



# Workforce Plan

**The Office of Injured Employee Counsel**

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**The Office of Injured Employee Counsel (OIEC)**

**WORKFORCE PLAN**



As part of the strategic plan required under Texas Government Code, Section 2056.002, each State agency is required to conduct a strategic staffing analysis and develop a workforce plan according to guidelines developed by the State Auditor. Workforce planning is an organized process for:

- Identifying the number of employees and the types of employee skill sets required to meet agency goals and strategic objectives; and
- Developing a plan of action to ensure that the appropriate workforce will be available to provide quality services to the citizens of Texas.



## **I. OVERVIEW**

### ***OIEC Mission***

*To assist, educate, and advocate on behalf of the injured employees of Texas*

### ***OIEC Strategic Goals and Objectives***

***Goal 1 -- To assist injured employees in the workers' compensation system and protect their rights.***

***Objective 1.1 -- To provide assistance to all unrepresented injured employees requesting assistance in each year.***

***Goal 2 -- To increase injured employee education regarding their rights and responsibilities and refer them to local, state, and federal programs.***

***Objective 2.1 To increase the knowledge of all injured employees and refer them to local, state, and federal programs each year.***

***Goal 3 -- To advocate on behalf of injured employees as a class.***

***Objective 3.1 -- To advocate on behalf of injured employees as a class in judicial, legislative, rulemaking, and administrative processes and ensure injured employee's rights are protected each year.***

### ***Core Business Functions***

OIEC was established to represent the interests and provide services to all unrepresented injured employees when assistance is requested. OIEC's core business functions include:

- 1) Assisting injured employees in the workers' compensation system by providing free Ombudsman services in TDI's administrative dispute resolution system;
- 2) Educating injured employees about their rights and responsibilities and improve their ability to effectively navigate through the workers' compensation system; and
- 3) Advocating on behalf of injured employees as a class in order to achieve a balanced workers' compensation system and protect their rights.

OIEC also refers injured employees to the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), TDI or other social or



regulatory services, such as the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) or licensing boards, to assist injured employees with 1) finding employment, 2) training opportunities, 3) returning to work, 4) filing complaints with appropriate licensing boards or other regulatory agencies, 5) obtaining financial assistance, and 6) reporting alleged administrative violations.

Additionally, OIEC provides outreach presentations, workshops, seminars, speaking engagements, or other forums to workers' compensation system stakeholders regarding OIEC, its role, and its services.

**Anticipated Changes to the Mission, Strategies, and Goals Over the Next Five Years**

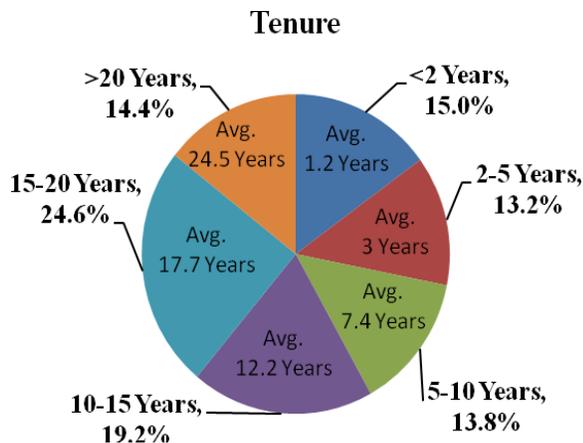
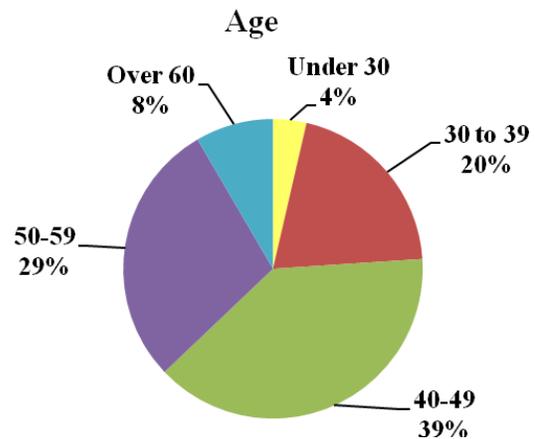
The 2010-2011 budget structure was carefully reviewed and recommendations for changes to the 2012-2013 budget structure were submitted to the LBB and GOBPP on April 16, 2010.

