

**Program Year 2004 One-Stop LMI Grant
North Carolina Workforce Development Board
and
Employment Security Commission of North Carolina
Labor Market Information Division**

Statement of Work

A. Statewide Workforce Information System

Relevant, timely and responsive information programs and services are a fundamental cornerstone upon which effective workforce investment strategy depends. North Carolina's Commission on Workforce Development (the State's Workforce Development Board) (SWIB) and the state's designated lead employment statistics agency—the Labor Market Information Division (LMID) of the Employment Security Commission have jointly and collaboratively developed this action plan to address the needs of present and potential workforce customers throughout the state. This process has placed particular emphasis on consultation, team planning, and representation of key elements of the workforce community in an effort to ensure that the resulting plan is responsive to the needs of North Carolina's state and local workforce investment systems.

The LMID is responsible for developing and maintaining a comprehensive system of labor market data for North Carolina. Included in the information gathered by the division are: labor force estimates, unemployment rates, wages by industry and by occupation, staffing patterns, industrial and occupational projections, as well as data on fringe benefits and other items. By working in close collaboration with the State Workforce Development Board and its partners, LMID is continually striving to develop and deploy resources and services that address the expressed need for timely, localized, and responsive information.

The products, systems and services outlined in this grant proposal are directed towards providing quality information for informed choices to all customers of the Workforce Information System. Primary One-Stop LMI customer groups to be served under this grant include:

- The business community
- workforce development professionals
- workforce information customers
- local workforce investment boards
- individuals engaged in job search and career exploration
- job and career counselors
- researchers
- government officials
- education and training providers
- economic developers
- planners and policy makers at the local, state and national levels
- other stake holders

This proposal is specifically tailored to the activities and planned customer outcomes as defined in the State's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five Year Strategic Plan. As such, it responds to the vision and goals of that Plan, by closely articulating its proposed activities and services with those of the Strategic Plan.

North Carolina's Commission on Workforce Development has set forth six goals as guideposts for the State's workforce system. These include:

- Incumbent and dislocated workers will possess the skills necessary to make transition to new, higher-skilled jobs or self-employment
- The State of North Carolina will build strong collaborative linkages between the economic development partnerships and workforce development boards
- The workforce development system (JobLink Career Center System) will be a coherent and integrated system of employment and training services
- K-16 education will prepare students for both further education and work
- Training programs will be accountable for results
- The Commission will examine the governance and accountability of the state's workforce development (e.g., vocational, technical, and professional education and training) and delivery (e.g., labor market information, labor exchange, worker economic security, employment assistance, training referral, and training delivery) systems.

As noted in the Commission's final goal, the Labor Market Information delivery system is an integral component of the State's workforce development system. Each of the activities, services and resources proposed in this application for PY 2004 specifically addresses one or more of the above goals. These are developed with the aim of enhancing core services through North Carolina's One-stop system (JobLink), the state's delivery mechanism for linking one-stop services with customers. This plan proposes the development and deployment of enhanced information delivery tools and training/development activities designed to address customers' specific information requirements. These requirements range from specifically tailored localized labor market information supporting career planning and job search, to training and skills development for JobLink staff in order to enhance their capacity to deliver services to customers in a timely and relevant manner. By linking labor market information with localized workforce intelligence such as present and projected job openings, compensation data, skills requirements and career development potential, individual job seekers can make more informed employment-related decisions. In addition, local workforce boards can obtain the necessary information for supporting training for dislocated workers, educational providers can work more closely with the workforce investment system to provide offerings in high growth/high demand occupations, and economic developers can focus on attracting industries that are consonant with existing or proposed regional industry clusters.

A draft of this grant application and action plan has been distributed to the state and local workforce development staff and state agency WIA staff for review and comment. These participants and stakeholders have been surveyed to obtain their input and direction concerning labor market information needs, and the provision of resources to address these needs. Their requests and suggestions for products and services have been incorporated into this plan as deemed feasible. In addition, these proposed activities reflect insights gained from surveys of local workforce board staff, regular contact with local workforce board members by members of LMID's outreach and training team, visits and consultations with the LMID director, and ongoing coordination and communication between SWDB, local boards, and their partners and customers.

LMID and SWIB place heavy emphasis on continual assessment of customers' informational needs and the resources and services that are designed to address them. Each will continue to conduct coordinated user assessments over the coming year, employing the foregoing techniques, as well as making use of focus groups of present and potential customers, including representatives from the job seeker, business, economic development and educational communities at both local and state levels.

