

**APPLICATION FORM  
NASCA 2001 OUTSTANDING PROGRAM AWARDS**

Program Title: Illinois Skills Match

**Category: Public/Private Partnerships**

State: Illinois

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## Executive Summary

Illinois was one of the first five states in the nation to establish a "Public Employment Service" in 1899, creating a free labor exchange whereby unemployed workers and other job seekers found new jobs, and employers found workers needed to operate their businesses. Administered today by the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), the State's Employment Service has, throughout its 102-year history, remained dedicated to the mission of serving Illinois and its local communities by matching the employment needs of businesses with the individual skills of workers. What has changed, however, and quite dramatically in the past year, is the method used to *match* business to worker, with the introduction of Illinois Skills Match (ISM).

The new Internet job matching system at <http://www.illinoisskillsmatch.com> was unveiled in August 2000, providing the public for the first time with self-service access to the State's labor exchange and its database of some 7,000 available jobs, 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week, free of charge. Using Illinois Skills Match, employers now can enter their own job listing, and within minutes find out if there are applicants in the system who match the exact requirements for their jobs. Similarly, job seekers can log onto ISM, list their skills and education, and learn immediately of available positions matching their qualifications. The system also is equipped to meet the needs of users with disabilities and is "Bobby Approved," making it fully compliant with the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) published industry standard guidelines on accessibility. Since its inception, more than 285,000 new job seekers have logged onto Illinois Skills Match, and more than 15,000 employers have registered as users.

### *Infrastructure*

IDES is the host of the Internet site, with the physical infrastructure located at its Central Office Data Center. ISM is more than a simple Internet web page. It is a robust business application with several subsystems, a relational database with high availability and performance requirements and interfaces to legacy applications. The system is highly scalable and able to accommodate increases in transaction volumes without requiring a redesign of the application. The technical infrastructure is scalable both vertically (within a server by adding CPU, memory, disk) and horizontally (by adding additional servers). The site is secure. It uses Entrust.Net.Web certificates on its web servers to authenticate and encrypt sensitive data, and inform the users of the system that the site is secure. It further assures the privacy of the user through user sign on names and user controlled password.

### *Partnership with Employers*

The success of Illinois Skills Match is totally dependent upon the participation of the state's private sector businesses. Simply stated, without employers there are no jobs to refer applicants. With that in mind, IDES began in 1996 to elicit the views of businesses throughout the state on how the Employment Service could be improved to better meet their needs. Invoking the motto, "employers are our number one customer," a comprehensive survey was conducted with more than 7,200 employers participating. The mandate from employers was clear: businesses needed better qualified job applicants, providing IDES with the impetus to dramatically change the way the labor exchange was operated. The survey yielded detailed information about employers' needs and expectations, which was used as the basis for many later decisions. Ultimately, a plan emerged which addressed the need for highly skilled job candidates through development of a computerized matching system that would automatically match a worker's specific skills to employer job requirements. Employer expectations became the driving force in the development of Illinois Skills Match.

**ILLINOIS SKILLS MATCH**  
EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

FREE 24 Hours a Day, 7 Days a Week!

**EMPLOYERS BENEFIT:**

- Locate the best employees based on precise skill selection.
- Save time and money vs. costly personnel searches.
- Available on your schedule, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!

**JOB SEEKERS BENEFIT:**

- Your job skills, matched with thousands of openings.
- Easily update your information as skills are upgraded.
- Find the perfect job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!

WWW.  
**IllinoisSkillsMatch**  
.com

IDES IETC

## **Description of Project**

Illinois Skills Match, the state's new job matching system, provides real-time matches of employer job requirements to applicant profiles based on job skills, education, and work preferences. The hallmarks of ISM are convenience, efficiency, and responsiveness. The system is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Unlike other matching systems, ISM continues to perform matches as additional job orders and applicant registrations are added to the system. Matches are conveyed automatically to self-service users, both employers and job-seekers, via e-mail.

ISM may be used self-service, but assistance also is provided by IDES and its workforce development partner-agencies, through the Illinois Employment and Training Center (IETC) Network in 55 regional locations throughout the state. In addition, IDES Central Support Services operates a telephone hotline and on-line assistance via email for responding to customer inquiries. This three-tier service approach ensures compliance with the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA). ISM is an evolving system, which was designed to adapt to the changing requirements of the Illinois workplace. From its inception, employers and other Workforce Development partners have been instrumental in creating and refining ISM.

