



Partnering Economic &  
Employment Research (PEER) Academy

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# Expanding LMI Capacity Among Workforce and Economic Development Professionals



# Introduction

Access to accurate, easily shared labor market information (LMI) data is an essential resource that helps workforce and economic development practitioners better understand local demographic trends, business and talent development needs, and their choices for investing public and private resources in initiatives and programs. Yet, LMI data sources can be fragmented, hard to interpret, or not tailored to the unique needs of smaller regions and specific programs. Federal funding constraints and shifting priorities further exacerbate these concerns.

To address those challenges, with support from the Ballmer Group and the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation, the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) and the New York Association of Training & Employment Professionals (NYATEP) piloted the inaugural Partnering Economic & Employment Research (PEER) Academy in Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The goal of the PEER Academy was to equip workforce and economic development professionals with the knowledge, tools, and resources necessary to independently identify, collect, and interpret LMI to drive impact.



Throughout the Academy, facilitators collected feedback and data to understand fellows' perceptions, experiences, and the overall impact of the program, as well as opportunities for improvement. Overall, fellows reported meaningful gains in their confidence and ability to apply labor market information in their work, alongside challenges related to time, technical complexity, and access to clear, usable data. These experiences highlighted that building LMI capacity requires more than technical skill development alone. Fellows' feedback consistently pointed to the need for sustained, hands on learning, stronger organizational support and protected time, improved access to high quality data, and more intentional opportunities for collaboration.

This brief outlines these findings in more detail as well as eleven recommendations surfaced through pilot outcomes and feedback. Recommendations were designed to help technical assistance providers, the workforce and economic development fields, and funders in promoting easier access and utilization of LMI among workforce and economic development professionals. Data referenced in this brief were collected at multiple points: Academy applications, a pre-Academy survey, a post-Academy survey, and a 6-month follow-up survey. Qualitative data reflect open-ended responses across all surveys, including perspectives shared at the opening and closing retreats.

## PEER Academy Design

Through a 10-month series of retreats and workshops, fellows strengthened their capacity to collect, analyze, and use LMI strategically. The initiative aimed to generate individual, organizational, and regional impact centered on equity, systems change, and job quality. The 16 fellows selected represented nonprofits, education institutions, public agencies, union-based training efforts, and economic development organizations from Western New York and Southeast Michigan. Applicants were expected to bring at least a novice familiarity with LMI and some current use in their roles. From October 2024 through July 2025, fellows engaged in a blended format of virtual sessions, self-paced modules, and in person learning anchored by an opening retreat in Buffalo and a closing retreat in Detroit. Sessions and cohort assignments were designed to support fellows in completing a Capstone project— an LMI product to be worked on throughout the Academy to demonstrate cumulative cohort learning and answer a real question facing fellows' work. Fellows were assigned partners and had access to technical assistance from four facilitators, two from each region.



# PEER Academy Outcomes

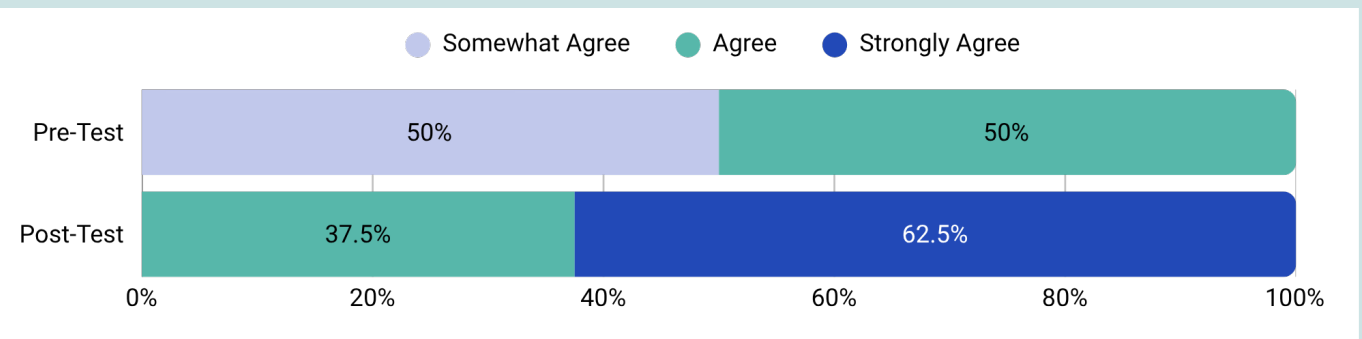
## Fellow Participation & Program Completion

Nine out of 16 (56%) fellows attended sessions throughout the course of the Academy. Of those who participated fully, 7 (78%) completed their Capstone project and successfully completed the program. Reported reasons for noncompletion included family or personal obligations, increased workload or promotions, loss of job, and the higher than anticipated technical demands of the Academy relative to what their current roles require.