The unifying theme relating each of the activities proposed in this application can be succinctly summarized as follows: “providing the right information, to the right user, in the right manner, at the right time.” Pertinence, accuracy, relevance, appropriateness and timeliness are the key principles that shape LMID’s delivery of information products and services to the workforce community and its customers, and against which their utility will be assessed. Taken together, these characterize our strategic approach to customer focused, demand driven workforce information delivery.

Priority Core Products and Services

1) Continue to populate the ALMIS Database with state data. (55,225)

The ALMIS database is a normalized, relational database structure that stores, maintains, updates and provides for integrated access to labor market, economic, demographic and occupational information. It is a key foundation for distributing information to customers in a timely and appropriately localized manner. With the support of the One-Stop grant, LMID is able to update and incorporate new data elements in the ALMIS system for delivery to the broad array of consumers at local and state levels who are seeking electronic delivery of consistent data for localized areas and specific, user-tailored purposes. Public access to data files in the ALMIS database is provided via the Internet through WebSARAS, NC Profile, ESC’s website and other associated applications. Feedback from customers consistently indicates the importance of access to information and data through the ALMIS system.

North Carolina will continue to populate and update existing tables in the ALMIS Database (version 2.2), including the core element tables and associated look-up and crosswalk tables, as defined in the ETA One-Stop Agreement and by the ALMIS Database Consortium. Customer feedback will direct and prioritize the population of other tables in the database and the creation of state and area-specific tables. This feedback will be solicited through a variety of methods including one-on-one meetings with local customers, participation in state and local workforce activities, as well as formal and informal surveys and focus groups. A particular emphasis will be placed this year on identifying and incorporating localized elements that can be incorporated into the system for North Carolina customers that go beyond the common data elements that all states have in common as part of the national structure.

Updated features available using ALMIS database will include non-standard table format for presentation of LED data. In addition, tables for storing and presenting job vacancy data will be made accessible.

North Carolina will update the URL addresses for web accessible occupational licensure information to the ALMIS database occupational licensure tables. This follows upon the extensive updating effort undertaken by LMID during the past year, and will allow customers access to the most current occupational licensure-related information available directly from agencies via the internet. Updating occupational licensure files will take place in the ALMIS database.

North Carolina has integrated the Employer Database into the ALMIS Database in accordance with Consortium guidelines and will continue to use this resource to deliver employer name, address and related information to individuals engaged in job search, career exploration and/or other approved purposes. Staff will update the appropriate tables as the data are received from the vendor. The Employer Database will be made available with enhanced format capabilities, which will enable ready identification of employers by location, industry and size.

North Carolina is committed to providing access to ALMIS Database elements through its state-standard delivery systems. This approach ensures that all customers have access to the most valid and up-to-date information possible. Enhancement of the ALMIS system, and expansion of the data elements available through it, will enable customers to engage in more informed, data-based decision making, thus providing

the opportunity for improving the workforce system and its responsiveness to the needs of its constituents.

2) Produce and disseminate industry and occupational employment projections. (250,456)

Last year, North Carolina LMID staff completed and submitted for review statewide Projections for 2012. During PY 2004, projections for the state's local workforce investment board areas will be undertaken and completed. 2012 Projections data for all of the local board areas will be completed by March, 2005. Projections for each individual local area will be released as they are produced.

Projections are used by businesses, workforce development professionals, local workforce investment boards, economic developers, curriculum planners, career counselors, government officials, researchers, policy makers (at local, state and national levels) and the general public. They are essential to workforce development planning, program/budget planning, public policy planning and career exploration.

The North Carolina LMID has consulted with the user community by a variety of methods (e.g., one-on-one meetings with local customers, participation in state and local workforce board activities, formal and informal surveys) in order to continue to collect information on customer's needs for projections information. A key finding resulting from this process is the need to present projections data in user-friendly, relevant, formats that can be readily understood and which are as attractive to the user as they are informative. Based on consultation with customers, LMID will produce and disseminate projections-based information data in electronic and hard copy formats that are responsive to consumer demand. These products will be developed to reflect both statewide and individual workforce board area data. They will emphasize high growth/high demand occupations as well as those with opportunities for higher earnings. In addition, particular attention will be paid to customer driven demand for coverage of specific occupational clusters (health care, biotechnology manufacturing) that may be the focus of economic development activities for particular regions or workforce board areas in the state.

