

NEW WEB-BASED CALCULATOR HELPS EVALUATE QUALITY OF JOBS

Tool will help community leaders decide whether a new business will bring jobs with wage levels they are seeking

ST. PAUL, Minn. October 29, 2007: When approached by a prospective industry, community leaders are often faced with a tough question: Will the new business produce local jobs that are worth the incentives requested.

Today, the Northwest Area Foundation launched a Web-based tool to help communities get answers. The Wage & Benefits Metric was designed to help users evaluate the quality of jobs a new or existing business brings to a community. Users can determine if the proposed jobs will offer wages and benefits that allow individuals and families to be self-sustaining within the local economy. This metric puts previously hard-to-calculate information a few keystrokes away from community decision makers.

“Too often in the desire to have new jobs, communities apply limited resources to lure a company without an analysis of the impact. Having jobs does not mean they will be good jobs. Now we have a tool that enables us to establish a baseline for job growth and to shape our goals to meet unique community needs,” said Michelle Long, a tester of the metric and executive director of Sustainable Connections, a network of more than 600 non-profit businesses in Bellingham, Washington.

The Wage & Benefits Metric uses a point-based system that measures income level. Attributes of the proposed jobs, such as pay rates, are entered into the metric, producing a chart with points. The total score determines whether it is a three star job: full-time with benefits; two star: full-time without benefits or part-time with benefits; or a one star: part-time jobs without benefits. That information can then be compared to the county’s median income or the average wage needed to meet basic needs.

In addition to the calculator, the Wage and Benefits Metric can be used to analyze and track trends in community job growth that can be stored in a database for evaluation over time. Users can quickly and easily create presentation-quality charts and tables which can be printed in hardcopy or placed in Power Point presentations.

The Web-based tool includes step-by-step instructions and offers a quick calculator with no login or password requirement for one-time users. No additional software installation is required.

“Many times a community welcomes new industries with the hope and optimism that new jobs will contribute to economic vitality. The Wage & Benefits Metric will help community leaders measure in advance if indeed this company will bring the kind of jobs they are expecting, and if that warrants tax incentives the company may be seeking,” said Kari Schlachtenhaufen, interim president & CEO of the St. Paul-based Northwest Area Foundation.

The Wage and Benefits Metric is being made available to a larger market today after more than two years in development and field-testing by more than 130 organizations and businesses. Testers found the tool had value in helping organizations understand the economic value of jobs in their region.

A project of the Northwest Area Foundation, the Wage and Benefits Metric was coordinated by the Montana Community Development Corporation. The tool can be accessed at www.jobmetric.nwaf.org <<http://www.jobmetric.nwaf.org/>> . For more information and or a demonstration, please contact Chris Allen at Chris@chrisallenassociates.com, 406-370-0780.

The Northwest Area Foundation realizes its mission - helping communities reduce poverty - by supporting strategic efforts within a small number of urban, rural and American Indian communities in: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon. These states were serviced by James J. Hill's Great Northern Railway. Hill's son, Louis W. Hill, established the foundation in 1934. Since 1999, the Foundation has invested approximately \$193 million in community-based poverty reduction programs. As of March 31, 2007, the Foundation had assets valued at approximately \$500 million. The Foundation does not accept unsolicited grant requests. For more information: www.nwaf.org <<http://www.nwaf.org/>> , or 651-224-9635.