## Learning & Competency Development

Throughout the Academy, fellows reported experiencing meaningful gains in their ability to apply new concepts, frameworks, and data practices. Fellows were surveyed to understand their perspectives on their LMI familiarity and competence prior to the Academy and at the 6-month follow-up. Only data for fellows who completed both the pre- and post-tests are reported in this brief. Fellows' familiarity with LMI data sources, types, and uses rose meaningfully over the Academy. Prior to participation, no respondents rated they Strongly Agreed that they were familiar, but by the end, nearly two thirds did. (Figure 1).

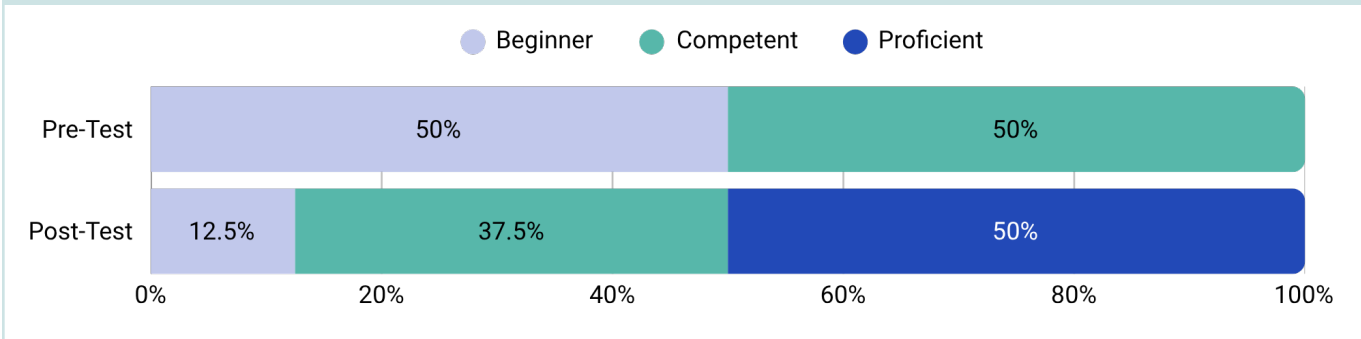
Figure 1: I am familiar with labor market information (LMI) types, data sources, and uses.



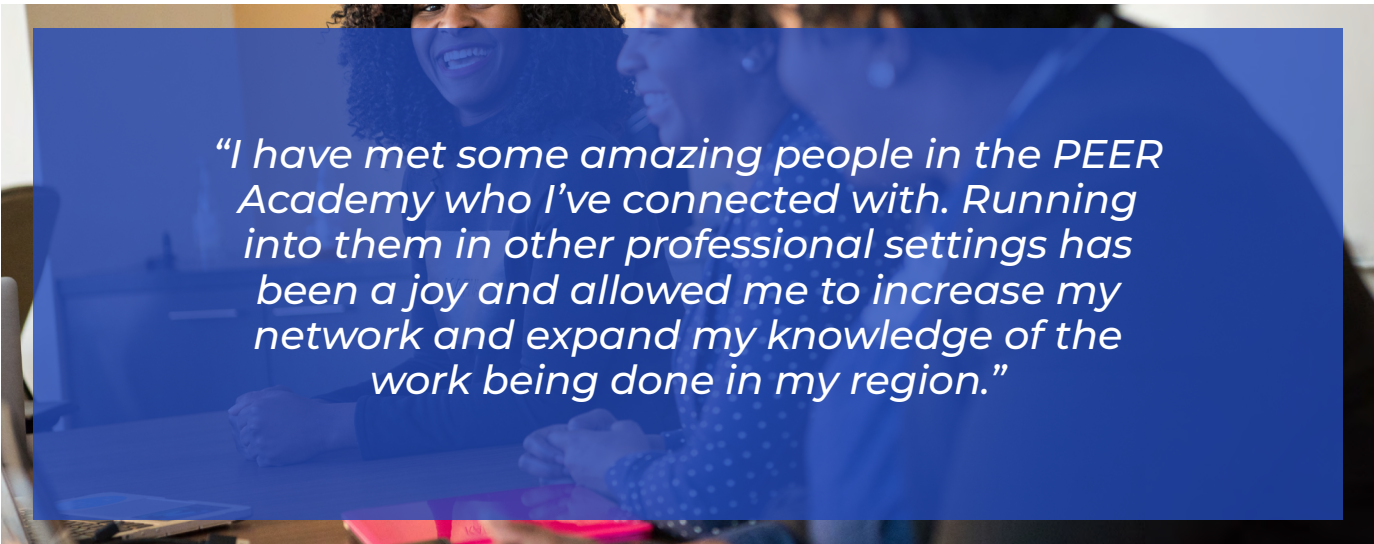
*"I gained a better understanding of the best way to share data with a focus on equity. I also learned about the important ways to address any biases and how to site methodologies used."*