Projections data will be disseminated in user-friendly formats tailored to the needs of specific audiences. These will include posters, folders, brochures and other hard copy material for distribution in addition to electronic formats. In addition to statewide projections-related information, these materials will present data specific to each workforce board area. Products covering statewide and local areas will begin to be disseminated beginning in Fall, 2004. Products presenting projections information will emulate those supported through the efforts of the ETA-funded Projections Consortium and the Projections Managing Partnership, as well as additional formats developed in consultation with and response to the needs of present and potential user groups.

During PY 2004, LMID will also produce short term projections for 2005, covering both statewide and local workforce development board areas. These projections data will also be made available in electronic format and distributed in hard copy formats that local boards may find most useful. These formats include posters, brochures and handouts focusing on near-term high growth, high demand occupations and industries statewide and specific to each area. Short term projections will be made available and released in Spring, 2005.

LMID will consult with the local workforce boards as well as with the SWIB in order to determine which dissemination approaches best meet the needs of its customers in presenting both short and long term projections.

3) Provide occupational and career information products for public use. (183,202)

During PY 2004, the North Carolina LMI Division will continue to produce and disseminate customer focused occupational and career information products which will address the needs of business, workforce boards and One-Stop Career Center staff, as well as those of representatives of all customer groups. These products, as requested by data users, include job openings, occupational projections, demand occupations and supply indicators by geographic area, occupational pay and benefits, skill and educational requirements as well as career ladder information.

Closer coordination with the economic development community will be a priority with LMID during PY2004. Increased outreach efforts will be directed toward local Chambers of Commerce and the seven Economic Development regions in the state. Input from these groups will be specifically sought concerning their labor market information needs and the products and services that might best address them.

Investments in occupational information assist in meeting the needs among different customer groups. Users within each customer group want to know about current job openings, pay and benefits, skill requirements and availability. They also want to know the occupations that are growing in their area, and associated training requirements. Businesses want to know what is predicted in the future for their industry and the economy in general, the skill level of potential workers, as well as those of their own workforce. All users are interested in the general state of the local economy, the health of the industries within an area, occupations in demand and economic prospects for the future.

As part of its ongoing assessment of customers' use and satisfaction with its products and services, LMID staff will consult with customers about the usefulness of the occupational information disseminated through the statewide workforce information system. Outreach staff will consult on a one-on-one basis with local workforce board members concerning needs and materials presented. Also, a standardized method permitting customer feedback will be developed through surveys (to be administered at least once annually), Internet notations or fliers requesting information on the usefulness of the product, whether the product met their needs and the degree of their satisfaction of the service provided by LMI staff.

Occupational and career information resources and services developed by LMID will be closely articulated with career information and education resources and providers in North Carolina such as the state's Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (SOICC), the Community College system, and business, industry, professional and trade associations. LMID's outreach and training staff will also continue to provide training on labor market information for Career Development Facilitation (CDF), required for CDF certification. Career and Occupational information and materials provision will be enhanced, both through electronic delivery and through hard copy publications.

During PY 2004, LMID will implement a job vacancy survey based on a methodology that will enable semi-annual (spring and fall) assessments of employer job demand. This methodology will be based upon the WIC-supported approach developed in cooperation with Minnesota and other states comprising the Job Vacancy workgroup. During Fall 2004 and Spring 2005, and every six months thereafter (dependent on customer demand and funding) LMID will collect data and will conduct analysis at the state level. During PY 2004, customer interest in conducting vacancy studies for local areas (e.g., workforce board areas; economic development regions) will be assessed and potential means of supporting these studies will be investigated. Data from these vacancy surveys have the potential to be supplemented with additional 'real time' openings data as reported through the North Carolina Employment Security Commission, local newspapers and Internet systems, based upon perceived usefulness to workforce customers. These data can also be analyzed in light of related characteristics such as wages, skill and educational level required to perform the jobs, and recommendations for short-term training for occupations in demand in the multiple workforce board areas across the state, again based on feasibility and user demand.

Data for the Job Vacancy survey will be gathered twice yearly, starting in Fall, 2004. This survey will be administered in Fall and Spring to avoid seasonal effects of winter holiday and summer hiring patterns. The Job benefits survey will also be administered in Fall 2004.

