

North Carolina
Workforce Information Core Products and Services
Annual Progress Report
July, 2004 – June, 2005

Introduction:

During Program Year 2004, the Labor Market Information Division (LMID) of North Carolina's Employment Security Commission (ESC) in cooperation and coordination with the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development initiated and continued development on key One-Stop Workforce Information core products and services designed to enhance access to and use of labor market information by present and potential customers in a timely, relevant and appropriate manner. Even though staff shortages in several key areas temporarily limited LMID's capacity to develop all products and services on proposed schedules, nonetheless PY 2004 was a year in which continued and increased collaboration and cooperation with North Carolina's workforce customers was evidenced through enhanced customer input, utilization of services and resources, and cooperative ventures designed to address the needs of the state's business and individual consumers. This past program year once again clearly demonstrated the added value that can be provided to consumers of labor market and workforce through the development of strengthened relationships with governmental, quasi-public and private components of the state's workforce system. The following principal activities were newly undertaken or continued during 2004 – 2005:

1) Populate ALMIS database with State data

During PY 2004, North Carolina continued to populate and maintain an ALMIS database as required for the State and Area Research Analysis System (SARAS), the internet version of SARAS known as WebSARAS, the North Carolina Navigator, the North Carolina Profile, the North Carolina State Training Accountability and Reporting System (NC STARS) and other state supported applications, including all core elements and associated look-up and crosswalk tables as defined in the ETA One-Stop Agreement. LMID staff continued to build historical data into the ALMIS database structure to allow time-series analysis, where appropriate. The database was updated as new data became available. The ALMIS database is the core repository of workforce-related data that forms the basis for LMID's provision of workforce information to its constituents. LMID provides access to ALMIS data through a state standard system, which ensures that all users (e.g., workforce planners, JobLink center staff and administrators, economic developers, state and local officials, employers and individual job seekers) have access to the most current and accurate information available. This approach obviates the need for local entities to develop or purchase duplicate systems or products to access this

information while at the same time it ensures the currency, accuracy and pertinence of the information that is provided.

North Carolina's LMI Division staff updated Occupational licensure information available through the ALMIS system. During PY 2004 LMID enhanced the usefulness of this information to users by adding URLs that link directly to the licensing or regulatory authority that governs each occupation. This enables the information seeker to directly access pertinent licensing or regulatory authority for each occupation and helps ensure that the latest information is made available directly from the entity itself.

North Carolina LMID continued its membership and active participation in the ALMIS resource center.

2) Industry and occupational employment projections

The LMI Division completed the production of long-term 2002-2012 statewide and sub state projections, covering all Workforce Development Board (WDB) areas. Both statewide and WDB areas were placed on LMID's test site for final analysis prior to release: these were subsequently made available through LMID's public website. Short term projections covering 2003-2005 were completed and sent to Projections Central website for display. Data were gathered for the next round (2004-2006) of statewide short term projections. Brochures and templates were developed and prepared for WDB areas covering 2002-2012 long term projections. In addition, templates for posters presenting high growth/high demand and 'hot jobs' in WDB areas and statewide were also prepared.

Projections staff participated in web-based seminar training on the newly developed Skills-Based Projections System. Statewide long term (2002-2012) and short term (2003-2005) were submitted to be displayed on the skills based projections site. North Carolina continued active participation as a member of the Projections Managing Partnership.

North Carolina will continue to submit state occupational projections in accordance with the instructions issued by the Long-Term Projections Consortium and the MicroMatrix User's Group for placement on the ALMIS State Projections Internet site and the ACINet site to the extent permissible under state statute. North Carolina's projections staff continued their participation in the MicroMatrix User's Group.

3) Occupational and Career Information Products

Over the past year, LMID staff continued development and enhancement of customer-focused analytical tools designed to maximize access to, and effectiveness of, occupational information.

LMID continued active participation in the Local Employment Dynamics program. Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI's) were made available to workforce customers through links provided on LMID's webpage. Staff provided quarterly submission of employer and wage data and continued review of QWI's for North Carolina, the state's WDBs and 100 counties. Internal issues affecting data quality were resolved. Staff participated in the LED partnership by attending meetings and enrolling in various LED-related listservs. North Carolina was selected as a pilot state for the LED mapping project, a cooperative venture involving LMID, Durham County WDB, the State Department of Transportation, and US Census Bureau. This innovative project will initially enable tracking of commuting patterns for the workforce located in the Durham WDB, and will ultimately allow for expansion of mapping capability of LED and related data statewide at sub-county levels down the census tract or block level in many instances.

