Labor Market Analysis Series:

Labor Market Information: What is It and Why is it Important? - Module 1

JOHN WALSH: Welcome to module one of the labor market analysis series. This module's entitled Labor Market Information: What is It and Why is it Important? My name is John Walsh and I'm the Project Director for the Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation, or CITVR, and I will be your trainer for this session.

So let's first place this training in the context of the time we find ourselves. The world of work is continuing to change and evolve, and in ways that are not always very predictable. One example is how employers adapted their business models in order to respond to strategies that were implemented to contain a global pandemic.

We saw that many of us for the first time worked from home, became more comfortable in virtual meeting spaces and a myriad of other ways that we, as a society and as individuals, adapted to the pandemic and connected impacts. We are also living through other societal shifts, including what is referred to as the Great Resignation, or a term I particularly like is the Great Realignment where we saw record numbers of folks choosing to leave their current jobs to explore other opportunities.

So during this time, we're seeing record resignation rates. And these rates are highest around mid-career employees, those in the age of 30 to 45 years old. And the highest rates of resignation were in the tech and health care industries. Where this Great Alignment will take us as a society is still being played out in real time.

We also saw, in the same time period, new opportunities that arose from these societal and workplace shifts, such as the rise of remote work and its benefits to employers and employees.

It is creating a scenario where geographical barriers are less important for knowledge workers, which really may open up employment opportunities for those we serve that was not an option and available just a few years ago. Technology advances continue to accelerate and who knows what lies over the horizon related to the future of work.

So what the world of work looks like today will not look the same as our economy and society continues to change and evolve. The truth of the matter is that change is not an event, or a crisis like a pandemic, but it is a constant. Large societal events like a global pandemic just brings it more acutely into our consciousness.

The other point is, is that change is not always a threat, but also generally provides us opportunities that can be explored in order to perform work in new and innovative ways that may not have been an option three, five, 10 years ago. The shift I witnessed in state VR agencies to address the impact of the pandemic in being able to continue to provide services in largely virtual modalities was something that many of us would not have thought possible only a few years ago. In order to meet these challenges as well as the opportunities, we need to adopt a mindset that change is constant, and that we need to continue to learn and adapt our approaches.

What would these shifts look like? So one, we really need to learn to be more fluid in our approach. You've probably heard the saying, blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape. So we have to be open that there are multiple ways to achieve objectives. Although it may not be our preferred method, it does not mean it may not be effective for another.

Two, we have to really reframe our relationship to control. In a world of flux, we need to acknowledge that we don't immediately have all the answers. April Rinne, an author of Flux, 8 Superpowers for Thriving in Constant Change, stated, fluxy leaders acknowledge what they don't know and what they can't control. They seek clarity of vision rather than certainty of outcome.

They also ask others for help unlocking far more agency and creativity in the process. So I provided links to two articles in this slide, and the slide deck and a resource document can be found on the landing page for this training, that you can continue to explore this topic and really continue your journey of learning.

So you may be asking at this point, what does this have to do with using labor market information in the VR process? As I mentioned in my previous slide from the quote from April Rinne a clarity of vision helps us in gathering additional data to assist us in our actions. Labor market information is data that can-- and a tool that we can add to our toolkit as a counselor, a business engagement specialist, or paraprofessional that will provide us another vantage point to gain that greater clarity of vision regarding the changing workforce.

So when we talk about labor market information, or LMI, this includes quantitative and qualitative data to give us a better picture of trends in the evolving labor market. By

understanding these trends, it will assist us in adapting our practices and approaches to assisting our consumers with their pursuit of work, and entering into career pathways. So the information we're seeking includes that data about sectors of the workforce where growth looks promising.

And the related career pathways to really-- for folks to advance in employment, take on new challenges, and have even greater earning potential. We can use this data to help us pivot when we're finding an approach is not working. Remember, blessed are the flexible.

I also think that a really important component of LMI is that it's going to help our consumers to make more informed choices about their vocational options and the careers they want to seek. If you really only have a little information about a vocational path other than popular knowledge or perceptions you may have around what the work entails, that's not really a good informed choice about the choices you want to make.

