the purpose of establishing common ground among government, education, and business for a new, statewide workforce initiative.

The Millennium Group brought together the people and public and private agencies and organizations needed to bring about necessary policy and programming change. It included representatives from the state's universities, community colleges, State Department of Education, the Governor's Office, State Department of Economic and Community Development, AFL-CIO, Mississippi Employment Security Commission, State PTA, Mississippi Public Education Forum, Mississippi Manufacturers Association, State Chamber of Commerce, the Chairmen of the House and Senate Education Committees, and individual private sector leaders.

This broad coalition raised necessary private funding to support research and development of a workforce improvement strategy and plan. It prepared a comprehensive workforce development report that was endorsed by all significant organizations that play a role in Mississippi workforce development. Its report was developed into comprehensive state workforce legislation -- the Mississippi Workforce Act of 1994 -- which was passed by both legislative houses without a dissenting vote.

The Millennium Group called on MDC in the person of its former president, the late George Autry, to assist it in its research and development activities as well as the preparation of its report and the adaptation of the report into legislation. Subsequently, MDC assisted the State Workforce Council that was created by the new workforce legislation in developing a strategic plan for implementing a statewide system of college-based one-stop workforce development centers and employer-led District Workforce Councils. Some five to six years later it is especially pleasing to report on the gains made by Mississippi's Community College workforce program.

I.   **The Skill/Tech Case for Community College Workforce Training:**
     A workforce development system that works

Enabled by strong state policy and legislation, the Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges undertook an ambitious plan in 1994 to make the state's workforce more effective and its businesses and industry more globally competitive. The plan called for each of the state's community and junior colleges to become regional resources for workforce development. They were to be responsive to the education and training needs of employers and of individuals seeking employment or skill upgrading. To eliminate duplication, improve effectiveness, and increase access, new and existing workforce education and training resources were pulled together in Skill/Tech One-Stop Workforce Development Centers[7] on each of the community college system's 15 community and junior college campuses.

In the five years since the Skill/Tech One-Stop Centers were implemented by the state's community and junior colleges, the state has seen a turnaround in employment, earnings, and job opportunities:

- In July 1994, the unemployment rate was 8 %; by April 1999 it had been halved to 4%

- Over the same period, despite heavy losses of jobs to offshore enterprises, the number of working Mississippians grew by 38,200 -- employers cited workforce training as playing a major role in the increase.

- Per capita income rose from $15,886 to $18,958

Not all the credit for the above improvements can be attributed to the workforce initiative alone, but Legislative Accountability Reports on the Skill/Tech system show clearly that the Skill/Tech system had a major role in those outcomes, and an impressive and sustained impact on the state's workforce preparedness. For example, the number of persons who received workforce education and training from the two-year college system jumped from 39,454 in 1994 to 115,827 in 1997 -- almost three-fold in three years. The number of employers served more than tripled -- from 206 served in Fiscal Year 1994

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[7] In the 1994 legislation that established the Centers, they were called "One-Stop Career Centers." Shortly thereafter the name "Skill Tech Career Centers" was adopted for marketing purposes. In 1999 the name was changed again to "Workforce Development Centers" to avoid confusion with other training initiatives such as Tech Prep. In this report, the Centers are called Skill/Tech Workforce Development Centers.

(FY 94) to 650 in FY 97. In Fiscal Year 1996 alone the Workforce Development Centers placed 5,518 people in jobs and awarded 8,822 GED Certificates -- an increase of 1,701 GEDs awarded over the previous year.

The beat has gone on: In FY97, 87,423 individuals were trained for work through Skill/Tech Centers and in FY98 that number increased to 96,375. The Centers have played a role in welfare reduction, as well, especially under welfare reform. In FY 97 they assisted 219 recipients into jobs to realize savings to the state in welfare payments of $2,409,000. In FY 98, the number placed rose to 1,043, and the savings realized from those job placements jumped to $11,473,000.[8]

The 1999 Legislative Accountability Report -- the most recent -- indicates that the Workforce Development Center system has continued its productive ways: Of 649 businesses responding to a Report-related annual survey, 631 reported that the training met their expectations and only one (1) said that it did not. More impressively, 646 of the 649 said they would use their Community College Workforce Development Center again as a source of workforce education and training; again, only one (1) said it would not.[9] In the same report, using figures provided by Mississippi's State Economist, the Legislative Accountability Report showed that tax revenues generated by Workforce Development Center System-related new jobs and pay increases reached $8,407,817.

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[8] An attachment to this case study offers an example of a highly collaborative welfare-to-work project undertaken by Coahoma Community College's Skill/Tech Center. Called the "Adopt a Town Program," it placed hard-to-place Mississippi Delta welfare recipients in tourist industry jobs.