Changes to the mission, strategies, and goals for the 2014-2015 biennia are not anticipated at this time.

**II. CURRENT WORKFORCE PROFILE (SUPPLY ANALYSIS)**

**Demographics information, including age, gender, and length of service**

**Aging Workforce.** The average age of an OIEC employee is 45. Approximately one-fourth of the employees are under the age of 40 while 39 percent are between the ages of 40 and 49. More than 37 percent of the agency's employees are 50 or older.



**Average State Tenure.** The average State tenure for an OIEC employee is almost 12 years. Almost 60 percent of OIEC employees have more than 10 years of experience while more than 14 percent of OIEC employees have at least 20 years of experience. According to the agency's 2010 Survey of Employee Engagement, 95 percent of OIEC employees see themselves working for this agency in one year. OIEC believes that is a good indicator



of how well the organization is doing at retaining its employees. Additional information regarding the survey can be found in Appendix F.

OIEC works hard and is fortunate to have such a diverse and experienced workforce.

**Gender of OIEC Employees.** According to the Statewide Civilian Workforce Composition, 46 percent of employees in Texas are female. The percent of female employees at OIEC is well above this number at 87 percent.

**Ethnicity.** OIEC’s percentage of Hispanic employees is well above the Statewide Civilian Workforce Composition with 49 percent Hispanics. The Statewide Composition of the Hispanic Workforce is made up of 28 percent Hispanics. OIEC’s percentage of Black employees is equal to the Statewide Composition at 11 percent.

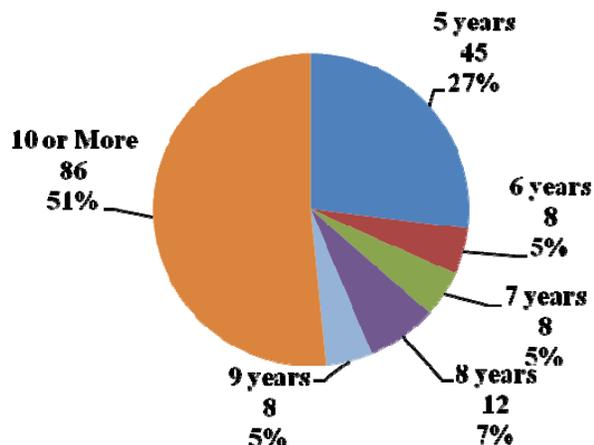
EEO Category	Office of Injured Employee Counsel – Workforce Statistics						
	Black	Hispanic	Anglo	Other	Female	Male	Total Positions
Officials, Admin. (A)	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%	0.0%	60.0%	40.0%	5
Professional (P)	14.6%	41.7%	42.7%	1.0%	84.4%	15.6%	96
Technical (T)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0
Para-Professional (Q)	0.0%	77.8%	22.2%	0.0%	88.9%	11.1%	9
Admin. Support (C)	8.8%	59.7%	31.6%	0.0%	93.0%	7.0%	57
Skilled Crafts (S)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0
Service & Maintenance (M)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0
All Categories	11.4%	49.1%	38.9%	0.6%	86.8%	13.1%	167

**Retirement through FY 2015.** More than 25 percent of OIEC’s workforce will be eligible to retire within five years as reflected in the chart. Additionally, 44 percent will be able to retire within the next eight years.

From a management perspective, more than 33 percent of OIEC staff in a Supervisory role will be able to retire by the end of 2015.

Recruitment and retention activities, training, and succession planning are

**Retirement Eligibility**



key to ensuring a knowledgeable and effective workforce. Cross-functional training is also key to ensure a workforce that will be efficient and effective regardless of the number of staff that leaves the agency.