So let's put together some of the pieces of this puzzle of how we can provide additional information and gather additional information that really seeks to help individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of work. In this four-part series, we hope to provide you knowledge and tools to use labor market information effectively in the VR process. In module two, my colleague, Nicole Tichy will explore how we can effectively use LMI in the rehabilitation counseling relationship.

In module three, another colleague, Christine Johnson, will explore in more in depth LMI and the counseling process in relation to informed choice, and also provide some insights on cultural considerations. In the last module, all three of us, all three of the trainers, will take you on a guided tour of labor market information resources, including additional training on how you can effectively use it.

So let's talk a little bit about module one. In this module, I will define labor market information and provide examples of various types of information that could be used in the VR process. I also hope to be able to explain how the use of LMI is linked with the requirements in the Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA. And lastly, I want to provide resources that VR professionals can utilize to expand their knowledge around the utilization of LMI in the vocational rehabilitation process.

So let's start by giving a definition of what is labor market information. On this slide, I have included a quote from an article entitled "Turning Labor Market Facts Into Labor Market Information, LMI's Effectiveness for VR." I provide the link on this page so you get access to the full article. And we also developed a resource document, which summarizes all the resources and references that we're going to use in this training.

So here's the quote. "Labor market information is both quantitative and qualitative. It is gathered from a variety of sources and used to inform VR services about employment opportunities for their clients, as well as to provide occupational information." So this is an expansive definition of LMI and it's not restricted solely to information that you would

traditionally think of being gathered by the Bureau of Labor statistics on the federal level or the Departments of Labor and Workforce Development on your state and local level. Although very important, we don't want to limit LMI just to those sources. As we will discuss momentarily, it is our contention that making a more expansive approach and inclusive approach to gathering data takes into account various facets of LMI that will provide that clearer picture of the workforce in your state and region.

So let's go a bit deeper to further define LMI. So let's start with what we traditionally think of as LMI, which is that traditional data-driven piece. So when we look at the traditional LMI, it really is collected-- it's a systematic collection, analysis, and reporting of a broad range of federal, state, and local data that describes current economic conditions within a given geographical area. So some of the key data metrics might include current employment levels, projected employment growth, unemployment rates, average wages, the minimum education requirements for getting into various occupations, industry trends, and workforce demographics.

But we also know there are other sources of LMI, including that real time data that is drawn from online job postings for a region that's offering information on employer demand. We may get some trend data around new and emerging in-demand skills and credentials, job titles, industry trends, and educational requirements. We also know that many VR agencies have specialists working around business relations, or sometimes through your partners in the workforce development system that serve in a very similar role. And they're gathering that qualitative data from employers, Chambers of Commerce, and business and industry associations.

This information can include opportunities and challenges of hiring for different positions, expected changes in employment, and positions that require specialized skills within your locality. I think we need to always be cognizant of this valuable information as well, and make sure we are intentional about connecting with our business relations specialists who could really be a valuable source of information that could provide us that fuller picture of the labor market in your state and the region you're serving.

So why is LMI important? I think we've touched upon some of the reasons already. We know that LMI can help us gain that greater clarity of vision to adapt to a changing workforce. It really provides us information that helps VR professionals and paraprofessionals adapt to that change as they serve their consumers. It provides us information on emerging and growth sectors.

And I contend there can be some surprises out there if we only relied on old data of what are these growth trends that some of us may not have seen coming. But keeping connecting with that data, we start to see some of the trend lines. It also helps us to see what's that next big thing. What is that emerging career?

So we also can learn about education, experience, and credential requirements, as there are also evolving education and career readiness with new credentials. How does that align with

what employers would like to see for their candidates? LMI is also a source of key information to provide our consumers to promote informed choice and making good career decisions.

This is a key reason, as we want to make sure that the folks have the information they need to make the choices about the careers and the related training they want to explore. And we're going to expand on that topic later in this series. The practice of using LMI can also be integrated into the therapeutic relationship, which, again, we're going to discuss both in module two and module three to really show how this links with the vocational rehabilitation process.

And lastly, the practice of using LMI clearly aligns with the priorities in the Rehabilitation Act as amended under WIOA. So let's take a look at that. Let's take a look at the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and some of the key points within the Rehabilitation Act.