LMID will also undertake a fringe benefits survey that will gauge the extent of benefits provision and participation. Funding for this survey will be partially defrayed by funds from the WIC-supported Benefits Consortium, and will follow the methodology and procedures set forth by that workgroup. These data will be gathered and reported on a statewide basis. Analyses and report/product publication and production will be undertaken in Spring 2005. These reports and other related materials will be distributed to interested parties in both electronic and hard copy formats. Initial distribution of reports for both the Benefits and Job Vacancy surveys will take place in Spring, 2005.

4) Ensure that workforce information and support required by state and local workforce investment boards are provided. (158,467)

Workforce information provides the core intelligence for helping to ensure that state and local workforce investment boards are capable of fulfilling their missions and addressing customer demand with maximal effectiveness. In order to enable the workforce system to operate at high capacity, LMID will both enhance and expand its services and resources in support of this end.

Educating workforce development staff regarding LMID products and services is an on-going process. At the core of the LMID's efforts to establish and maintain strong links between the workforce community and the Division is LMID's Outreach and Training and Team. Members of the team serve all twenty-four local boards in North Carolina. LMID staff will continue to attend board meetings, provide information for grant writing and strategic planning and keep local board members and their staff updated on available products and services.

While the initial connection with the local boards has been very successful, plans are for Outreach and Training team members to further develop these relationships, to better identify local needs and, likewise, to make boards more cognizant of available LMID resources. During this program year, members of the team will continue to work with staff of JobLink Career Centers (North Carolina One-Stop Centers) to determine their informational needs and discuss available products and services. Feedback from local customers will continue to be used in the development of customer-focused products and services.

In collaboration with the boards, staff will develop compilations of key economic information tailored to the individual board areas. This information will be provided to local boards on a regular basis and where possible, lead to the development or refinement of on-line products. LMID staff will continue to participate in the development, enhancement, implementation and training on products elsewhere in this document.

Responding to the need for analysis and interpretation of data related to questions and issues raised by customers is a key responsibility of LMID. Staff are heavily called upon by individual workforce boards, economic developers, government officials (legislative and executive), policymakers and media for research and insight into workforce trends. These activities are directly supported by the one stop grant, and are a critical function of LMID's information dissemination function. LMID will continue to maintain an on-call capability to provide rapid response to consumer questions, or to refer those requiring more in-depth attention to appropriate staff.

Analysis of user feedback gathered from surveys, consultations and regularly assigned staff visits suggests that users (especially, but not exclusively at local workforce levels) that this capability to respond in a rapid manner to information requests is both a highly valued and often used service provided

by LMID. In the coming year, LMID will work with both present and potential customers to facilitate the use and enhance the awareness of access to customized information provision and analysis. By supplementing the data and information available through electronic dissemination, LMID staff provide a critical value-added dimension to customers.

North Carolina has been among the states with the high numbers of dislocated workers, attributable in many instances to closing of manufacturing plants in the textile and furniture-related industries. In order to track the post layoff outcomes of these and all dislocated workers in the state, LMID will undertake an in-depth analysis of their re-employment experiences. Using wage records and other administrative data, LMID will analyze these workers' re-entry into the labor force and their re-entry earnings compared with pre-layoff wages. Data from this study will be made available in published reports to be produced in Winter 2004-5.

During PY2004, LMID will begin publication of Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI's) for state, local workforce board, county and metropolitan areas. These data produced as part of a cooperative venture between the LMID and the US Census Bureau (i.e., LED) will substantially enrich the array of data available to planners, economic developers, businesses and policy makers at within North Carolina, at state, regional and local levels. Products will be developed for distribution by local JobLinks using QWI's. These will be based upon input from and preferences of local boards and their staffs.

Providing accurate and timely information in response to 'ad hoc' information demands from customers is a pivotal LMID function. The Division provides rapid response to such requests through its telephone inquiry unit and (for more in-depth information requests) through its research division staff that are specifically dedicated for such purposes.

LMID will continue publishing monthly/quarterly publications relating to current economic conditions and topics of interest as determined by user requests. Topical articles provided by expert researchers and professionals around the state, as well as within LMI, will be presented in hard copy and via the Internet. LMI will continue to edit monthly reports associated with the state and national employment statistics release. These reports have formed the centerpiece of monthly briefings with state governmental officials concerning economic trends and their implications.

North Carolina is among the states with the fastest growing Spanish-speaking population. During PY2004, LMID will explore methods for best reaching this population in order to provide meaningful and appropriate labor market and employment related information. A proposed plan of action and priorities for services and products will be developed during this period, based upon consultation with our customers and drawing upon the experiences of experts in the bilingual presentation of information, particularly to populations with limited reading proficiency in their native language or in English.