An Interagency Advisory Group was assembled in April 1999, to ensure that during the development of ISM the system would meet the requirements of all workforce partners. The Group is comprised of representatives from various Illinois agencies and WIA partners, including: the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, Department of Human Services, Board of Higher Education, Community College Board, Illinois Department of Employment Security, Education and Training Center, Occupational Information Credentialing Committee, Illinois Occupational Skills Standards and Credentialing Council, and individual Service Delivery Areas.

Between April and August of 1999, 41 focus groups met statewide. These consisted of a total of 757 participants, including Interagency Advisory Group members, employers, and IETC partners. The meetings were held in all areas of the state, to reflect cities, small towns, and rural areas. Teams from IDES presented a prototype version of ISM, which simulated the look and feel of the system. It also demonstrated the functionality of ISM, from both the employer and job-seeker side.

ISM developers studied the suggested improvements; more than 800 of them. Many were incorporated into the final design, and are currently part of ISM. Even something so basic as the color scheme of the system was determined by the focus groups. The original graphic design of the system was deemed too institutional by the participants, and changed to its present form based on suggestions from the meetings.

The focus groups generated so many ideas that ISM added Build 2 of system enhancements. One of the primary pieces of Build 2 is the Gap Analysis tool. ISM matches occur only when the applicant has 100% of the skills required by the employer. The Gap Analysis tool feeds back the missing skills, so the applicant can tailor further training to meet the needs of the job. This is valuable for the individual applicant, but also for training partners. By using this tool, they can tailor their curriculum to the needs of the Illinois workplace. Another vital component of Build 2 was building and certifying low graphics pages in ISM which are accessible for users with disabilities. Build 2 developers worked closely with ORS, the World Wide Web Consortium, and the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST). Each page of the Low Graphics path for job seekers is "Bobby Approved," which is a certification indicating that the site meets CAST's requirements for disabled users.

### **Benefits Realized by Service Recipients, Taxpayers, Agency**

**Service Recipients - Employers:** The benefits of Illinois Skills Match to the state's employers, one of two key customer groups, are evidenced by the sharp rise in the number of employers using the system. Since ISM's inception in August 2000, employers registered to use the system have increased at a rate of 200 a day, to a total of 15,000 -- nearly triple the number at the start. Add the individual business sites within the corporate and franchise structures (i.e. the number of McDonald's in the Chicago area), and the total jumps to nearly 20,000.

Numbers, however, don't tell the whole story. Employers also have provided verbal and written feedback on a variety of service-related issues, attesting to the benefits they personally have realized as a result of using the system. Their issues of chief concern are the quality of applicants referred for job openings, and response time -- how long it takes to obtain matches.

Some employers initially shrugged with impatience at finding it took a full 30 minutes to complete a list of skill requirements in order to enter a job listing. But impatience turned to approval with the realization that in roughly 35 minutes, including the 30 spent listing the necessary skills, the employer had in hand a list of applicant matches who met their requirements. The total time spent? A fraction of what it normally took them to complete such time-consuming tasks as writing and placing newspaper ads, answering the calls of job seekers responding to those ads, and sifting through stacks of resumes in search of "just the right worker." The automated system searched for them, and employers, overall, are pleased with the results. Employer feedback further suggests a higher level of confidence on the part of businesses, which staff observe has resulted in a corresponding increase in professional and higher paying jobs listed with ISM by employers. While such observations are largely anecdotal at present, more quantitative results will be available once the system has been operational longer.

**Job Seekers:** This second major group of service recipients also has responded favorably in feedback provided on their employment search results. With no time limits imposed on access, job seekers now have the ability to search for employment whenever *their* time permits. And job seekers point to convenience frequently when asked to identify the system's best features. They appreciate the flexibility to conduct their job search anytime, and, in many cases, from their own home for those with computers and Internet access.