So the amendments to the Rehab Act in WIOA stress the importance that the workforce development system in this country would work to strengthen the United States workforce development system through innovation and an alignment and improvement of employment, training, and education programs in the United States, and to promote individual and national economic growth and for other purposes.

So when we look specifically at the code of regulations that govern the PR-- the public VR system, the section of the code that addresses the comprehensive system of personnel development in agencies, and that's located at 34 CFR 361.18, that section of the code emphasizes the importance that VR professionals are sufficiently prepared to understand the 21st century evolving labor force linked with understanding the needs of individuals with disabilities.

The code specifies three areas that stress the importance of an in-depth knowledge and use of LMI in the VR counseling relationship, in the planning process, and as part of informed choice. So it talks about an in-depth knowledge of labor market trends, occupational requirements, and other labor market information that provides information about employers, business practices, and employer personnel needs. And where are the sources of this data? Such is provided in the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Department of Labor's O*NET occupational system.

In addition, the use of LMI should be used for VR counseling, vocational planning, and the provision of information to consumers for the purposes, again, making informed choices for also working with our business partners and business engagement, and around job development and placement. Lastly, the use of labor market information is there also to support building and maintaining relationships with employers and to inform delivery of job development and job placement activities that are responsive to today's labor market.

OK, so let's now take another deeper dive and look at some of the traditional sources of labor market information that provides metrics and indicators to describe support and demand for labor. And I touched upon those core data elements, which looked at unemployment rates,

average wages, occupational growth and decline, industry and sector growth and decline, employment projections, and other data related to the labor market.

So what I'm going to review now is certainly not an exhaustive list of LMI, but we are going to show you some really valuable tools that a VR professional or paraprofessional can utilize in your daily work. So we're going to look at three resources that are available to the VR community that will assist in accessing LMI.

So in the next several slides, we're going to look at The Career Index Plus, the work of the National Employment Team and their talent acquisition portal, and we're also going to look at LMI Central that is provided by WorkforceGPS. You may have access to additional resources within your state, and we certainly encourage you to access those as well. But we believe that these are three robust resources and that are easily accessible for anyone throughout the country.

So let's start with the Career Index Plus. The Career Index Plus can be accessed at thecareerindex.com, no spaces between the words. It is simple to use. Access is free to everyone, courtesy of RSA.

All you need to do is a one-time registration, and then when you enter your email address in the future, you can begin using it. If you want to save searches that you do in the career index plus, you will need to create a password to access your stored information. But otherwise, it's not a very onerous registration system.

Data is derived from a host of resources, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Included within the Career Index Plus is a searchable database that looks at salary information, job trends and projections, current jobs openings, license requirements and certification, education and experience requirements, knowledge, skills, and ability, and related training programs. Now in module four, we're actually going to take you on a guided tour of the Career Index Plus and that way you can see some of the core components of this platform.

So the other piece I want to make you aware of is within our slide decks, we provide you links to all the resources in order for you to access any of those resources we've discussed in this. So within this slide, we provide you a link directly to the Career Index Plus. And again, it would be on the resource sheet that is on the landing page of this training.

We also want to provide you with a link to access training on the Career Index Plus. WINTAC had developed a series of short webinars and other resources that will provide you a tour of the Career Index Plus and all the ways that you could utilize this information within the VR process. Again, we're going to-- in module four, we'll actually provide you of a tour of the WINTAC page and all of the resources and training that are located there.

I also wanted to talk about the National Employment Team as part of the Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation. This is another valuable resource to gain additional

information on trends in the workforce. The talent acquisition portal, which could be accessed at TAPability.org. Again, the link is provided on this slide.

The NET has established single points of contact in each state. And if you don't know your single point of contact in your agency, then this is one of your action items you should pursue when you complete this training. These single points of contact can be help you helpful to you in providing additional information about companies that are working with the NET and possible needs.

So the National Employment Team does a lot of outreach to large employers throughout the country, and it's a way to gain access of another employer for our consumers. But the approach has been it's best to have a single point of contact to work directly with each agency throughout the country and also linked with the connections on the National Employment Team.

The Talent Acquisition Portal emerged from the work of the National Employment Team and is led by CSAVR and the NET in partnership with Disabled Person Inc. It is an online system, which includes both a national talent pool of VR candidates looking for employment and a job posting system for businesses looking to hire talented individuals. The TAP is actually the largest talent pool of individuals with disabilities in the country.

