

Labor Market and Demographic Trends

Title	Brief Description
Regional Labor Market Profiles	Workforce development practitioners have expressed a need for detailed information on their local labor markets to guide planning decisions and facilitate regional coordination. Working with the Commonwealth Corporation, NEPPC analyzed changes in labor supply captured by recent trends in population, educational attainment, and degrees conferred as well as changes in labor demand evidenced by trends in employment growth, unemployment, and job vacancies by industry and occupation. Data are analyzed for 8 regions in Massachusetts, and compared to trends in the Commonwealth and the United States for the period between 2000 and 2010. Each profile will be released at a regional summit convened by the local Workforce Investment Board.
Meeting the Future Labor Force Needs of New England: The Role of Immigrants	This research investigates the role that region’s immigrant population currently plays in the region’s labor force and what role it could play in addressing future challenges, including the current mismatch between labor supply and demand and the retirement of the Baby Boom cohort. It also seeks to inform policymakers of the gap in the skills that immigrants possess and those demanded by employers and investigate ways to prepare this population for these opportunities.
Filling the Workforce Gap in the Healthcare Industry	The mismatch report and other sources have identified the healthcare industry as potentially facing a growing labor shortage as the baby boom generation retires and demand for health care rises. At the same time, hospitals have taken active steps to work with community colleges and develop training programs to fill critical vacancies that they have identified. Yet it is not clear how large these workforce gaps are and how successful these partnerships are in filling them. This research will quantify existing critical vacancies in health care by occupation in Massachusetts and at the sub-regional level where possible. In addition, existing training partnerships around the state will be evaluated to discover best practices that could be replicated across the state as well as lessons learned and pitfalls to avoid.
The Potential Impact of National Health Insurance Reform on Employers: Lessons from Massachusetts	This research investigates the impact of recent health reform on Massachusetts’ smaller employers (fewer than 50 employees). To what extent did reform yield a greater cost burden or mitigate risk? Using data from the Current Population Survey and the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey on demographics, worker and firm characteristics, insurance coverage, and medical utilization and expenditures we will estimate the cost of health insurance reform to Massachusetts employers by firm size. The research also intends to employ data from the Massachusetts Connector to determine what role the small group insurance market has played in enabling small employers to continue to provide coverage. This work has important policy implications for implementing health care reform at the national level.
Immigration Enforcement and the Impact on New England’s Labor Force	This research investigates the impact of state and local immigration policies and enforcement, and considers the extent to which growth in this population affects the labor market. The analysis describes the labor market characteristics of the region’s foreign born population and review of immigration flows into and from the region. The research analyzes the extent to which these flows are influenced by state and local immigration enforcement policies. Finally, the paper will consider whether recent growth in the region’s immigration population has allowed more of its highly-skilled native women to participate in the workforce.

State and Local Public Finance

Title	Brief Description
Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund Solvency and the Great Recession: Lessons for New England	High and prolonged unemployment stemming from the Great Recession, in some cases coupled with inadequate reserves heading into the downturn, caused many state unemployment insurance trust funds to become insolvent. This research examines the unemployment insurance systems in the six New England states, describing their key features, their financial position heading into the recession, how they have fared in the ensuing years, and reforms that have been enacted or proposed. It highlights policy options for improving unemployment insurance financing to ensure solvency in future downturns.

(over)

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Long-Term Fiscal Sustainability of State and Local Governments	This research examines the extent to which New England state and local governments are fiscally sustainable, and will explore policy changes that state and local governments could adopt to enhance fiscal sustainability. The research will contribute to the literature and policy discussion by (1) providing cross-state comparison, (2) creating a framework to consider policy changes, and (3) developing recommendations to inform policy debate.
The Quest for More Cost Efficient Government in New England: What Role for Regionalization?	This study outlines various forms of regionalization of non-school municipal services, concentrating on interlocal services agreements. These agreements tend to be relatively new, but they are becoming increasingly common around the nation. Within New England, state governments in Connecticut, Maine, and Massachusetts have begun to incentivize interlocal agreements through grants to localities. It provides information on the categories of municipal services that have been found to exhibit economies of scale (that is, the per-unit cost of providing the service falls as the size of the jurisdiction increases). It then provides information that allows New England policymakers to compare the degree of regionalization in their states with those of selected other states around the nation.
Setting the Optimal Size of State Rainy Day Funds	This research attempts to quantify the optimal size of individual state's Rainy Day Funds and provide policy recommendations on reforming state Rainy Day Funds. States Rainy Day Funds are created to help stabilize state budgets when states experience unexpected revenue shortfalls and expenditure overruns. There are a few existing rules of thumb regarding the optimal size of state Rainy Day Funds, however, researchers have argued that the appropriate balance depends upon the volatility of the state's revenues and the desirability of having stable tax rates and stable expenditure growth.
State Fiscal Policies in Economic Downturns	This research investigates why state fiscal policies have remained so contractionary during recessions and the early stages of expansions. And—apart from building up even larger rainy day funds—analyze and discuss what structural changes to spending, saving, and tax policies states should consider implementing in order to create a more stable fiscal policy that can better weather the next economic downturn. The paper also considers the goal of fiscal stability against other state policy and fiscal goals.
State Debt Affordability	This research seeks to provide a framework for policymakers to assess state debt affordability. In addition to describing the current level of indebtedness of the New England states and these states' current debt practices, the paper discusses the factors that state policymakers should consider when determining what constitutes a reasonable or affordable debt level.

Other

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The Supplemental Security Income Program and Welfare Reform	This paper employs state panel data, exploiting variation both across states and over time, to determine what factors determine SSI disabled caseloads. It examines the relative importance of a number of factors, including economic conditions, health conditions, relative program generosity, and state fiscal situations. It then examines the effect of welfare reform, as well as the effect of variation across states in welfare policies. Given previous research that provides evidence of interactions between the SSI program and other welfare programs that provide income support to single-mother families, the research examines how the effects of the factors listed above have changed after the passage of major welfare reform in 1996.
Do Public Pensions Risk Bankrupting the State and Local Government Sector? (John Carlson, Paula Tkac, Robert Triest and Bo Zhao)	This research focuses on understanding the relationship between economic shocks and the distribution of realized public pension plan finances across various states of the world. An important objective is to estimate the likelihood of a relatively widespread public plan funding crisis. Explores the sensitivity of public pension plans' funded status to economic and financial shocks similar to those explored in the recent Federal Reserve's CCAR (Comprehensive Capital Analysis and Review) "stress test" of the banking system.