**Agency Turnover**

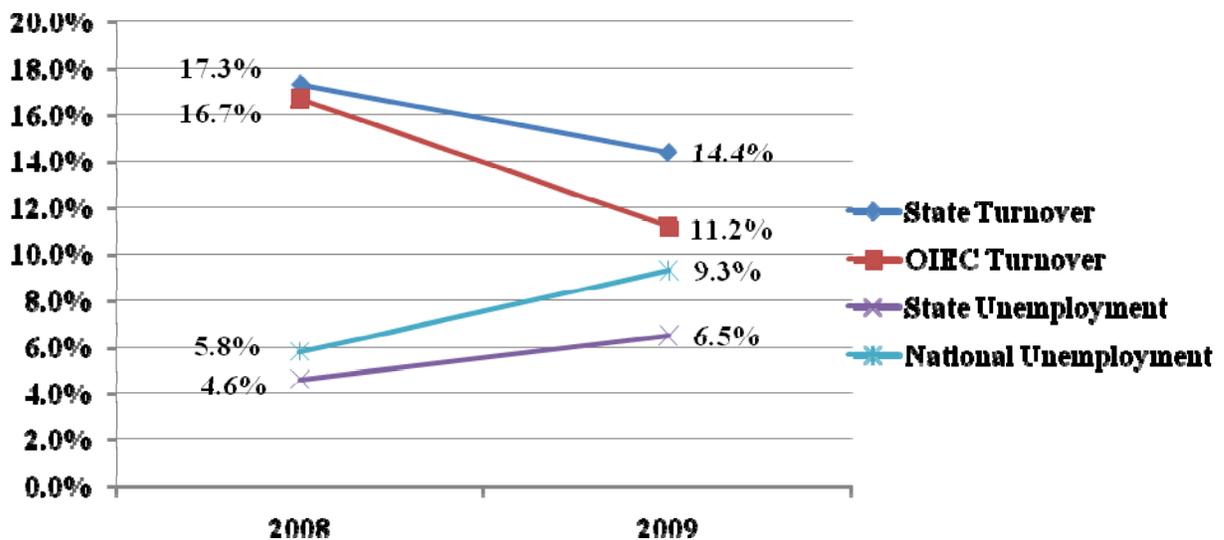
**Turnover.** The average turnover rate for OIEC and that for all State agencies has decreased over the past few years due in part to the economic downturn. Turnover for full- and part-time employees decreased in 2009 to 14.4 percent, down from 17.3 percent in 2008. That’s the lowest rate in the past five years.

Conversely, Texas unemployment rates increased. The statewide unemployment rate increased from 4.6 percent in fiscal year 2008 to 6.5 percent in fiscal year 2009.<sup>1</sup> The national annual average unemployment rate is well above Texas’ unemployment rate which rose from 5.8 percent in 2008 to 9.3 percent in 2009, which is the highest national annual average unemployment rate since 1983 when it was 9.6 percent.<sup>2</sup>

In FY 2008, OIEC’s turnover rate was 16.7 percent, compared to the average state agency turnover rate for FY 2008 of 17.3 percent.

In FY 2009, OIEC’s turnover rate was 11.2 percent, which is lower than the average state agency turnover rate for FY 2009 of 14.4 percent.

The chart below identifies OIEC’s turnover rate compared to the statewide turnover rate for 2008 and 2009 and the State and National unemployment rate comparison for 2008 and 2009.



<sup>1</sup> Source: Texas State Auditor’s Office; *An Annual Report on Classified Employee Turnover for Fiscal Year 2009*.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics; *Annual average unemployment rate, civilian labor force 16 years and over (percent)* [http://www.bls.gov/cps/prev\\_yrs.htm](http://www.bls.gov/cps/prev_yrs.htm). Viewed 6-21-2010.



As of February FY 2010, OIEC's turnover rate is **1.82 percent**, well below that of two years ago (as of February FY 2008), which was **7.17 percent**.

***Projected Employee Turnover Rate over the Next Five Years***

OIEC anticipates that the turnover rate over the next five years will be less than 15 percent.