LMID utilized a variety of electronic tools to provide information to its customers. Enhancements to WebSARAS, available on the Internet at www.websaras.org, were completed. An Internet-based county profile "pocket card" was created to allow customers more current access to key local data (www.ncesc.com under Labor Market Information/County Profile). Design and development work has been completed on an Internet-based mapping application (currently in beta testing phase), and an enhanced Consumer Guide. This Guide is in production under the local information section of WebSARAS, in the North Carolina Navigator, and in NC STARS. Workforce in Depth, a product enabling presentation of an array of labor market, fiscal and demographic data at the county level, was updated and expanded in its coverage during this program year. In addition, the North Carolina Navigator, another Internet application, continued to be used to disseminate labor market information and career resource information to users nationwide. Updated data elements and reports were added to the LMI section of the ESC site including: Announced Business Closings and Layoffs; Insight: North Carolina's Labor and Economic Outlook; LMID's monthly compendium of workforce conditions and trends at state and regional levels, NC Today, was expanded in coverage and made available to customers on the internet. The ESC web site containing these elements may be accessed at www.ncesc.com.

Over the course of the program year, LMID focused on the delivery of workforce information through a variety of formats designed to be optimally responsive to information users' requirements. Internet access was enhanced for LMI data through WebSaras, NC Navigator, NC Profile and ESC's website.

Existing workforce-related data sets were enhanced through supplementation with administrative records and incorporation of ongoing research results. LMID developed its Geographic Information System (GIS) technology capabilities for improved spatial analyses. In addition, 'New Hires' data was incorporated into WebSaras in order to allow more detailed analysis of commuting patterns of new hiring as well as additional industrial and geographic patterns of employment.

4) Provide Information and support to workforce Investment Boards and other state information products and services

During the program year, LMID staff members were assigned to a specialized unit within the Division to work with the local workforce boards, their staff, and staff of the Joblink Career Centers. Members of this Outreach and Training Team regularly attended local workforce board meetings, made presentations to the board, and conducted training sessions for Joblink Career Center staff. Presentations and training sessions covered a variety of topics, such as current economic and business conditions, productivity studies, and state and area demographic trends. Case studies were developed for use in training sessions to help the user better understand the practical applications of available labor market information. Special requests for information were addressed as they were received. Staff were able to assist several workforce boards with information needed for grant applications and strategic planning. All Local Area Workforce Boards have been visited during the program year.

LMID, in cooperation with the Commission on Workforce Development, sponsored a series of three workshops for consumers of workforce information. Intended audiences ranged from representatives of state workforce-related agencies, local workforce service providers, and member of the media. These workshops, using the resources of the LMI Institute, were overall favorably evaluated by participants. The insights gained from these workshops will guide the delivery of workshop training in PY 2005.

Over the past year, LMID staff provided labor market information through a variety of media to numerous state and local agencies. Information including jobs openings, applicants available, occupational wage information and commuting patterns have been made available through both printed and electronic media. In addition, the SARAS system and WebSARAS continue to provide information for a variety of geographic areas, including planning regions, WIA local areas, metropolitan statistical areas and other sub-state areas, as well as statewide reports.

In response to numerous requests, reports on the availability and qualifications of the local workforce were prepared for a number of state, county and metropolitan areas in the past six months. Ad hoc reports detailing available labor supply, as well as occupational, wage and demographic data, were prepared for economic and industrial developers across the state. In-depth reports related to the local area workforce, including the availability of skilled workers in a 25-mile radius, were prepared for a variety of users including consulting firms, state agencies, economic development offices, city and county planning departments, private sector employers and educational institutions statewide. LMID has utilized data from the State's Common Follow-up System (CFS) to conduct studies assessing the utilization of federal and state-supported education and training providers, including an examination of user movement between and among these service providers.