[9] The lone unsatisfied employer reversed its position when it was followed up as a part of the system's continuous improvement program. The employer cited a misunderstanding of the related survey question and its own role in program planning. The employer had insisted on a shorter and more consolidated form of spreadsheet computer training than the provider-college had recommended and it proved to be inadequate due to the diverse computer skill levels of the company's employees.

II. **The System at a Glance:**
   State supported and college-based

The Community College Skill/Tech Workforce Development Center System was created by the Mississippi Workforce and Education Act of 1994 and is funded entirely by state appropriations. It consists of 15 Skill Tech Workforce Development Centers operated by the state's 15 Community and Junior Colleges. (Some colleges also operate satellite centers to reach outlying areas.) Funding for the Skill/Tech system is administered through the Mississippi State Board for Community and Junior Colleges, and system oversight and support is provided by the Board's Center for Quality and Productivity.

The Workforce Development Center System is guided by a strong State Workforce Development Council that brings coordination among related state agencies, monitors the effectiveness of the Workforce Development Center System, advises the governor, public schools, and institutions of higher learning on school-to-work policies and programs, and assesses the effectiveness and results of the system. It's membership includes the Governor, a private sector representative from each of 15 college district workforce councils, the State Superintendent of Public Education, the Commissioner of Higher Education, the Executive Director of the State Board of Community and Junior Colleges, the heads of the Employment Security Commission, Department of Human Services, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Department of Economic Development, among others. It's the high powered group that can help bring about needed action and changes in both the public and private sectors.

Workforce Development Center Structure and Services

Each of the State's 15 Community or Junior Colleges administers a Skill/Tech Workforce Development Center under the supervision and control of the college president. Depending upon the size of their districts and their employer base, some colleges operate satellite centers to serve outlying areas in their district.

Workforce Development Center staff are employees of their respective community or junior college and are directly supervised by Workforce Development Center Directors. Staffs range in size from 5 to 28, with most having 8 to 10 staff. As

might be expected, colleges with larger municipalities and greater numbers of employers in their service districts have the larger center staffs.

Each Workforce Development Center is guided by a 15-member District Workforce Development Advisory Council that is appointed by the host-college's board of trustees. Council appointments are selected from recommendations from chambers of commerce, employee groups, labor unions, community organizations, industrial foundations, and local governments located within the college district. Underscoring the importance of literacy training and private sector guidance to improving the state's workforce, each Council must include one member that represents basic literacy training, and a majority of each district council must be CEOs or plant mangers from the private sector to ensure the responsiveness of centers to local workforce needs. The District Councils are responsible for developing a District Strategic Plan; identifying their respective districts' workforce development needs; setting short-term and long-term goals for industry-specific training and upgrading; coordinating all training; assisting business managers in the transition to high-powered, quality organizations; encouraging continuous improvement; and overseeing development of an extensive Workforce Development Center marketing plan to the employer community.

The services provided by the Workforce Development Centers also vary from college to college depending upon their location and employer base. They include:

Occupational Education	Single-Parent/Displaced
Distance Learning	Homemaker Training
Small Business Services	Child Development
Computer Technology	Industrial Services
Career Development/	Applied Technology
Occupational Assessment	Advanced Technology Training
Adult/Continuing Education	Professional Development
Mobile Training Units	Job Placement
Work-based Learning	
Tech Prep Programs	
Business and Government	
Services	
ABE/GED Instruction	
Workforce Basic Skills	
Customized Training	
Rapid Response Coordination	
Leadership Training	
Business Management	

The above list is not an exhaustive one, but offers a good review of the services available at the Centers to job seekers, workers desiring to upgrade their workplace status, and employers.

Center services are marketed to employers through a variety of strategies, including Workforce Development Center staff visits; the involvement of Center representatives in business meetings of the Division of Economic and Community Development; Workforce Development Center briefings at Chambers of Commerce and other professional organization meetings; Workforce Development Center success stories in local newspapers and trade and business publications; through businesses networking.

Individuals obtain knowledge about and access to Workforce Development Center education and training services by visiting the Centers directly; through referrals from various agencies, including Department of Human Services case workers, Employment Security Commission counselors and interviewers, the Department of Rehabilitation Services; via employers that sponsor skill, literacy, or GED training; and through other means such as job fairs, public service announcements, local newspapers, social organizations, and churches.

Public/Private Sector Inspired and State Supported

The genesis of the Skill/Tech Workforce Development Center system is found in a marriage of the public and private sectors. Following review of a report on an eight-day study of Germany's dual educational system by a small group made up of community college presidents and leadership of the Mississippi Community College Foundation (MCCF), the Foundation's Board of Directors (the presidents of the state's community and junior colleges) called for implementation of a major workforce improvement initiative for the state.

