

**Program Year 2005 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). This Plan promulgated the following four goals as essential guideposts:

- 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 resources proposed in this application for PY 2005 specifically addressed one or more of the above goals. These were 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 activities carried out over the program year are the fruits of planning by combined efforts of key partners in North Carolina's workforce development system. Materials developed with support of this grant were the result of joint efforts between the Commission and LMID: as a result, methods were identified to ensure that this collaborative relationship was appropriately highlighted on products and services developed with support from this grant. Progress toward implementing products and services proposed under this grant during the course of PY2005 was monitored through quarterly meetings of a Workforce Information Grant Advisory Committee. As in the past, this Committee consisted of representatives from North Carolina's Division of Employment and Training, JobLink centers, the Commission and LMID.

Prior to final drafting and submission of activity plans for PY 2005, a draft of the grant application and action plan was distributed to the State and local workforce development staff and State agency WIA staff for review and comment. 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 carried out under this grant reflect insights that were 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 place heavy emphasis on continual assessment of customers' information needs and the resources and services that are designed to address them. Each continued to conduct coordinated user assessments over the Program Year.

The unifying theme relating each of the activities undertaken during PY 2005 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. (\$65,000)

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 continued to populate and update existing tables in the ALMIS Database (version 2.3), 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 continuing to identify 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. QWI data was made available to users as an initial step in this process.

North Carolina updated the URL addresses for web accessible occupational licensure information to the ALMIS database occupational licensure tables. This followed upon the extensive updating effort that was undertaken previously by LMID, and allows 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 updated the appropriate tables as the data were received from the vendor. The Employer Database was made available with enhanced format capabilities, in order to enable ready identification of employers by location, industry and size.

Linkage to ALMIS data will be made accessible to customers through ESC's Job Connector on-line service, which will be rolled out in December, 2006.

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, has enabled 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. (\$143,000)

During PY 2005, long term statewide projections (2004-2014) were completed and submitted for review. In addition, short term occupational projections for each of the state's 24 workforce areas were produced and published. Publication of jobs in demand ("hot jobs") posters and brochures were distributed to each of the workforce board areas based on these projections. During the coming year, consultation with each of the boards concerning both short and long term projections will be continued.

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 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 was 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 responsive 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 was 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.

3) Provide occupational and career information products for public use. (\$102,000)

During PY 2005, the North Carolina LMI Division continued to produce and disseminate customer focused occupational and career information products aimed at addressing 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 remained a continuing high priority with LMID during PY2005. LMID staff were heavily involved in producing research in support of industry recruitment efforts by North Carolina's Department of Commerce. Such research included assessments of available skills and skills transferability pertinent to the needs of prospective relocating industries. In addition, LMID staff produced on-demand assessments of labor shed characteristics, commuting patterns, labor force information and training and resource availability in response to specific industry requests. LMID collaborated closely with the North Carolina's Division of Employment and Training in analyzing and presenting area-focused analyses on questions of particular concern to local planners and developers. LMID actively participated in interagency planning and research councils and task forces, such as those

focusing on needs of North Carolina's rural areas, economic development strategies, health care delivery systems and personnel, and entrepreneurship

Occupational and career information resources and services developed by LMID was 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 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 2005, LMID is undertook and completed a demonstration Job Demands Survey, that was conducted Workforce Board regions of the State that were selected by the Workforce Commission and LMID's interagency workforce advisory team. This survey was designed to respond to expressed demand from local workforce boards across the State for a measure of the immediate (i.e., less than 2-year) demand for occupations. The local areas participating in this demonstration received the survey results identifying the expected number of jobs by occupation for those industries that are growing and have an industrial wage above the State's average. In addition, the survey will identify positions that are difficult to fill, the reasons why some positions are difficult to fill, and the effects of not being able to fill positions.

Based on the findings and perceived utility of this demonstration job demands survey, other local workforce areas in the State have expressed a desire have LMID conduct similar studies in their areas. These will be funded by local funds, an example of successful leveraging based on the initial funding for the demonstration projects from this grant.

During PY 2005, LMID also conducted specialized surveys and regional studies to enable 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.

LMID staff developed an innovative product ("Show-It) that enables users to conduct industry and occupational clusters in areas (national, state, local) of interest to them. Using shift-share analysis, this product, (which is made available to free of charge to all workforce boards in the state) allows not only specification and clustering of industries of interest, but--for the first time—permits clustering of occupations to determine growth patterns and the relative contribution of local regional or national forces.

4) Ensure that workforce information and support required by State and local workforce investment boards are provided (\$110,247)

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 has 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 and workforce 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 continued 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.

As in previous years, LMID Outreach and Training team members built upon and further developed customer relationships, to better identify local needs and, likewise, to make boards and their staffs more cognizant of available LMID resources. During PY 2005, members of the team continued to work with staff of JobLink Career Centers (North Carolina One-Stop Centers) to determine their informational needs and to 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 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 continued to participate in the development, enhancement, implementation and training on products elsewhere in this document. LMID implemented a mechanism whereby local workforce board areas and JobLinks can develop their own electronic template newsletters which can be automatically updated with LMI and workforce information and data that they select for inclusion.

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 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) 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 PY2005, LMID expanded publication of Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI's) for State, local workforce board, county and metropolitan areas. During the past year, LMID staff have been reviewing LMID data and establishing links for presentation of statewide LMID data. 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

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, 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.

As noted earlier, LMID is committed to working with State, regional and local entities to provide the benefits of current research on areas of topical concern to customers. This will be 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. Examples of such efforts include collaboration with the Kerr-Tar and the Kenan Institute at the University of North Carolina in a regional economic capacity study; work with the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center on strategies for working with displaced workers; Tracking and outcome studies of displaced textile workers; and assistance offered to the regional WIRED initiative at Piedmont-Triad partnership.

5) Maintain and enhance electronic State workforce information delivery systems (\$295,000)

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.

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 PY2005 LMID introduced and implemented an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) web-based system that enables customers to have delivery of information and data pertinent to their individually specified areas on interest. RSS technology will make possible 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.

During this program year, LMID also continued its ongoing review with customers focusing on existing applications and documents in order to determine the feasibility of their continuance, enhancement, or elimination. These reviews were targeted at users in the workforce and economic development communities, and will guide the development and design of new resources, services and applications.

In PY 2005, LMID continued to expand its mapping capability and further incorporate tools to facilitate spatial analyses of data, by making their use available to end users. LMID implemented its wage analysis application that presents 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. This wage analysis tool will enable data analyses that are both more extensive in coverage and more localized in focus.

The provision of updated labor area information within boundaries to be determined by local users is a continual request from local area workforce customers. During PY 2005, LMID released an enhanced version of 'Workforce in Depth,' a resource that enables end-users to identify selected demographic and employment characteristics of the workforce resident in individual counties in the State. This upgraded

application allows multiple counties to be selected and data aggregated for purposes of comparison or for modeling specific geographic or programmatic areas, such as multi-county workforce board areas, community college districts, or economic development regions.

6) Support State workforce information training activities (\$185,000)

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. During PY 2005, LMID is offered 18 workshops providing an overview of the broad spectrum workforce information and equipping users with the capacity to access and use workforce information in the most pertinent and effective manner. LMID coordinated closely with North Carolina's Workforce Development Training Center personnel to coordinate many of these these events, while others were presented in venues such as conferences, workshops and seminars..

LMID also coordinated 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 included 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.

Staff of the LMID 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 supported continuous capacity building for Division staff. Staff participated in training offered by the LMI Institute and other training facilities. LMID continued to support the LMI Institute and publicized 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 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. LMID management supported 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.