***Workforce Skills Critical to the Mission and Goals of the Agency***

The agency has many professional, skilled, and well-qualified employees. Maintaining a workforce with particular knowledge and skill sets is critical to the agency's ability to operate efficiently. These skill sets include:

- Providing appropriate customer service;
- Interpreting legal/regulatory statutes;
- Providing legal and workers' compensation research and analysis;
- Managing and providing leadership to staff;
- Coordinating outreach efforts among the multiple program areas to improve both internal and external communications;
- Providing medical research and analysis; and
- Performing audit, quality assurance, and administrative functions.

**III. FUTURE WORKFORCE PROFILE (DEMAND ANALYSIS)**

***Expected Workforce Changes Driven by Factors such as Changing Missions, Goals, Strategies, Technology, Work, Workloads, and Work Processes***

OIEC does not foresee the elimination of any of its responsibilities over the next five-year period or a significant change in the number of staff available to perform those functions.

***Future Workforce Skills Needed***

- Providing appropriate customer service;
- Interpreting legal/regulatory statutes;
- Providing legal and workers' compensation research and analysis;
- Managing and providing leadership to staff ;
- Coordinating outreach efforts among the multiple program areas;
- Providing medical research and analysis; and
- Performing audit, quality assurance, and administrative functions.

***Anticipated Increase or Decrease in the Number of Employees Needed To Do the Work***

In response to the economic downturn and efficiencies identified, OIEC anticipates reducing its FTE cap from 184 to 175 FTEs.



### ***Critical Functions that Must Be Performed to Achieve the Strategic Plan***

- Customer service functions
- Legal research and analysis functions
- Medical research and analysis functions
- Workers' compensation research and analysis functions
- Managerial functions
- Audit, quality assurance, and administrative functions.

## **IV. GAP ANALYSIS**

### ***Anticipated Surplus or Shortage in Staffing Levels***

In response to the economic downturn and efficiencies identified, OIEC anticipates reducing its FTE cap from 184 to 175 FTEs.

### ***Anticipated Surplus or Shortage of Skills***

*Medical Background.* A staff member with a medical background is necessary to provide assistance and serve as a professional medical resource to Ombudsmen and other OIEC staff regarding medical dispute resolution, medical necessity, medical research, and other related issues.

## **V. STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Specific Goals to Address Workforce Competence Gaps or Surpluses***

*Recruitment and Retention Plans.* It takes competent and motivated employees to assist, educate, and advocate for injured employees. To recruit and retain such employees, OIEC must be a place where people are proud to work.

Supervisors within OIEC can influence motivation and serve as ethical role models. Research supports that employees who know that they are working for a noble purpose can be expected to be loyal and dependable. In "Managing Business Ethics," the authors note that "in a survey by a national opinion research firm, ethical corporate behavior, honest company communications, and respectful treatment ranked among employee's five top ranked goals, before good pay, which was 11<sup>th</sup> on the list and job security, which ranked 14<sup>th</sup>."

OIEC fosters a positive organizational culture and uses proven search and retention strategies to recruit, develop, and retain the best employees possible. To encourage employee involvement in decision making, OIEC has established a Policy Committee comprised of staff at various levels within the organization, to solicit, review and make



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recommendations for positive change. All employees at OIEC are encouraged to play a role in fostering a dynamic, positive culture. Many of OIEC's recruitment and retention activities include the following.

- College Student Recruitment. OIEC is coordinating with various colleges across Texas in order to recruit students before or after they have received their degree. OIEC is anticipating offering both salaried and non-salaried positions to interns interested in working in health care or in an advocacy role.
- Alternative Work Schedule Program. This program extends the number of hours that agency staff is available to provide services while also providing our employees with work schedule flexibility. The program is intended to improve customer service and better accommodate customer needs by offering extended service hours from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Every effort is made to accommodate the needs of individual employees who are working extended or alternate hours; however, in all instances, business necessity is the overriding factor.
- The Performance Planning and Development System (PPDS). This evaluation process provides supervisors the tools to develop an employee's performance, address performance that does not meet expectations, and handle performance problems in a manner that encourages individual responsibility for results. This system also presents an opportunity for the Supervisor and the employee to look to the future and identify opportunities for the employee's growth and development. OIEC believes that by periodically communicating performance expectations and satisfaction with co-workers, productivity and morale increase.
- Merit Awards. For OIEC employees that meet the criteria for a merit award, OIEC may provide deserving staff with administrative leave. The total amount of leave granted may not exceed 32 hours per employee during a fiscal year.