The first step in that initiative was the formation of the "Millennium Group," a collection of make-it-happen individuals from the public and private sectors that included representatives from the state's universities, community colleges, State Departments of Education, Economic and Community Development, State Employment Security, the AFL-CIO, State PTA, the Public Education Forum, the Mississippi Manufacturer's

Association, the State Chamber of Commerce, the Chairmen of the House and Senate Education Committees, and top leadership from the private sector.

For several months this group sought to establish common ground among public and private actors, and to articulate the workforce development needs of the state in the form of a state workforce development strategy and plan that could move the state into a competitive position in the world economy. That plan was ultimately endorsed by all organizations in the state with workforce development roles, and ultimately became comprehensive legislation -- the Mississippi Workforce Act of 1994 -- that passed both houses without a dissenting vote and was signed into law by the Governor in April 1994. The legislation provided $30,000,00 in implementation funding, and was viewed nationally as a model of a bottom-up organizational structure where the employer-customer dominated workforce training decisions.

III. **Skill/Tech Snap-Shots:**
Examples of How the Centers Work

The following are examples of how Skill/Tech Workforce Development Centers work within college districts to provide workforce education and training to raise the competitiveness of workers and business.

Taking Workforce Education to the Worker

Baldor Electric, a manufacturer of electric motors, located a branch plant in Columbus, Mississippi, in 1965. In the 30+ years since, the Columbus plant has undergone seven major additions that created 150,000 square feet of manufacturing floor space and 400 jobs. But while the number of jobs at Baldor increased, the skill level of Baldor employees remained much the same.

By the late 1980s, national and international competition were creating severe problems for Baldor's Columbus plant. Production and performance had fallen as its 1960s-style workforce struggled to cope with a 1980s organization plan that called for greater employee responsibility and less direct supervision. Workers were being called on to take much more responsibility for taking technical action on their own. But low employee literacy skills severely weakened the Columbus plant's competitiveness. Baldor's Columbus plant ranked 14th in production out of its 14 branch plants.

"At that time Baldor decided that being better is better than being cheaper," said Ed Wamble, director of East Mississippi Community College's Skill/Tech Center (EMCC), and the company began looking for ways to raise its workers' literacy levels and competitiveness. They tried GED instruction in the late 1980s, but it proved ineffective in raising reading and math skills. Then in 1994 the training effort got a boost from two events: The company set a goal to have all employees reach the 8th grade level in reading and math (testing showed 75% of Baldor's 400 employees in Columbus missed the 8th grade mark), and Mississippi's legislature passed the Workforce Development Act of 1994, establishing Skill/Tech Workforce Development Centers at each college. The first solidified the company's commitment to educating its workforce, and the second enabled EMCC to offer a more comprehensive approach to delivering workplace-related reading and math instruction.

EMCC's Skill/Tech Center proposed testing all employees to identify the specific area(s) each worker needed to concentrate on, and to meet identified needs with curricula tailored specifically for Baldor. The plan called for curricula that combined customized training with adult basic education that used Baldor terminology to make it relevant for Baldor employees. The Skill/Tech Center individually tailored printed and audio instruction materials to meet employee needs to help workers reach 8th grade status, and also to help non-readers learn to read and those at or above the 8th grade reading level obtain high school equivalency. Subsequently workplace skill programs were developed in computer literacy, metallurgy, blueprint reading, schematic reading, and other areas, and training was offered in team problem solving techniques. In three years the 8th grade statistic at Baldor-Columbus had been reversed -- 90% of Baldor's employees made the mark. And by late 1997 the Columbus plant had improved its performance ranking among the 14 Baldor plants to #1.

Baldor played its part. To generate interest in the new reading and math programs among its employees, the company initially tied salary incentives to learning based on participation and achievement in reading and/or math classes. These incentives boosted participation to the point that training was soon offered during all work shifts and a waiting list for classes became necessary.

As an outgrowth of its on-site workplace literacy training, in 1997 Baldor Electric became an East Mississippi Community College distance learning site with the addition of a T-1 line and interactive video specifically to enable company employees to take other credit courses at the plant. In response, Baldor has erected a large sign at the front of its Columbus plant proclaiming its partnership with education: "East Mississippi Community College -- Baldor Campus."

Preparing a Regional Workforce for an Economy in Transition

Northeast Mississippi Community College responded to the Workforce Education Act of 1994 by consolidating all the college's workforce development programs and services under a single entity — the Division of Community and Economic Development (CED), which operates the college's Skill/Tech One-Stop Workforce Development Center.

The Skill/Tech Center serves a rural five-county region with an economy historically dominated by low-wage, low-skill industry. In recent years, many of the region's employers — including virtually all its apparel plants — left the area for cheaper off-shore labor. Fortunately, the region has been able to replace most of the lost jobs, and many of the new jobs demand higher skills than their predecessors. The Skill/Tech Center has faced the challenge of preparing the region's workforce for an economy in transition.