Over the course of the past year, LMID has also worked to establish and strengthen linkages with foundation and university-based researchers to investigate occupational issues and trends influencing the dynamics of local and regional labor markets and their impacts on the workforce development system. LMID was an active lead participant in several workforce initiatives focusing on displaced workers and development needs that were undertaken by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center. The Division continued its collaboration in research efforts with such entities as the Cecil Sheps Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Center for Competitive Economics at the Kenan-Flagler Business School of the University, the UNC Center for Ageing and several local WDB projects focusing on economic cluster analyses, compensation policies, and workforce characteristics.

LMID provided information, including data compilations, analyses and interpretation to support workforce and economic development activities throughout the state. Among the analyses provided were those related to workforce availability (i.e., estimates of active applicants, claimants and dislocated workers); profiles of labor force composition and characteristics, and explorations and decomposition of industrial configurations. Included in these efforts were contributions leading to the successful recruitment of such companies as Dell and Credit Suisse, other industries in areas as diverse as marine trades and pharmaceutical manufacturing; projects related to the development of information resources regarding special workforce populations including veterans, college graduates and ethnic minorities; and assistance with locating, understanding and using labor market information resources.

LMID actively supported the development of the combined Wagner-Peyser/WIA two year plan by providing information and assistance with the development of the Labor Market and Economic Analysis section of the report, as well as providing information concerning the delivery of labor market services in JobLink and local ESC offices.

LMID staff also participated in a variety of local, state and national workshops, seminars and conferences hosted by BLS, ETA and various state workforce, economic development and research organizations. As in prior years, LMID was an active participant in the Labor Market Directors' Committee of NASWA during PY 2004.

5) Electronic Workforce Information Delivery System

As noted in section 3 above, LMID utilizes WebSARAS data delivery system as the prime vehicle for delivery of ALMIS data. In addition to regular updates of data to be provided to all customers seeking workforce-related information through this system, LMID relies on electronic distribution as its primary means of publication. This cost effective mechanism allows LMID to reach a considerably wider scope of users, in greater numbers, than would be the case through reliance on print publication as a major means of dissemination. All reports that are available to the public in print format are also available through electronic access on the LMID website.

During PY 2004, LMID convened an internal group to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of its website, including attractiveness and ease of use. This study group forms the basis for planned activity in PY 2005, in which LMID will convene focus groups of actual and potential users to recommend changes to the website.

Section 3 also has outlined the principal activities related to the introduction of new electronically delivered workforce information tools and enhancements to existing products. Initial data estimates indicate that there were 74,362 hits on LMID's website during PY 2004. These numbers are currently being recomputed and corrected figures will be provided as necessary.

6) Support State workforce information training activities

In PY 2004, numerous training activities were provided by LMID staff to workforce community and related audiences. These included presentation at major workforce conferences and professional organizations, including the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development Annual Conference; North Carolina Association on Aging Annual Conference; Research Triangle Regional Economic Development Partnership; North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center and local and regional meetings of WDBs across the state.

During the program year, staff of the LMI Division attended local, state and national training sessions and workshops to enhance their knowledge and expertise in such areas as methodology and statistics, economics, computer programming and analysis, workforce development, desktop publishing, web design and other related skills necessary to the development and dissemination of LMI products. Employees have participated in a variety of local, state and federal seminars and conferences designed to broaden their knowledge and provide opportunities to interact with customers and peers. Examples of these workshops included ALMIS, LMI Forum, BLS and ETA. LMID is an active sponsor and member of the LMI Institute.

In addition to external training, a series of internal "sharing sessions" were conducted for all LMI Division staff. Staff of the Outreach and Training Team coordinated and scheduled these sessions in which senior staff of the division presented information about their program and explained the various data elements they collect and how they can be used to serve LMID's present and potential customers.

7) Customer Consultation and Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is periodically assessed through self administered surveys, customer focus groups, evaluations by participants in presentations and training sessions, and structured and informal feedback from customers. User surveys have been administered to customers attending the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development annual conference, asking respondents to rate the usefulness and adequacy of services provided. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate additional products, services or different means of dissemination that they would like to see LMID provide.

Respondents indicated a high level of overall satisfaction with LMID's products and services. Nonetheless, approximately one-fourth of respondents indicated a desire for more localized information and for additional training in the use and application of labor market information and data. These findings have guided the development of proposed activities and services for PY 2005.