

**Program Year 2006 One-Stop LMI Grant  
North Carolina Workforce Development Board  
and  
Employment Security Commission of North Carolina  
Labor Market Information Division  
Annual Progress Report**

**Background**

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) (SWDB) and the State's designated lead employment statistics agency—the Labor Market Information Division (LMID) of the Employment Security Commission have jointly and collaboratively planned, developed and implemented the activities, services and products supported under this grant in order to address the needs of present and potential workforce customers throughout the State. In doing so, particular emphasis has been placed on consultation, team planning, and representation of key elements of the workforce community in an effort to ensure that these efforts are 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 developed under this program are directed towards providing quality information for informed choices to all customers of the Workforce Information System. Primary Workforce Information System customer groups served grant include:

- 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

Activities performed under this grant were specifically tailored to the activities and planned customer outcomes as defined in the State's recently-approved WIA/Wagner-Peyser Two-Year Strategic Plan. As such, they respond to the vision and goals of that Plan by closely articulating its proposed activities and

services with those of the 2005-2007 Strategic Plan of the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development (Commission).

North Carolina's Commission on Workforce Development promulgated four goals as essential guideposts for its strategic plan, as represented in figure 1. These include:

- Achieving a higher level of workforce delivery system unification
- Strengthening the partnership with economic development through collaboration and resource sharing
- Establishing an accountability system that builds capacity of the Commission and local workforce development boards
- Providing policy and research support, including improving communication and accountability at the State and local levels to enhance the workforce development system through federal and State legislation.

The Labor Market Information delivery system and the resources, products and services it delivers, is an essential component of the State's workforce development system. Each of the activities, services and outlined here 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.

The products and services described below represent the combined efforts of key partners in North Carolina's workforce development system. As a result, they have been collaboratively designed, developed and implemented. Materials developed with support of this grant are the result of joint efforts between the Commission and LMID, through collaboration with LMID's external partners advisory board and, individual Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs), the regional WIRED partnership (Piedmont Triad), state and local economic development entities, and North Carolina's governmental executive leadership. These participants and stake-holders were 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 were incorporated into this plan as deemed feasible. In addition, the proposed activities enumerated below reflected 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 the Commission, local boards, and their partners and customers.

LMID and the Commission continued to place heavy emphasis on regular assessment of customers' information needs and the resources and services that are designed to address them. Both the Division and the Commission continued to conduct coordinated user assessments over the coming year, employing the foregoing techniques, as well as employing the 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.

Conducting a comprehensive economic assessment in cooperation with the state's executive leadership and focusing on economic development conditions and trends represented a new mandate to be performed under the terms of this grant. LMID staff worked closely with chief policy and program staff from the Governor's office and the North Carolina Department of Commerce to bring this to fruition. This activity built on our previous close relationships and enabled the development of new perspectives and insights that promise to lend further strength to our state's development efforts.

The unifying theme relating each of the activities carried out under the term of this grant 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.**

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 continued to populate and update existing tables in the ALMIS Database, 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 directed and prioritized the population of other tables in the database and the creation of State and area-specific tables. This feedback was be solicited though 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.

Updated features available using ALMIS database will included non-standard table format for presentation of LED data.

North Carolina updated and refined 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 previous years, 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 remains 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.**

During PY 2006, long term occupational projections for each of North Carolina's 24 local workforce investment board areas were completed and distributed in attractive formats that the LWIBs and their customers could easily download and reproduce. These projections covered the years 2004 - 2014.

Projections are widely 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 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, user 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 produced and disseminated projections-based information data in electronic and hard copy formats in ways that responded to consumer demand. These products were developed to reflect both statewide and individual workforce board area data, and emphasized 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 were disseminated in user-friendly formats tailored to the needs of specific audiences. These included posters, folders, brochures and other hard copy material for distribution in addition to electronic formats. In addition to statewide projections-related information, these materials also presented data specific to each workforce board area. Products providing projections information emulated those supported through the efforts of the ETA-funded Projections Workgroup 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.