Fellows also rated their proficiency in utilizing LMI in their work higher following the Academy. Before the program, fellows were evenly split between identifying as Beginner and Competent. By the end of the Academy, only a small share still saw themselves as Beginner, and half rated themselves as Proficient (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: I would define my ability to utilize LMI data to improve workforce and economic development policy, programs, and practices as...**



The Academy was designed to increase fellows' proficiency with 11 key competencies. At the 6-month follow-up, fellows were asked to select the competencies in which they experienced the greatest gains through PEER (n=10). The highest-reported improvements were in *reporting data in accessible, compelling ways* (8; 80%), *identifying research questions* (8; 80%), and *identifying LMI data sources* (8; 80%), with strong gains as well in *applying workforce/economic context to analysis* (7; 70%) and *embedding culturally responsive, equity-informed methods in research and reporting* (7; 70%). Moderate gains were noted for *producing audience-tailored report products* (6; 60%). Only half of respondents reported *strengthening using findings to develop and advance strategies* (5; 50%), *describing key LMI datasets* (5; 50%), *collecting and analyzing primary/secondary LMI* (5; 50%). Fellows were the least likely to report *where and how to share findings for regional impact* (4; 40%) as an area of growth.



Fellows also highlighted challenges with respect to achieving the desired Academy learning goals. When asked to share what learning from the Academy was the hardest to apply, five fellows shared that *locating and extracting LMI data*, one of the program's main goals, was the most challenging.

“Collecting LMI itself was difficult. I needed more step-by-step instruction and opportunities to practice.” In reflecting on how the Academy could be strengthened, more than half of 6-month follow-up respondents (5 of 9; 56%) recommended adding greater in-person time at the outset to build foundational skills. An equal share (5 of 9; 56%) asked for more structured, hands-on technical exercises woven throughout the curriculum, especially step-by-step opportunities to practice finding, extracting, and working with LMI data. Several also noted that larger peer groups would deepen collaboration and maintain momentum.

# PEER Academy Impacts

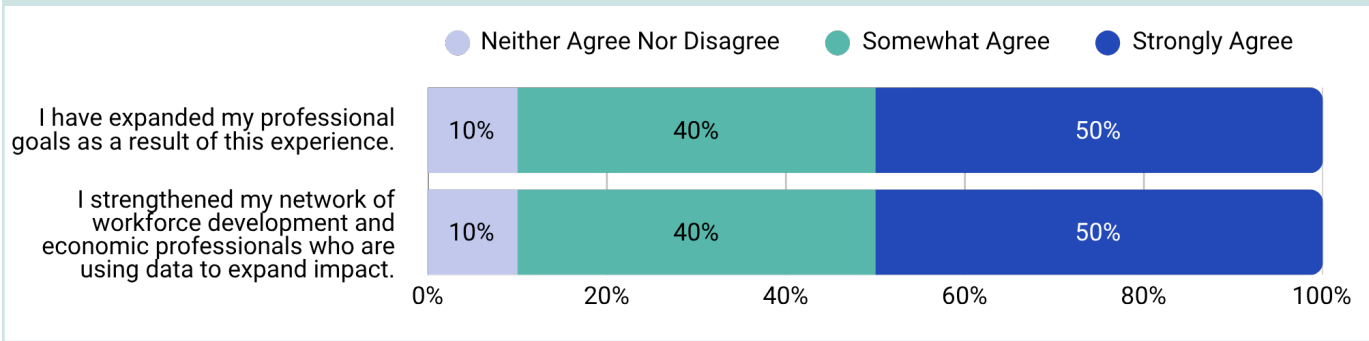
Beyond learning and skill gain, follow-up survey respondents shared other impacts from participation in PEER, including organizational and personal professional impacts. Even though designed to address a real, regional data and systems change need, at six months, only one fellow had shared their Capstone beyond their organization and/or implemented any steps from their action plan. Reasons fellows had not moved their Capstone/ action plan steps forward included: other organizational priorities, misalignment between their product and the current political administration, and concerns about data quality prevented broader use. One fellow shared their Capstone findings suggested they move in another direction organizationally, and four fellows shared that while they have not widely shared their project, they have used it internally to advance impact.