OIEC may grant merit salary increases and one-time merit payments to eligible classified employees whose job performance and productivity is consistently above that normally expected or required if the employee has been in his or her current position for at least 6 months. Merit salary increases are granted when funding is available and within guidelines established by the Public Counsel.

- Sick Leave Pool. The Sick Leave Pool (Pool) has been established to benefit OIEC employees and their immediate family members who suffer a catastrophic illness or injury. The Pool is intended to provide for the alleviation of a hardship caused to an employee and the employee's immediate family, if a catastrophic illness or injury forces the employee to exhaust all leave earned by that employee and to lose compensation from OIEC. The program allows employees to voluntarily contribute sick leave time to the Pool.

OIEC's rule 28 TAC §276.4 was adopted as a result of a requirement of Texas Government Code §661.002(c). The Government Code requires state agencies to



adopt rules relating to the agency's sick leave pool program.

- **Policy Development Program.** OIEC's Policy Development Program was initiated in an effort to better communicate and receive ideas from all employees. Recognizing the value and ideas of each employee, this program was designed to serve as a channel of communication for "great ideas."

While participation in this program is optional, all OIEC employees are encouraged to submit their ideas on how to improve OIEC, OIEC's policies or procedures, or work environment. OIEC's executive management team review the ideas or recommendations submitted monthly. Confidentiality of employees who submit policy recommendations is being provided to encourage all OIEC employees to participate in providing suggestions to improve our agency.

Since its inception, many ideas have been proposed, and of those, many have been implemented. Administrative leave for outstanding performance has been awarded to OIEC staff whose ideas have been implemented.

- **Return-to-Work Program.** The intent of the Return to Work Program is to allow employees with injuries or illnesses, both job-related and non-job related, to return to work as quickly as possible in a meaningful and productive capacity. Participation in the program will be handled on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the employee's physician. It is the employee's responsibility to make all reasonable effort to return to work at the earliest possible time to full duty or alternatively to a light or restricted duty capacity.

**Organizational Training and Employee Development.** Training is a year-round, continuous requirement for OIEC staff. The many complexities of the workers' compensation system and the agency's core value of providing premier service necessitate ongoing training. Various committees and training activities are discussed below:

- **Training Committee.** The agency's training committee consists of employees from all walks of OIEC. It is a multi-program committee created to design an agency training program. This committee has developed a comprehensive training program for Ombudsman Assistants and Customer Service Representatives. The committee coordinates Legal Services' Regional Staff Attorney (RSA) training, including but not limited to Practical Skills Training.

The Training Committee developed a Core Training Links section of the OIEC intranet site that provides ready access to critical baseline information about workers' compensation that every OIEC field office employee must know or be able to easily locate in order to educate the injured employees of Texas.

Effective June 1, 2010, the Training Committee will be broadened to include OIEC management and the agency's Quality Assurance Section. This expansion of the Committee will ensure effective communication amongst all employees that have a



training function at the agency. The Training Committee will meet bi-monthly in FY 2011 to ensure all employees are fully aware of new legislation as a result of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature and the Sunset Advisory Commission Review of the Workers' Compensation System.

