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## Laura Thomas

### Senior Research Programmer

Social Policy Research Associates

Laura Thomas brings extensive experience in developing interactive data-driven visualizations, spatial analysis, and GIS mapping for complex analytical projects including: the New Jersey Department of Labor Career-Based Career Exploration project, the Dislocated Worker Grant program technical assistance, the Workforce Systems Data Visualization project, the WIOA Policy Development Center/LEAD Center, the Workforce Data Quality Initiative, the H-1B Grants Management Support project, and the Job Corps Business Engagement Initiative. Laura not only develops technical solutions and spatial analysis using ArcGIS and QGIS for these projects but also specializes in translating complex geographic and data concepts for non-technical audiences through accessible dashboards and interactive visualizations. Before joining SPR, Laura was a Research and Analytics Specialist at Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance for over seven years, where she analyzed demographic, economic, and spatial data for regional stakeholders and managed multiple databases for decision-making support.

## EDUCATION & WORK EXPERIENCE

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**M.A.**, Urban and Regional Planning, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, 2011

**B.A.**, Political Science, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities, 2009

- 2022 – present **Senior Research Programmer**  
Social Policy Research Associates
- 2018 – 2022 **Research and Analytics Specialist**  
Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance
- 2017 – 2018 **Digital Manager – Analytics**  
Converge Consulting
- 2015 – 2017 **Digital Marketing Strategist**  
MedTouch
- 2012 – 2015 **Research Specialist**  
Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance

## SKILLS AND EXPERTISE

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- Fluent in R, HTML, CSS, JavaScript
- Data cleaning and processing
- Economic development research
- Labor market information analysis
- Data management (GitHub, Airtable, Zapier, IFTTT, RegEx, SQL)
- Data visualization (R Shiny, ArcGIS, Google Looker, Power BI, Tableau)

## REPRESENTATIVE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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***New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) Career-Based Career Exploration*** (2025-present). SPR is supporting the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) to develop interactive, data-drive sectoral career maps that will support jobseekers for four industry sectors in New Jersey. Through this project, SPR will gather and analyze multiple types of data—including labor market data, qualitative data from employers and industry partners, and feedback from potential users of the sectoral career maps—to inform the content for the occupational progressions and sectoral career maps. SPR will consult with the NJDOL’s technology team on the usability and function of the recommendations for improved user experience and content development and provide a sector memorandum and a final memorandum to summarize best practices, and lessons learned.

*Data Visualization Programmer:* Analysis of existing user interface, design of healthcare career maps, and recommendations for website design.

***Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG) program – Workforce System Technical Assistance (TA) Strategy & Support*** (2021-present) Under this contract, SPR provides technical assistance (TA) to the performance team for USDOL’s Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG) program. Specifically, SPR supports the staff in the Office of Workforce Investment (OWI) as well as individual DWG grantees and USDOL ETA regional staff (FPOs, regional performance specialists). To support national office staff SPR assists with grants management tasks such as maintaining complete lists of grants in the NWDG portfolio (including contacts, grant numbers, and reporting strictures); performing quarterly analysis of DWG reporting, including summarizing participant level data through dashboards and providing a qualitative analysis of grant narrative reports; and maintaining and updating performance reporting resources for grantees and regional staff. SPR also supports the help desk ticking system for the Workforce Integrated Performance Systems (WIPS), responding to DWG grantees who submit requests for technical assistance regarding their quarterly reporting. Working with regional ETA staff, SPR also provides direct TA to grantees to discuss and trouble shoot performance reporting issues.

*Senior Programmer:* Analysis of performance data and creation of interactive program year report by family

***Disability Innovation Fund Monitoring*** (2024-2025). The Rehabilitative Services Administration (RSA) selected AIR and its subcontractor, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to monitor the grant recipients of the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF). These grants support innovative projects to advance the post-school transitions of students with disabilities as they enter the workforce and develop independence. SPR and the contracting team are developing a monitoring tool/dashboard that will track grantee progress over the 5-year project period and will conduct virtual and onsite monitoring activities.

*Data Visualization Programmer:* Design and creation of data collection tool and monitoring dashboard.

**Workforce Systems Data Visualization** (2022-present). The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) seeks to help job seekers access employment education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. This project summarizes and visualizes WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) data in an interactive application on the U.S. Department of Labor's website.