It includes job postings and metrics, geographic, specifically resume searches, candidate availability, recruiter accessed and saved searches, compliance and application reports, hiring data, interview capability with transcripts, and direct access to VR agencies. There's been listed to have 30,000 job candidates and 7,000 VR counselors that are currently using the system. So it's a great way not only for you, as a VR professional or paraprofessional, but also a great way for folks participating in VR programs to be able to post the resume and have another way to search for employment.

WorkforceGPS also has developed a site called LMI Central, which is a portal to innovative and relevant sources of workforce and labor market information to really help with that data-driven planning. This community features a diverse palette of LMI resources to assist you in painting a picture of your labor market. It helps you improve your employment and training programs and also could be linked to policy changes. Again, the link to that is provided in the slide deck. It is LMI.workforceGPS.org.

If you're not familiar with WorkforceGPS, it is an online technical assistance website created to help build the capacity of America's Public Workforce Investment system. It is sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration and the site was specifically developed for workforce professionals, educators, and business leaders. I found it to be chock-full of information in relation to LMI. And in module four, we're actually going to take you to the website and show you some of the key elements so you can navigate through that website and get the information you need.

So let's also look at some qualitative sources of LMI. As you put together the pieces of the puzzle to get that greater clarity of vision, we cannot forget that our internal resources in our agencies, and also our community linkages with our partners, as really great resources of LMI. As I already mentioned, oftentimes your best source of qualitative data comes from your business relation specialists, which may be in your VR agency, or they may be a partner in the workforce development system, including some of the Title I programs in your state, which could be an excellent resource of that qualitative labor market information.

You also can gain access to additional information from the job coaches and employment specialists that work with your community rehabilitation programs. They could be a great source of LMI based on their day-to-day dealings with employers in your region and your state. You may also have colleagues in your agency serving in the role of a VR counselor, and there are certain folks that are very comfortable interacting with the business community.

And connecting with those folks and having brief huddles with your colleagues that really have that connection to the business community can be a great way to gather additional intelligence on really what's happening with specific large employers, or even those smaller businesses that are in your community that you've developed that relationship with and can get that kind of information that will be valuable to your consumers.

Developing your networks is key. Finding ways to share information and coordinating your relationship with your business partners is really key. A primary point of contact with a specific business is a great practice to developing that relationship. Instead of having different folks approaching the same employers, having a coordinated effort usually is the best especially, and it's very business-friendly.

Many of you probably already choose to get involved with your local Chambers of Commerce and your business and industry associations in your state. They're are another great resource to learn about that qualitative pieces of what's happening in your workforce and in the labor market in your state. I also provided you a link on this slide with an article that would take you a bit deeper on really how to utilize these hidden gems, if you will, of labor market information and the VR process.

The other piece with qualitative LMI, it's a great source of just general business climate in your community. It provides you an opportunity to learn about internships or other on-the-job training opportunities when they first get launched, so you're not learning about it when it's already-- those positions are filled. You get a chance to learn about it early on.

Forging relationships with your local community colleges that have two-year degree and certificate programs. It's a great way to learn about what credentials are being developed and what are some of those employer demands within that particular community. It's a great connection and it's a great way to really make additional linkages with the business community.

In the following modules, we are going to try to further explore how we're going to use LMI in the VR process, and also provide you the guided tour on those resources. So at this point, we're

going to end module one. And I would encourage you to go right to module two, which will take some of this information around using LMI in the VR process and really link it to the rehabilitation counseling relationship.

So I also want to make you aware that any of the references or resources we discussed in this session, they're all linked throughout the slide deck. But we also, in slides 21 and 22, we provide all these resources and references in one area so you can take a deeper dive on these topical areas and continue your learning. As I mentioned earlier, we also put together one document that consolidates all of the resources from all four modules in one location, and is easily accessible on the landing page of this training. I've also included my contact information for you if you want to reach out with any additional questions or to provide me feedback. My email is jcwalsh@gwu.edu.

I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy day to complete this training. Be sure to check out the other three modules in this series. Again, the next one up is module two, which focuses on using LMI in the rehabilitation counseling relationship. Be well.