

Electronic Portfolio Pilot Project**Report to the****Budget Section****December 13, 2011****Beth Zander**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Budget Section, I am Beth Zander, Director of the Workforce Development Division of the North Dakota Department of Commerce. I'm here today to report on the electronic portfolio system pilot program.

54-60-27 of North Dakota Century Code calls for establishment of a pilot project that provides for an electronic portfolio system. The legislation describes specifics of the pilot goals, such as a multimedia system that enables users to showcase education and skills, and allows employers and economic developers to conduct online searches to determine workforce potential by geographic region, skill, education, and experience. Legislation further mandates that under the pilot, partners work together to facilitate integration of future workers into the workforce system and enhance access of skilled workers by employers and economic developers, and ensure that a portfolio system is complementary to the state's workforce and higher education systems.

The two institutions named in the statute as potential participants both very willingly joined the effort. As a result, our eFolio Pilot Project Committee includes representation from North Dakota State College of Science, Valley City State University, Job Service North Dakota, the North Dakota University System and the Department of Commerce. We will be connecting with Dakota College at Bottineau later in the project, so that a key individual there can gain exposure to the product as well. To date, we have finalized the project plan, begun enlisting instructors at the two institutions, developed smaller implementation teams, identified services, service development, and training to be provided by the vendor, and established system training dates. In fact, committee members are receiving training on the electronic portfolio system tomorrow.

North Dakota State College of Science has been utilizing an electronic portfolio system for five years, in collaboration with Minnesota's state colleges and universities system, referred to as MnSCU. MnSCU developed a portfolio system, free to all Minnesota residents, to create a living showcase of their education, career, and personal achievements. The software is maintained by the Avenet Company. This eFolio product is used by instructors to assign coursework that is stored and accessible for review and grading. For example, an instructor in a business administration program may assign completion of a business start-up plan. The student would store his work within his individual portfolio, and make it available to the instructor. Students might video themselves completing a welding or teaching assignment, and post it in their portfolios.

Colleges can utilize the eFolio system to showcase their key systems, processes and achievements in an institutional portfolio as part of accreditation and institutional assessment. There is potential use for instructor tenure and promotion determinations, so there may be future use by businesses in employee evaluation.

NDSCS knowledge and satisfaction with the Avenet/MnSCU eFolio product, and its potential for development into a labor exchange and workforce intelligence tool, led the committee to determine that expanding use of the product was the best option for the pilot project.

Engaging students in creating portfolios is critical to the success of a system such as this. Therefore, it is critical that we engage instructors in incorporating the system into their coursework. NDSCS is conducting orientation and training activities to increase instructor use of the portfolios, and VCSU is implementing plans for bringing instructors into the project. Instructors participating in this pilot project will not only be expected to utilize the eFolio system for traditional use; they will also be expected to help students understand the importance of regularly storing educational and career achievements, and the value of the product as a job seeking and lifelong career record maintenance tool.

In its current state, eFolio allows students to provide others, such as potential employers, with access to specific portions of their portfolios via a web link. We've found that we can paste the web link onto resumes created in the Job Service labor exchange system, and we'll be testing that further as a way of avoiding duplication of functionality and costly development expenses during the pilot.

The product does not currently include online labor exchange functionality for job seekers or employers, nor does it contain a reporting function to pull workforce intelligence such as skills and credentials. It does allow us to require data entry by users, so that we can drive specific workforce characteristics into the record.

During the pilot, we will address methods of achieving the desired functionality through a limited amount of product development, interaction with the Job Service labor exchange system, and work with the vendor to identify desired future state product features. State procurement requirements preclude us from any guarantee that a statewide system purchase would be with Avenet, so we want to be judicious in our use of pilot funds for product development.

We understand that eFolio is, as indicated by Avenet CEO Eric Johnson, 'expected to bring in the knowledge workforce and not designed to serve those with no technical skills.' We further understand that first time users will require some level of individual or classroom instruction to utilize the product. We'll explore this further during the pilot project by working one-on-one with a test population of non-student job seekers through Job Service North Dakota and the Commerce ExperienceND program. We'll help job seekers build their portfolios and assess the ease of use. We will also work with a select group of employers to understand how to make individual portfolios and an electronic folio system of most value to them.

We plan to develop a North Dakota portal within the project. A portal will be the point of entry for students and non-students. It is the method by which non-students can enter the system, it will give a North Dakota system its own identity, and it will allow Avenet to flag students and job seekers as being connected to the state, necessary for isolating characteristics of the user population for workforce information reporting.

Another task of the project committee is to further explore the RU Ready portfolio product used in North Dakota's K-12 system. Initial review resulted in the belief that RU Ready would not work well in the labor exchange arena. However we want to assess it further as an option or a possible compatible component of a statewide system.

While we have not spent any of the allocated \$150,000 to date, we have developed a project budget that includes purchase of eFolio individual user licenses, administrative tools that allow us to require specific data entry, related training, development of the North Dakota portal, and development of pdf conversion capability, all from the Avenet vendor. Our vendor budget is \$77,570. The \$72,430 balance is budgeted for stipends for participating instructors, and funds held in reserve for possible travel, promotion, and unplanned expenses.

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, this concludes my testimony. I'll be happy to answer any questions.