*Programmer:* Strategy for data visualization roadmap; program user interface, quality control testing, and user analytics.

**LEAD Center / WIOA Policy Development Center** (2022-present). Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities (LEAD Center), a project of the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy, provides policy research and recommendations, training, and technical assistance, as well as demonstration projects, designed to break down silos in existing systems, processes, and practices, and foster wider understanding, adoption, and integration of next-generation employment practices in both the public and private sector for all people with disabilities.

*Programmer:* Strategy for data visualization roadmap; program user interface, quality control testing, user analytics, quarterly updates, career map design and creation.

**Workforce Data Quality Initiative Technical Assistance – Round 7 & 8** (2023-2024). The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) launched the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) to support states in developing and improving their workforce longitudinal administrative data systems (LDS) and improving the linkage between workforce and education data. By promoting improvements in data quality and linkages with education data, the WDQI aims to assist states in developing LDS that provide full portraits of individuals' educational and workforce pathways and reveal key insights that can guide education and workforce policy and program decisions. The WDQI represents a significant effort on the part of DOL to improve access to high quality and consistent workforce and education program data for the benefit of policy makers, agency and program leaders, and citizens alike.

*Programmer:* Program user interface, quality control testing, and user analytics.

**Job Corps Business Engagement Initiative (BEI)** (2024-2025). National Office of Job Corps (NOJC) selected American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its subcontractors, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), CALCO Consulting Group (CALCO), and Jobs for the Future (JFF) to support the efforts to continue to invest in its Business Engagement Initiative (BEI). This project includes providing an environmental scan, business engagement training and skill building, training, coaching, leveraging existing business partnerships, project management, customer service and support, technical support to other NOJC contracts and build national partnerships.

*Programmer:* Consolidation of completed asset maps, design and programming of asset map summary dashboard in Airtable, develop system and process for users to update asset map records.

***Navigator Evidence-Building Portfolio*** (2024). This project aims to develop foundational knowledge on the potential of Navigators to improve outcomes and equity in workforce programs. It includes: a literature review of navigators and navigation services, a formative evaluation and evaluability assessment of Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Navigators; an implementation evaluation and evaluability assessment of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Navigator grantees, an implementation evaluation of the Fostering Access, Rights, and Equity (FARE) Navigator grantees, and an advisory group of navigators across all of these programs as well as Veterans Employment and Training Program (VETS) navigators.

*Programmer:* Design and creation of infographic to display high-level metrics.

***H-1B Grants Management Support, Performance, Management and Technical Assistance*** (2023-present). As a subcontractor to AIR, SPR provides technical assistance (TA) to multiple USDOL H-1B grant programs, supporting federal and regional staff as well as individual grantees. SPR's coaching team provides TA directly to grantees in both one-on-one coaching sessions and through facilitated group activities. SPR's performance TA team is engaged in performance reporting TA directly to grantees and also supports DOL national and regional staff with quarterly analysis of grantee performance data.

*Programmer:* Design and programming of data visualization product, strategy for product roadmap program user interface, quality control testing, user analytics, quarterly updates.

***Labor Market Information Training*** (2024). As the One Stop Operator for the City and County of San Francisco SPR provides partner coordination and oversight of local WIOA implementation as specified through the Local and Regional WIOA Plans and partner MOUs. Other tasks include completing the Comprehensive Access Point's Hallmarks of Excellence Certification, developing a Continuous Improvement Plan, providing technical assistance and training to WIOA system partners, and liaising with the Workforce Investment Board of San Francisco (WISF) and its staff.

*Presenter:* Prepared and presented slides on labor market information metrics in the U.S. Census American Community Survey and Bureau of Labor Statistics.

***Battle Creek Workforce Development Evaluation and Technical Assistance*** (2023-2024). This project evaluates the work of WKKF workforce development grantees and provides technical assistance to Battle Creek workforce partners to 1) enhance the shared Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database and use its data more effectively; and 2) implement and track goals and measurable indicators, which make up a theory of change that supports integrated service delivery within the Battle Creek workforce system.

*Programmer:* Perform advanced data analysis for reporting; program data visualizations to effectively communicate performance outcomes.