- *New Employee Training.* All new employees are required to participate in new employee training. Training courses are available on the Intranet and may include a course description page with prerequisite reading, the course itself, and helpful links. Several training modules are available and include the following: Ethics in the Workplace, Employment Law, Computer security, and Workplace Conduct. The training courses consist of slideshows, videos, or videos with a handout. Some courses include audio. All employees are also required to read the employee manual and take core training offered by OIEC and TDI, such as Ethics, Confidentiality, Sexual Harassment, Discrimination, and related agency policy and law training.
- *Ethics Training and Committee.* OIEC is dedicated to operating under the highest standards of ethical and professional behavior. To ensure that every effort is made to achieve this goal, it conducts Ethics training and has created an Ethics Committee. Ethics training is conducted for new employees and periodically each year thereafter. The Ethics Committee has been vital to the development of our agency's superior reputation for being a professional and ethical organization. Created in June 2008, the OIEC Ethics Committee addresses the ethical questions and issues presented to it by OIEC employees.

The Committee is comprised of a diverse section of OIEC staff, which includes employees from all divisions of the agency who hold both supervisory and non-supervisory positions. The Ethics Committee has and will continue to convene as necessary to discuss the issues presented to it by OIEC employees and a quarterly update on the issues will continue to be created and sent out to the OIEC Team.

The agency's Ethics Committee has a revolving membership in order to ensure its recommendations reflect the agency's high ethical standards and new voices are heard. OIEC's ethics statement is below:

*Each OIEC employee has an obligation to maintain high ethical standards in the performance of their work responsibilities and in their personal life, realizing that lapses in such judgment will reflect negatively on OIEC. OIEC employees must seek to enhance and implement ethical values based on established principles of sound reasoning and the highest standards of business conduct.*

- *Ombudsman Training Program.* Generally, staff in the Ombudsman Program are hired as Ombudsmen Associates and begin up to a year-long training program at the end of which they will have earned their Type 03 Workers' Compensation Adjuster's Licenses and be reclassified as an Ombudsman I. The training program for an Ombudsman Associate consists of up to one year of training divided into two parts. In



Part I (26 weeks) the Ombudsman Associates complete new employee orientation courses, classroom studies, customer services, and observation of activities. After completing Part I, the Associates enter Part II of the program. In Part II (also 26 weeks) the Ombudsman Associates begin conducting meetings with unrepresented injured employees in preparation for dispute resolution hearings and assisting in proceedings while being observed and evaluated by their mentor, trainer, and Supervisor of the Ombudsman Program. The Ombudsman Associates are required to obtain a Type 03 Workers' Compensation Adjuster's License before they finish their training program. Upon successful completion of the training program, Ombudsman Associates are eligible for a career ladder promotion to an Ombudsman I.

The Ombudsman I must have at least one year of workers' compensation experience as required by Texas Labor Code §404.152. They participate in proceedings; assist injured employees to obtain supporting documentation and to appropriately and timely exchange evidence; maintain an index folder; and work closely with the Ombudsman Assistants to effectively assist injured employees. If an Ombudsman I was not previously an Ombudsman Associate, then the Ombudsman I completes a 20-week training program during which time a Type 03 Workers' Compensation Adjuster's License is obtained.

The Ombudsman II is required to have at least two years of Ombudsman I experience. The Ombudsman II must maintain all of the requirements of an Ombudsman I and may be required to assist Ombudsman Supervisors and Associate Directors in the training and mentoring of Ombudsman Associates, Ombudsman Assistants, and Customer Services Representatives. Each Field Office has an Ombudsman Lead who serves as a mentor for all Ombudsman Program staff.

All Ombudsmen assist with case development when injured employees request assistance. The goal of case development is to resolve the issues before going to an administrative proceeding; therefore, Ombudsmen may become involved in a case before it is scheduled for a dispute proceeding.

Ombudsmen must remain current on continuing education requirements in order to maintain their adjuster's licenses. These credits are offered through Practical Skills Training conducted by the agency's Regional Staff Attorneys (RSA), and the agency conferences. Training is also provided through monthly teleconferences.

Additional information regarding the Ombudsman training program and continuing education can be found in OIEC Rule §276.10.

- *Practical Skills Training Program.* The Practical Skills Training Program is designed to help Ombudsmen refine their skills in assisting injured employees in proceedings before TDI and to ensure injured employees' rights are protected.