**State/Citizens:** The State as a whole stands to benefit significantly from a system such as Illinois Skills Match because of its potentially favorable impact on Illinois' business climate and contribution to the state's present and future workforce. In year 2000, more than \$1.2 billion was paid in unemployment insurance (UI) benefits to eligible Illinois workers who became unemployed through no fault of their own. These benefits were funded by more than 260,000 Illinois employers through quarterly tax contributions into the UI Trust Fund. Providing employers with well-qualified workers who can help their businesses grow and succeed is key to maintaining the future economic viability of the state. Equipping Illinois' workforce with the means to attain productive jobs and earn prosperous livings is an investment that will pay off in countless dividends for all Illinois citizens, both now and in the future.

## What Our Customers Say About Illinois Skills Match

- *Excellent service. Fast and easy for our company. The people we have hired all have the right education, work experience and skills. (Burns International Security)*
- *I have just started using ISM and find it to be a very useful tool in recruitment. I will continue to use it. (Union Planters Bank)*
- *Thanks for your help. I really appreciate it. They should make me recruiter of the year for the 51 people that responded. Thanks again. (Mary Ellen Miller)*
- *BRAVO!!!! The new low graphics option is FANTASTIC!!!! It loads so much faster than the other option and it DOES NOT lock up the system or the system at the college I attend (Ill. Valley Comm. College). First Class Job!!!! (Stephen Berryhill)*
- *I have just completed my registration and am very impressed with the Skills Profile tab. The listing of possible skill criteria in each category is amazing. Obviously a great deal of time and effort went into this. (Montie Standing)*



**September 28, 2000**

**Mr. William C. Harrison  
Marketing Coordinator  
Employment Service  
401 South State Street 8 North  
Chicago, IL 60605**

**Dear Mr. Harrison:**

**This letter is in response to your inquiry about my experiences with the Illinois Skills Match Program developed by I.D.E.S. I was fortunate enough to learn about the program several months before it went live and was given an opportunity to register our company at that time.**

**When the program went live on August 1, I took the opportunity to try it out and was pleasantly surprised with the results. As I have mentioned in the past our company has had difficulty in finding welders, so I decided to list this position on the Skills Match Web Site. Within several days I had over 20 hits that matched my skills requirements. From these 20 potential candidates I was able to recruit 3 new welders. This surpassed the results I have been able to achieve through other sources such as newspaper ads in Galesburg and other towns within a 60 mile radius over the last 60 days.**

**I found the Web Site easy to move around in and became relatively proficient with it in a very reasonable time frame. It is another tool that I have added to my recruiting tool box. I have added several other positions to the list and have gotten matches on these also.**

**I have suggested the program to several other HR people that I associate with. I would like to thank I.D.E.S. for the Skills Match Program and I look forward to expanding my use of the program in future recruiting efforts.**

**Sincerely yours,**

**William J. Gohring**

**Human Resources Manager**

**Midstate**

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**Manufacturing**

**Company**

**From:** <BarbaraPoolba@aol.com>  
**To:** <ismysad@ides.state.il.us>  
**Date:** Thursday, March 01, 2001 11:40:55 PM  
**Subject:** Re: New Job Referrals

I have accepted the job of Media Liaison for the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Chicago. They contacted me through this service, I followed up and was hired the same day I interviewed. Thank you so much!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Obviously, unless there is an opportunity that pays more than \$30K per year with benefits, I\*m not likely to consider leaving this position. Besides, I really love the work and the people and the opportunity to do something that in some small way makes a difference in the world.  
Once again, thank you.

Barbara Pool

4857 W. 84th St. #2 Burbank, IL 60459 (708) 423-5286 BarbaraPoolba@AOL.com

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**From:** <njennings2001@yahoo.com>  
**To:** <ismysad@ides.state.il.us>  
**Date:** 3/29/01 3:26 p.m.  
**Subject:** On-Line Feedback

I wanted to comment on Illinois Skills Match. It is a wonderful program. It does all the job hunting for you. This was a great idea!!!

I also wanted to inquire as to how a person would apply for a job in an IETC? I love working with the public and would enjoy a career in that capacity. I went on the IETC web site and there was no reference to available positions. If you could e-mail me a response, I would greatly appreciate it.

Thank you, Nicole Jennings.

Nicole Jennings  
9138 South Bishop  
Chicago, IL. 60620