



Oregon Workforce Innovation Award Nomination: Economic Cycle Plan

Contact Information of Individual Submitting Nomination

Nominator: David Gerstenfeld

Email Address: david.k.gerstenfeld@oregon.gov

Agency Name: Oregon Employment Department

Economic Cycle Plan

The Great Recession was a huge stress on Oregon's economy and workforce system. The Employment Department faced difficulties providing unemployment insurance benefits and employment services as quickly and effectively as we would have liked. The economic recovery created its own challenges. They included identifying and resuming work set aside out of necessity during the recession and repairing parts of the system that had been overly stressed, all while dealing with declining federal funds.

The Oregon Employment Department committed to documenting the lessons learned during the Great Recession and its recovery so the workforce system could better deal with future economic fluctuations. The goal was to take advantage of hard-learned lessons by documenting them as a reference for the future, creating more structured ways of identifying when early action is needed, and determining what types of action to take.

Oregon Employment Department leadership, and executive leadership of the Office of Workforce Investment (Oregon's Title I provider which is in a separate state agency, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission) sponsored a workgroup to take on that work. The workgroup conducted "lessons learned" sessions, gathering detailed feedback from people throughout the organizations about the recession and its recovery, and documenting that feedback in a Lessons Learned report. People across all functional areas (including LMI, ES, UI, and administrative functions) and organizational levels were involved.

The workgroup created a standing Economic Cycle Task Force to identify and regularly review indicators that could signal future recessions. The Economic Cycle Plan highlights a series of issues that will likely need to be addressed as economic conditions change. It has checklists, indicators of timelines, and other considerations to help guide rapid changes in staffing levels and redeploying current resources to meet needs. For example, potentially having employees from outside of the unemployment insurance program, or from unemployment insurance tax, redeploy to help process an initial sudden increase in claims while new employees are hired and trained. It also included a structured way to evaluate how the agency adjusts to economic fluctuations to continually improve responsiveness to changing conditions.

Oregon has shared its approach with other states and is interested in improvements others are making to this approach. The Department conducts a periodic review of our plan to ensure current agency employees are familiar with it, and that it continues to represent our best current thoughts for approaching economic fluctuations.

Statement of results, accomplishments, impacts and any other appropriate information that demonstrates why the nominee's efforts were an exceptional contribution.

- Documenting “Lessons learned” from the Great Recession and its recovery provided important opportunities to better plan for and respond to economic fluctuations. This took advantage of difficult experiences staff went through, many of whom retired or will retire before the next recession.
- The standing Economic Task Force, with members from multiple program areas, is responsible for monitoring early harbingers of recessions and helping initiate early action. It includes an agency Recession Single Point of Contact to help coordinate these activities when additional action becomes advisable.
- Monthly reports of economic indicators, reviewed by the Economic Task Force, better identify when early action or additional monitoring is advisable.
- The Economic Cycle Plan documented key considerations, including specifics related to funding, communications, processes, technology, and staffing. Checklists, plans, and documented approaches and considerations help flag early decisions that might be needed and key factors to help guide informed, quick decision making.
- By documenting changes made during the recession, they can be unwound when no longer needed or more thoroughly incorporated into long-term processes when recessionary pressures lessen.
- A method for formally reviewing how we deal with future recessions, including a scorecard, means we can continue to evolve our adaptability to the economic conditions.

Other significant contributions

- Decreasing federal funding, an ongoing loss of staff who worked in the workforce system through the Great Recession, and ongoing demands for people's time made gathering the information and planning difficult. A commitment from executive leadership at the Employment Department and the Office of Workforce Investment allowed scarce resources to spend time documenting past lessons and planning for the future. Multiple program areas, including LMI, ES, UI, Title I, and all supportive functions, saw the value in, and contributed to, this work. Strong project management kept the work moving even as other priorities arose.
- Getting adequately broad perspectives from staff, including frank feedback on what challenges were during the recession, was also difficult. Having good facilitation and an open environment where experiences could be safely shared was important.
- Developing an approach that was structured enough to help us in the future, while not being so structured it would not accommodate the unforeseen ways a future recession is bound to happen is inherently challenging. Open communication, a commitment to operational agility, and creative thinking helped balance those competing forces.

Examples of work

[Oregon's Economic Cycle Plan Summary Information.pdf \(726KB\)](#)

[Great Recession Lessons Learned Summary Information.pdf \(809.8KB\)](#)

[ECP Project Charter Signed.pdf \(1.5MB\)](#)

[Economic Cycle Plan - Signed 10-6-17](#)