Beyond impacts from the Capstone, several fellows shared that understanding how to use data to tell a story has been beneficial to their work. Outcomes reported by fellows following participation included: stronger presentations and project/idea justification; better use of data to assess program effectiveness and to understand community needs; a stronger, data informed focus on job quality; sharing program learning across colleagues; better comprehension of data and research; and strengthened credibility among peers.

Most (8 out of 10; 80%) 6-month respondents also shared examples of how they plan to apply the learning to their work in the future, including specific reports or presentations they plan to develop, additional learning they want to complete, and applying their new skills to grant applications.

Participation garnered personal professional results, as well, with 50% of respondents (5 out of 10) Strongly Agreeing that participation increased their professional goals and network (Figure 3). Fellows shared that the experience allowed them to expand their networks across both regions and to build their resume.

**Figure 3: Fellows’ agreement with personal professional impact statements.**



## Fellow's Overall Perceptions

### Overall value

Eight of the ten (80%) respondents to the 6-month follow up survey rated the Academy as Very or Extremely Valuable, reflecting strong satisfaction with their overall experience.

### Expectations

Half of 6-month follow up survey respondents (5 out of 10) reported that the Academy Met or Exceeded their expectations, while about 30 percent felt it fell short. Those who were less satisfied most often cited the technical intensity of the data work and the time required to keep up with assignments.

### What resonated

Participants consistently highlighted the facilitation team, cross regional interactions, and opportunities to learn from guest faculty and peers as strengths of the Academy.



# Recommendations

It is critical for workforce and economic development organizations to be able to competently integrate regional, program-specific LMI into their day-to-day work. To achieve this, workforce and economic development professionals need access to comprehensive, program-specific labor market information as well as the skills to use it. Through facilitating PEER, CSW has identified three sets of recommendations to support better access and utilization of LMI data for these professionals: 1) recommendations for technical assistance providers to strengthen learning and application, 2) recommendations for the workforce and economic development field that aim to foster greater awareness, use, and access to LMI, and 3) recommendations for workforce and economic development funders to establish more ambitious and comprehensive data resources.

## For Technical Assistance Providers

1

### **Strengthen the value proposition of enhanced data skills and require explicit organizational commitment.**

Inconsistent engagement and challenges with managing workloads on top of Academy responsibilities indicated that stronger upfront commitment and leadership support could improve follow through on assignments, data practice, and Capstone development. Developing a clear value proposition to organizations and their leaders around the need for these competencies and resulting data products may increase organizational support and leader participation in data learning and outcomes, as well as foster buy-in, a stronger internal data culture, and support for time away from duties. Future academies should also secure clear supervisor and organizational agreements that protect fellow participation.

2

### **Integrate practice into session time wherever possible.**

Rather than relying on independent work, which varied widely in completion, technical assistance should embed guided demonstrations and hands-on practice directly into sessions to ensure all participants, regardless of workload constraints, can engage with foundational skill building.

3

### **Broaden peer support opportunities.**

Fellows valued their cohort connections and emphasized that larger or more structured peer groups would enhance collaboration and learning. This was especially true for fellows who were paired with those who did not complete the Academy or those struggling with the material.

4

### **Offer varied training opportunities to grow LMI skills.**

Fellows shared conflicting views on what was needed to improve the Academy – differences in desired intensity, length, and collaboration opportunities. Given the wide variation in learning styles, time available, and prior experience, LMI capacity building is most effective when offered through multiple formats. Cohort-based learning, individual technical assistance, webinars, and modular training options can help practitioners engage at the level and pace that best meets their needs.