5) Maintain and enhance electronic state workforce information delivery systems (166,902)

North Carolina LMID will continue to deliver workforce information through a variety of internet-based applications designed to respond to the expressed needs and preferences of workforce customers. Primary mechanisms for this delivery will consist of WebSARAS, LMID's website on the ESC portal and other associated applications.

All members of the workforce community, and especially those engaged in activities and services at local levels, need access to information that is provided in a manner that is both timely and tailored to the specific environments within which they operate. This is a need which has been repeatedly expressed by LMID's workforce customers in our surveys, discussions and consultations with them. To address this need, LMID will undertake development of a RSS web-based system which will enable customers to have

delivery of information and data pertinent to their individually specified areas on interest. This technology will enable the delivery of labor market information ‘news alerts’ and bulletins to state and local WDB staff, so that they may be able to incorporate updated information into their information dissemination systems (e.g., websites, e-newsletters) in a timely and efficient manner. This prototype selective dissemination of information system will be available in test phase in Spring, 2005.

During this program year, LMID will coordinate an extensive review with customers focusing on existing applications and documents in order to determine the feasibility of their continuance, enhancement, or elimination. This review will be targeted at users in the workforce and economic development communities, and will guide the development and design of new applications and services.

In PY 2004, LMID will continue to expand its mapping capability and further incorporate tools to facilitate spatial analyses of data. LMID will implement applications that present employment and earnings data using temporal and graphical co-ordinate presentation. This enhanced data presentation and analysis capability is in response to articulated consumer demand for greater depth of coverage of earnings and employment data using wage records. These applications will enable data analysis that is both more extensive in coverage and more localized in focus.

6) Support state workforce information training activities (100,384)

Almost since the inception of the Workforce Investment System in North Carolina, LMID has maintained close linkage with many of the key elements of the workforce system, including the members and staff of local workforce development boards areas, JobLink Career Centers, Employment Security Commission (ESC) local offices, state and local planners and economic developers, WIA partner agencies, and members of the business community.

Many of these system members have expressed a need for increased familiarity with the fundamentals of labor market information, the characteristics of labor market data, and the appropriate (and inappropriate) uses of such information. During PY 2004, LMID will undertake several training initiatives and approaches designed to increase the capacity of workforce professionals to more effectively understand the fundamentals of labor market information and to apply insights gained from this enhanced understanding to addressing local customer needs.

During PY2004, LMID will offer an “LMI Forum” targeted at local area JobLink board members and staff, economic developers and media representatives. This Forum will consist of a one or two-day overview of LMI data and their applications, presented in a series of plenary sessions, workshops and breakout sessions. The focus of the workshop will be to provide a basic familiarity with labor market information and its potential applications. Attention will also be given to updates on available and planned LMID products and services.

LMID will also provide higher-level, more intensive LMI training modules that will be offered on a semi-annual basis. These training sessions will be aimed at providing opportunities for JobLink and local area workforce development board staff to become proficient in the use of labor market information and to equip them to become local liaisons providing a link between themselves, their customers, and LMID. These modules will be offered by LMID in conjunction with the Workforce Development Training Institute. Opportunities for participants to obtain certification as a ‘local LMI resource person’ will be explored.

Staff of the LMID’s Outreach and Training Team will also continue to work jointly with the various customer groups to develop training material which is targeted to meet specific customer needs. Training will include a brief overview of available LMI data, collection methods and on-line products and services. Sessions will focus on applying labor market information to assist the job seeker with job and career

choices and providing information to employers that can be used for business decisions, such as staffing and relocation. Sessions will range from one hour to day-long with hands-on workshops in computer labs, when appropriate.

Staff of the LMID will also continue to make presentations and conduct workshops at state and local conferences for workforce development professionals, WIA partner agencies, economic developers and the business community.

LMID will develop and implement the use of a customer feedback survey instrument and use such a tool to gather information on the effectiveness of training and presentations.

The LMID will support continuous capacity building for Division staff. Staff will participate in training offered by the LMI Institute and other training facilities. In pursuit of continuous improvement for staff, LMID will investigate hiring professionals to provide instructions on such topics as technical and professional writing, graphics and public speaking. LMID management will support regular meetings of division staff for the purpose of reporting on recent training received, programmatic changes affecting data collection and analysis, conducting specialized training on statistical methods and presenting new and innovative customer self service tools being developed within ESC and in cooperation with WIA partner agencies.