At least two different practical skills training courses are offered by RSAs each year. The training is delivered in regional locations across the State and the Ombudsmen



receive continuing education credits for participating in the training, which helps them fulfill the requirements for maintaining their statutorily required Type 03 Workers' Compensation Adjuster's License.

The courses are designed to give practical, useful information to the Ombudsmen, which they can immediately implement into the performance of their job duties. There is a lecture and discussion component at each training session. In addition, written material is prepared to provide more detailed resource material than can be presented in a lecture. The written materials from each practical skills training are posted on OIEC's intranet for future reference. Finally, each practical skills training includes some practical application of the material to test the participants' knowledge of the subject matter covered in the training. Those exercises provide an excellent opportunity to provide feedback from the trainer and for the participants to learn from each other and determine best practices and strategies.

Practical Skills Training topics that have been conducted include the following:

- Direct Examination and Cross Examination (October 2006);
- Direct Examination and Cross Examination of Expert Witnesses (March 2007);
- Discovery tools, Objections and Responses (November 2007);
- Pre-Hearing Dispute Resolution: Case Management, Assessment & Development (March 2008);
- Advanced Case Development and Formulation of Oral and Written Arguments (May 2008);
- Occupational Disease and Repetitive Trauma Injuries (April 2009);
- Formulation of Arguments to Assist Injured Employees Through the Medical Dispute Resolution Process (August 2009); and
- Effectively Questioning Physicians on Medico-Legal Issues (April 2010).

Following the August 2009 Practical Skills Training on the formulation of arguments in medical dispute resolution, Legal Services determined that the training needed to be supplemented with training on effectively conducting medical research. As a result, one of OIEC's RSAs arranged for and coordinated training by medical school librarians around the State. That training, which was conducted in October and November 2009, was attended by both the RSAs and the Ombudsmen. The training focused on conducting research for the type of evidence-based medical evidence that is critical for establishing the medical necessity of proposed treatment. The training was conducted at the medical school libraries, which also permitted the participants to become familiar with those libraries and the wealth of resources available there.

In order to ensure the continuing effectiveness of the Practical Skills Training, OIEC surveyed the Ombudsmen to determine the topics on which they wanted to receive training. Legal Services is currently in the process of establishing the training agenda



for Practical Skills Training in October 2010, April 2011, and October 2011. The survey results were compiled and are available to Legal Services in establishing the training plan.

- Customer Service Representative (CSR) Training. A comprehensive training program is provided to each CSR as they are hired so that they will have the information necessary to respond accurately and promptly to the injured employee.

Newly-revised training manuals with copies of the Workers' Compensation Act and Rules are provided to each CSR with the requirement that they be conversant with the information contained therein. Training requirements include completing the OIEC Core Training, workers' compensation modules, customer service training, computer and telephone and soft skills training, and early intervention procedures. Ongoing education includes regular review of the agency website and links, and attendance at the various teleconference training sessions. A monthly review of Appeals Panels decisions is also required as they provide interpretations of the Act and Rules and procedural clarifications.

Before being assigned to providing customer service to injured employees, CSRs are required to observe interaction between injured employees and Ombudsmen staff. In addition, new CSRs choose or are assigned a Senior CSR and an Ombudsman Lead (field office team leader) as a mentor for guidance and advice. They are also required to observe dispute resolution proceedings, preparation appointments, Benefit Review Conferences, and Contested Case Hearings. Training exercises are given that are designed to help CSRs determine the questions to ask injured employees and the information that should be provided based upon the injured employee's needs. This extensive training is designed to produce employees who are well-equipped to provide exceptional customer service.

OIEC CSR staff provides advocacy, assistance, and education about the workers' compensation system while TDI staff processes official and regulatory actions.