## For the Workforce and Economic Development Fields

1

### **Build data competencies into all organizational roles to truly transform organizational culture.**

Promoting data literacy across workforce and economic development professional roles will help with leadership buy-in as well as the capacity for professionals to successfully embed findings into organizational practice and learning. For organizations to truly be data-informed, these skills should not be specialized but instead sit across roles.

2

### **Advocate for continued and better access to quality public data.**

Fellows struggled with steps to identifying and collecting public data in part because of how cumbersome and disparate public data sources can be to navigate. Additionally, not all data are there or there consistently to answer critical questions facing their work. Workforce and economic development professionals need public administrative data to effectively serve their communities, yet funding is politicized, and data quality, availability, and access varies from system to system. Our field needs to normalize and foster opportunities to become better informed about state and federal workforce and economic data sources so that we can identify meaningful ways to advocate for continued funding and access as well as needed changes to strengthen application. More evidence and examples of local and regional use and partnership with organizations like the [Data Quality Campaign](#) will help incentivize policymakers and local officials to focus their energy here.

3

### **Build regular opportunities for workforce and economic development professionals to partner.**

PEER was designed to encourage workforce and economic development professionals to strengthen their collaboration by providing the space to learn and work together. Through PEER, fellows were exposed to examples of data relevant to both sides as well as examples of innovative programs and initiatives that resulted from this type of collaboration. Fellows valued this aspect of the opportunity, and regions and their residents would benefit if this type of collaboration is more consistently fostered than through one-time learning cohorts.



## For Funders

1

### **Invest in data capacity building.**

Fellows were able to participate in PEER at no cost to them other than the time to complete activities, and even this was challenging from a resource perspective.

Organizations may lack the resources to participate in or purchase training when opportunities such as these are not made available for free. This is especially true for smaller nonprofits or public agencies where staff are already managing high caseloads or multiple program responsibilities.

1. Support access and adoption of needed skills by investing in capacity building efforts, including multi cohort academies, communities of practice, training, webinars, and coaching. Investments focused on regions can further extend impact through encouraging systems change through funding that expands shared learning, partnerships, collaboration, and data sharing.
2. Offer organizations direct support that offsets staff time, travel, or the backfilling of responsibilities needed for organizations to fully participate in training.
3. Invest in the development of tools, such as data toolkits, to support organizations in accessing and applying relevant, regional LMI data through less intensive means than training.

2

### **Fund infrastructure that makes public data accessible and usable.**

Fellows reported struggling to understand publicly available data sources and how to collect these data. Funders can invest in the development of curated datasets and accessible data collection and reporting interfaces so workforce and economic

development staff can access and report reliable data without specialized training or cost-prohibitive data subscription services.

3

### **Convene regional providers to foster peer exchange and strengthened collaboration.**

Cultivating intentional spaces for cross-organizational learning could address challenges fellows faced with where or how to share their findings for broader regional impact.

Creating forums where practitioners can jointly explore data, share findings, and collaborate on regional challenges can amplify the value of LMI and reinforce shared priorities. [The Employment Equity Learning and Action Collaborative](#) in Detroit offers one example of how such structures can support ongoing regional exchange.

4

### **Reinforce the need for data-informed practice that centers equity, job quality, and systems change in funding opportunities and requirements.**

PEER was launched during a politically challenging time, and fellows struggled with their ability to participate and share data framed in this way among shifting priorities. Funders, as non-political entities, can play a transformative role in our fields, especially during challenging times. They can continue to support and advance economic mobility for all by using their power to shape incentives, expectations, and the structures needed to position innovation, opportunity, and access as the goal, not accountability.

## About Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

CSW is a national workforce policy and systems change nonprofit that partners with government, business, and community leaders to develop good jobs and the skilled workers to fill them. Since 1991, CSW has provided high impact strategic planning, program development, and evaluation assistance to state, regional, and local partners. We catalyze change in educational and labor market systems, policies, and practices to increase economic mobility, particularly for people of color and others historically excluded from success. We offer a variety of services across our five strategy areas: Competencies & Credentials; Federal, State, & Local Systems Change; Improving Practices & Outcomes; Research & Evaluation; and Trauma & Resilience at Work.

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