Projections staff underwent thorough review of methodology employed in the process, in order to ensure that projections accurately reflected occupations in their actual demand patterns at both state and local areas. This resulted in products that proved more useful to consumers of these resources. Projections staff also worked closely with Workforce Commission research staff in the updating of the Commissions' strategic planning process.

## **2) Provide occupational and career information products for public use.**

During PY 2006, the North Carolina LMI Division continued to produce and disseminate customer focused occupational and career information products designed to 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 was a top priority with LMID during PY2006. Increased outreach efforts were 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.

As part of its mandate to produce comprehensive economic analyses closely tied to the needs of state government, LMID produced two analysis reports which focused on trends in workforce and labor markets during the prior six years (2001 – 2006). This activity produced the first such comprehensive analysis conducted within the state by the Division. One of these reports specifically focused on the state's seven economic development districts, and represented a new way of bringing labor market and workforce information from a hitherto unanalyzed perspective.

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 their 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 continued consultation with customers about the usefulness of the occupational information disseminated through the statewide workforce information system. Specifically dedicated outreach staff regularly consulted on an individualized 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 continued to 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. The cessation of federal funding for career information provided through SOICC has created new challenges for providing this important resource through the identification of alternative mechanisms. LMID's outreach and training staff also continue to provide training on labor market information for Career Development Facilitation (CDF), required for CDF certification.

LMID staff were directly involved in collaboration with the state's Commission on Workforce Development in the review and selection of workforce projects such as the National Governor's Association-sponsored Allied Health Sector Initiative and other regional sector initiatives. As part of this collaborative, LMID assumed the role of primary information provider to grant applicants and successful awardees.

In response to customer demand, LMID continued to conduct specialized surveys and regional studies, and find ways to incorporate existing data sources, that enabling economic developers and workforce planners and professionals to address local needs in a timely and responsive fashion. Examples of these surveys include assessments of workforce availability and skills as well as labor force benefits and

compensation costs in specific industry clusters (e.g., marine trades, allied health professions, religious sector employment) and for specific workforce and economic development planning areas. In conducting these activities, LMID continued to leverage resources from appropriate State and local entities in addition to pursuing support available from regional and national entities such as non-profit foundations and institutes.

### **3) Conduct comprehensive economic analysis report**

A new requirement of this year's Core Products and Services Grant mandated the LMID work with other state agencies and entities to analyze workforce and labor market conditions and trends within North Carolina. After close consultation with the Office of the Governor, the Department of Commerce, the Workforce Commission of North Carolina and the state's Economic Development Division, a joint decision was reached to fulfill this requirement by the publication of two separate yet integrated reports. The first of these reports analyzed workforce dynamics on a statewide basis, with particular attention to changes in industry and occupational characteristics as they related to regions within the state. The second report examined these trends relative to each of the state's seven economic development districts. Both of these reports took as their starting point the beginning of 2001, and continued analysis through the latest available data period. A multiplicity of data sources were employed, including (but not limited to) Census and BLS data, economic measures including income transfer data, taxation and revenue data, educational and health information and qualitative information sources. These reports will form the basis for subsequent analytical investigations to be carried out, again in consultation with workforce partners and other relevant state agencies and entities.

### **4) Ensure that workforce information and support required by State and local workforce investment boards are provided**

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 continued to build on its existing array of products and services in ways that will enhance and expand system support.

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

As in previous years, LMID Outreach and Training team members built upon and further developed customer relationships, in order to better identify local needs and to make boards more cognizant of available LMID resources. During Program Year 2006, members of the team continued 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 continued to be used in the development of customer-focused products and services.