- Teleconferences. Teleconferences are held to ensure OIEC staff in the field and Central Office stays abreast of information necessary to continue to effectively serve the injured employees of Texas. Teleconferences may be held for specific functions, such as Ombudsman or Customer Service Assistants, or as an agency as a whole. RSAs may make presentations on legal issues, or presentations may be made by OIEC staff on new legislation, policies and procedures. Agency staff also has the opportunity to request particular topics be included in the teleconferences via the agency Policy Development Program.
- OIEC Conferences. Various conferences are held for staff each year. Below is a summary of each type.
  - OIEC's Annual Conference: OIEC's annual conference is held in June for all OIEC staff to come together in one place. The conference generally lasts over a



three day period to allow for travel. Since OIEC staff is located throughout Texas, the conference provides an opportunity to get to know each other - providing a face with a name, building OIEC's network, and increasing agency relations to overcome geographical barriers among OIEC's 23 locations.

Training sessions are held that promote teamwork and ethics as well as provide information about other aspects of the agency that staff may not be familiar with. Breakout sessions are held on a variety of topics including current legislative activities, changes in workers' compensation laws and rules, and new agency policies and procedures. Information presented at the conference is designed to enhance the skills of staff and increase communication within the agency in order to provide excellent service to the injured employees of Texas. Additionally, the conference provides continuing education credits to help Ombudsmen and other OIEC staff satisfy the requirements for maintaining their Type 03 Workers' Compensation Adjuster's License and for OIEC attorney's to obtain continuing legal education credits.

- *OIEC Leadership Conference:* (Held two times each year). OIEC holds a leadership conference where all management employees meet for training and issue discussion. The leadership conference provides an opportunity for all of the functional areas of the agency (Customer Service, Ombudsman, and Legal Services) to come together and focus our efforts on improving the quality of the service that we provide to the injured employees of Texas. The next leadership conference is scheduled for September 2010. The expected topics for the conference are a Sunset update, status of budget reductions, business plan initiatives for fiscal year 2011, performance measures, the survey of employee engagement, the customer satisfaction survey, revisions to the agency's training program, and a review of the agency's Quality Assurance Program and its plan for going forward in fiscal 2011.
- *Legal Services Conference:* (Held once each year). OIEC conducts a Legal Services conference, where the Regional Staff Attorneys gather with agency executive management to discuss legal issues in the workers' compensation system. The conference also provides an opportunity for candid discussion about how effectively the OIEC Team is serving its mission to assist, educate, and advocate on behalf of the injured employees of Texas and recommendations from the attorneys directly assisting the Ombudsmen and Customer Service Representatives on how we can better serve our mission. A current initiative that OIEC is pursuing concerns extent-of-injury disputes and how the agency can more effectively assist injured employees in such disputes. That issue will undoubtedly be a focus of the next Legal Services conference.
- *Practical Resource Guide.* Legal Services and the OIEC Training Committee entered into a joint project to produce a Practical Resource Guide for the OIEC Team. The Guide is designed to be a workers' compensation desk book for OIEC staff. The Training Committee identified the core information that OIEC Customer Service



Representatives, Ombudsman Assistants, and Ombudsmen needed to know or to readily access. The Training Committee developed an organizational structure to provide that information, which included a description of the topic, important term and definitions, a discussion of why the topic is important, identity of documents the injured employee needs to provide related to the topic, citations to relevant statutory and rules provision, research related to the topic, and resources that provide additional information about the topic. The members of the Training Committee and the RSAs were assigned various topics and asked to write the entry on those topics. Once the entries were written, they were compiled into a single document that was reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy and consistency. The Practical Resource Guide was completed and distributed to the OIEC Team in May 2010.

- *Career Ladder Program.* OIEC is committed to developing employees and promoting employee development and initiative by establishing structured career progressions reflecting the agency's business needs and the benefit to employees of having defined career advancement opportunities and requirements.

OIEC recommended additional career ladder opportunities for Ombudsman positions, which was approved for the FY 2010-2011 General Appropriations Act. Three levels were added: Ombudsman Associate, Ombudsman III, and Ombudsman IV. The classification change more clearly reflects the desired career ladder opportunities in OIEC's Ombudsman Program and the nature of the work performed by an OIEC Ombudsman.