The Center provides individuals and employers with a wide variety of education and training programs, from basic literacy skills to training in advanced technology. It coordinates closely with local, state, and federal workforce development agencies and related programs to reach the region's workforce and streamline service delivery. And it is involved as an integral player in the region's economic development efforts.

The Center's mandate is to provide training for all employers that are located in the college's five-county district, putting the Center at the forefront of the district's transition from low-wage/low-skill employment to jobs that require greater reasoning power than manual dexterity or physical labor. It provides education and training to both new and existing employers to help them prepare new entrants to the workforce for new jobs or to upgrade the skills of existing employees to meet technological advances. An example of its effectiveness is that over the first three quarters of 1997 the Center provided training to 1,100 individuals.

To accomplish that level of activity, Center staff annually contact all eligible businesses and industries in the five-county district to familiarize them with the Center and promote its services. A key to the Workforce Development Center's success is its flexibility in meeting the training needs of employers. It can design customized training or offer a wide range of standard programs that it can provide wherever it is most suitable for the employer – at the work site, at the college campus, at secondary vocational/technical schools, or via mobile units equipped to meet an employer's training needs. To take advantage of the most effective trainers available, programs can be delivered by the faculty and staff from the college or secondary vocational/technical schools, or by industry personnel with whom CED contracts on a consulting basis.

But the Center does more than work with employers and workers needing upgrading. To reach and train the unemployed, the Skill/Tech Center and CED have developed strong partnerships with public agencies in the region, including workforce development agencies, social service agencies, and economic development groups.

An example of the innovation that can result from such collaboration is found in a one-of-a-kind (in Mississippi, at least) welfare to work initiative called "We Care Combined Activities." The program combines the Skill/Tech resources of the college, employers, JTPA, ESC, and DSS to move long-term Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients off welfare and into jobs. The major components of the initiative are:

- An intake and assessment process that produces an individualized service plan for each participant.

- Job readiness and literacy training.

- Ongoing counseling and job coaching.

- Up to 80 hours of subsidized work experience over a four-week period in business and industry. This provides needed work experience and enables participants to demonstrate their job readiness to potential employers. After this trial period, most participants have been hired by their work experience employers.

- Retraining designed to overcome gaps in work readiness. Those who are not quite job-ready following their work experience period receive additional training designed to overcome specific inadequacies identified by the work experience employer.

Although the program has proved its capacity to move TANF recipients into unsubsidized employment, NECC Skill/Tech Center director Billy Bolden reported that it will be ended on June 30, 2000 due to a loss of JTPA funding as the state implements Workforce Investment Act programming.

IV. **Productive State Workforce Policy:**
Underpinning state workforce effectiveness with community college training

Mississippi's Workforce Education Act of 1994 put in place state policy that underpinned the state's commitment to workforce effectiveness and enabled construction of a system for effectively and efficiently organizing state workforce development resources. It called for the creation of a regionally based system for workforce education and training that would be responsive to the needs of individuals and employers, driven by the demands of business and a competitive economy, make maximum use of limited resources, and be accountable.

The consistently high outcomes of the Skill/Tech Workforce Development Center system over the past five years underscore the potential community colleges offer state policy makers in terms of workforce development. And that potential goes beyond the limitations of state resources. Although the state policy that created Mississippi's Skill/Tech Workforce Development Center system was implemented in 1994, some four years before passage of the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), it established a workable structure for implementing programs and services called for by WIA. In effect, it offered a ready mechanism for unifying state and federal workforce development policy and programs under the state's primary deliverer of workforce education and training -- the state community college system -- and in so doing increase workforce development effectiveness and efficiency.

At one point state legislation to accomplish such unification of resources was being discussed, but it never reached its potential and the state chose to construct a parallel WIA system with its own state and local workforce boards and one-stop centers. Community colleges are eligible to propose operating one-stop centers (using existing Skill/Tech Centers as their foundation) under the WIA system, and if they did so it would provide yet another if less comprehensive means for unifying federal and state workforce resources. But currently only three of the state's 15 community colleges have been selected to operate WIA One-Stop Centers -- Itawamba Community College, Northeast Mississippi Community College, and Northwest Mississippi Community College. The remainder of the state's WIA one-stop centers reportedly will be located at State

Employment Service offices. It will be interesting to see how the three community college-based operations compare with the Employment Service-based centers.

Despite the decision to keep the two workforce efforts largely separate, Mississippi's Workforce Education Act of 1994 and the Skill/Tech Workforce Development Center system that it produced nevertheless demonstrate the viability of community colleges and state community college systems as highly effective structures for implementing state workforce policy -- and possibly federal workforce policy, as well.