In collaboration with the boards, staff developed compilations of key economic information tailored to the individual board areas. This information was provided to local boards on a regular basis and contributed to the development or refinement of on-line products. LMID staff also continued 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 continued to maintain its 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) perceive that this capability to respond in a rapid manner to information requests is both a highly valued and often used service provided by LMID. By supplementing the data and information available through electronic dissemination, LMID staff provide a critical value-added dimension to customers.

During the past year, LMID staff reviewed LMID data and established links for presentation of statewide workforce data. These data produced as part of a cooperative venture between the LMID and the US Census Bureau (i.e., LED) will substantially enriched the array of data available to planners, economic developers, businesses and policy makers at within North Carolina, at State, regional and local levels.

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

LMID continued to publish 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, were presented in hard copy and via the Internet. LMI continued to edit monthly reports associated with the state and national employment statistics releases. These reports have formed the centerpiece of monthly briefings with State governmental officials concerning economic trends and their implications.

As in previous years, LMID remains strongly committed to working with state, regional and local entities to provide the benefits of current research on areas of topical concern to customers. This was done both directly (through specially focused studies of central concern to workforce-related issues) as well as through the provision of formal and informal technical assistance and advice to consumers contemplating or conducting such activities themselves.

## **5) Maintain and enhance electronic State workforce information delivery systems**

North Carolina LMID continued 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 consisted of WebSARAS, LMID's website on the ESC portal and other associated applications. In addition, new products were developed and tested during PY2006 that promise to bring an enhanced level of responsiveness to our present and potential customers.

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, in PY2006 LMID implemented an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) web-based system which enabled customers to have delivery of information and data pertinent to their individually specified areas

on interest. RSS technology now enables 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.

In PY 2006, LMID will expanded its mapping capability and developed a prototype system for mapping that will become fully operational in the early months of calendar 2008. This resource enables end users to spatially map characteristics of the workforce within user-chosen radii, using the most current available data. This “map jobs” tool will respond to the often expressed need from potential employers and industrial recruiters concerning the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the potential workforce supply, their geographic dispersion, and their distance from prospective workplaces in both distance and commuting. The Division also continued to explore the feasibility of implementing a wage analysis tool that will incorporate demographic information from Division of Motor Vehicles license data along with administrative wage data from UI tax files. This wage analysis tool will enable data analyses that are both more extensive in coverage and more localized in focus.

## **6) Support State workforce information training activities**

Throughout the years of its support 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 board 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. Based on customer feedback and reactions, LMID substantially expanded the number of training opportunities available to North Carolina’s workforce information consumers in PY 2006. The Division continued to provide workshops that equipped the broad spectrum of present and potential users of workforce information with the capacity to access and use workforce information in the most pertinent and effective manner. LMID utilized the newly refurbished resources of the North Carolina’s Workforce Development Training Center and its personnel to coordinate these events.

LMID also continued to explore the feasibility of coordination with other in-State and regional entities such as universities, professional associations, and research centers in order to provide broader dissemination of workforce information and presentation of current workforce trends and dynamics. This involvement will assume the form of presentations at professional meetings, preparation of materials pertinent to the concerns of the hosting entity, and serving as a resource for background information utilizing labor market and workforce information.

In addition to the training workshops coordinated with the Workforce Development Training Center mentioned above, staff of the LMID’s Outreach and Training Team continued to work jointly with the various customer groups to develop training and materials which are targeted to meet specific customer needs. Such training often included a brief overview of available LMI data, collection methods and on-line products and services. Sessions focused 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 ranged from one hour to day-long with hands-on workshops in computer labs, when appropriate.

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



The LMID will support continuous capacity building for Division staff. Staff will participate in training offered by the LMI Institute and other training facilities. LMID will continue to support the LMI Institute and will publicize its offerings and services to other members of the State's workforce investment system. Because of LMID's support of the Institute through this grant, all workforce partners in the State are able to avail themselves of Institute-offered training at reduced rates. LMID staff will also maintain involvement in appropriate professional associations and activities in order to enhance their capability to serve the needs of the State's workforce community. 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.