



# **Report on the Efforts to Strengthen The Common Follow-up System September 15, 2013**

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The Performance Evaluation Division

**Submitting Entity:**

The North Carolina Department of Commerce

*Report On*

# **The Efforts to Strengthen The Common Follow-up System**

*To The*

## **North Carolina General Assembly**

*September 15, 2013*

As required, this report, prepared by the N.C. Department of Commerce, explains the current status of efforts to strengthen the common follow-up information management system.

The purpose of the Common Follow-up System (CFS) is to provide information on the educational and employment outcomes of participants in publicly supported educational, employment and training programs for use in planning, policymaking, program evaluation, resource allocation and career planning. The CFS is a longitudinal system, which provides for the tracking of outcomes over multiple years and provides for the tracking of an individual's progress across agencies and programs and for looking at outcomes across time.

In the early 1990's the system started as a voluntary effort among several state agencies as a mechanism for sharing information across agencies. It provided a mechanism for agencies to share data and to allow for the analyses of education, employment and outcome data across agencies and programs. The Employment Security Commission (ESC) was selected as the operator of the system and worked with the participating agencies to complete the information technology matching process. In the mid 1990's the North Carolina legislature codified the CFS under state law. Chapter 96 of the North Carolina General Statute was amended to include §§ 96-30 to 96-35 which defined system operational and evaluative requirements for Common Follow-up system. In 2011, the Employment Security Commission was merged into the Department of Commerce and the responsibilities for the CFS were transferred as part of the merger to Commerce.

During the 2012 Session the North Carolina Legislature enacted Session Law 2012-131: Reform Workforce Development. The law requires the Department of Commerce to improve and strengthen the CFS and to work in collaboration with the Commission on Workforce Development to utilize data from CFS in the development of performance measures for North Carolina's Workforce Development System.

As part of its efforts to improve and strengthen the CFS, the North Carolina Department of Commerce is undertaking several initiatives. These include enhancing the technology processes for system processing and storage, enhancing data integrity, updating system documentation regarding agency and programmatic information, and enhancing system outputs.

### **Enhancing Technological Process for System Processing and Storage**

The CFS contains an extensive and diverse set of data; however the information technology utilized to store, retrieve and analyze the data has become severely dated. Over the years the data files contained in the system have become extremely large and inefficient for analyses due to both structural limitations and the age of the information technology utilized to maintain and process the data. Additionally, the mainframe system storage charges have become costly. The North Carolina Department of Commerce has begun implementation of a system redesign, begun work on a data quality improvement effort, and is in the process of creating and developing enhanced system outputs. The overall goal is to bring the system to full operational capacity and to ensure that the system is flexible enough to grow to future needs.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce has begun work on the enhancement of system capacity by initiating the migration of CFS data from its current mainframe computing environment to a server based platform. The new server based CFS system will be comprised of a relational database, that will support business intelligence software applications and web based information delivery applications. This new technology infrastructure will provide the core mechanisms for storing, updating, securing, maintaining, processing, analyzing, and reporting effectively and efficiently from the CFS.

The Department of Commerce has acquired a new server for the CFS and the server has been installed at the State Information Technology Services (ITS) facility. A legal review of confidentiality storage requirements has been completed. Staff from the Department of Commerce have completed an analysis of existing CFS files and have developed an inventory of all existing data files. Testing of the data transfer protocol has been completed and data transfer has been initiated. Once data transfer is completed all data will be migrated to the server and a new database structure will be developed. Initial development work on the new relational database structure is underway.

In 2012, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to build a State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). The NCDPI has engaged SAS as a partner in the development of the SLDS. While NCDPI is the lead on the SLDS grant, the project is a collaborative effort of several entities including: the NCDPI, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS), the University of North Carolina General Administration (UNC GA), the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), and the North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDOC). The project is in year one of a three year project development cycle. The proposed SLDS project establishes a data exchange across the partner agencies. One of the goals of the grant is to establish a link between the proposed SLDS to the workforce and employment related data contained in the CFS. The SLDS system is estimated to be deployed in 2015.

In April 2013, the North Carolina Department of Commerce applied for a competitive grant with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration through their Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI). The Department received notification in June that North Carolina has been awarded a WDQI grant. The grant covers a 3 year period ending in June 2016. Grant funds will be utilized to further assist in the strengthening and enhancement of the CFS. The Department of Commerce has submitted documentation to the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) and is awaiting approval from OSBM to begin drawing down and expending funds.

In August, Commerce staff met with staff from the Office of State Controller's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC). As part of the State Appropriations Act of 2013, the General Assembly assigned the GDAC with responsibility for the coordination of data integration efforts related to the linking of individual student data and workforce data from all levels of education and the state workforce. The meeting included a discussion of the plans for CFS system enhancement, technology needs and system outputs. Commerce staff will continue to coordinate CFS enhancement efforts with the GDAC staff.

### **Enhancing Data Integrity and Updating System Documentation**

As part of its efforts to improve the data contained in the CFS, the Department of Commerce is working to improve system documentation and enhance staff knowledge regarding data contained in the system. Staff have taken three steps to accomplish this purpose. First, staff have reviewed existing data submissions and developed documentation regarding both data structure and content. Staff is continuing to work with the participating agencies to identify and clarify existing data structures and agency specific codes. Second, staff are continuing work on the development of a data dictionary that describes all of the data contained in CFS and documents allowable values for each field contained within the system. Finally, staff are continuing to work on an enhanced data

validation process that will validate agency data submissions dynamically by comparing the data submissions from the agencies to the data structures and definitions in the dictionary. This new process will facilitate the loading of new data from agencies and help to ensure data integrity.

### **Enhancing System Outputs**

Staff members from the Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) have initiated the development of a proof of concept for the display of performance measures through an online delivery system. The goal of this concept is to develop an electronic delivery system that can be utilized to deliver performance measures for a variety of education and workforce programs. These outcome measures will include post program participation employment and wage information.

LEAD staff are working with the Commission on Workforce Development on the development of a set of performance measures for North Carolina's Workforce Development System. LEAD staff has met with the Commission's Evaluation and Performance Task Force and Advisory Group. The Advisory Group is comprised of representatives from the various workforce agencies and is charged with assisting the Commission with the development of the performance system.

In addition to the system outputs that are needed for the Workforce Development Performance System, LEAD staff continue to work with the participating agencies and other stakeholders on research, evaluation and performance initiatives utilizing data from the CFS.