

**Program Year 2005 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) (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 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 Workforce Information System customer groups to be served under this 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

This proposal is 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, it responds 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).

Figure 1

North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development 2005 - 2007 Strategic Plan

MISSION

The mission of the North Carolina Commission on Workforce Development (Commission) is: To establish and guide a world-class workforce development system for NC. This system will be comprehensive, integrated, relevant and effective. It will produce well-educated, highly skilled workers who perform at high levels and work in economically viable enterprises that provide good jobs at good wages.

GOALS OBJECTIVES

1. To achieve a higher level of workforce delivery system unification.

- 1.1 Eliminate non-JobLink "stand alone" service delivery sites that are not necessary.
- 1.2 Implement a branding/marketing campaign for the JobLink system.
- 1.3 Build the capacity of the JobLink system to deliver a greater variety of services to employers.
- 1.4 Improve the statewide capability of the JobLink system to provide a continuum of workforce services to meet the needs of job seekers and employers.

2. To strengthen the partnership with economic development through collaboration and resource sharing.

- 2.1 Develop and implement cross-educational opportunities for state and local workforce development and economic development entities.
- 2.2 Align needs of economic development partners with workforce development partners and develop processes for economic growth in state, regional and local areas.
- 2.3 Provide products, tools and training resources for use in economic development and business retention services.
- 2.4 Provide resources and encouragement to educational institutions and other workforce partners that focus on workforce development goals and objectives in curriculum and service delivery.

3. To establish an accountability system that builds capacity of the Commission and local workforce development boards.

- 3.1 Define roles and relationships among the Commission, local boards and local elected officials.
- 3.2 Implement standards for local boards.
- 3.3 Apply best practices to assist boards and board staffs in capacity development.
- 3.4 Develop marketing and public awareness strategies for the Commission and local workforce boards.
- 3.5 Improve lines of communication between the Commission and local elected officials.

4. To provide 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.

- 4.1 Develop procedures for addressing present and future federal and state legislation.
- 4.2 Advocate and influence policy to benefit workforce policy outcomes.
- 4.3 Conduct research on workforce development topics to support the development of policy objectives.
- 4.4 Publish an annual workforce policy report.

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 resources proposed in this application for PY 2005 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 proposed products and services set forth in this application represent the combined efforts of key partners in North Carolina's workforce development system. As a result, they are collaboratively designed, developed and implemented. Materials developed with support of this grant are the result of joint efforts between the Commission and LMID: methods will be identified that will ensure that this collaborative relationship is appropriately highlighted on products and services developed with support from this grant. In order to monitor progress toward implementing products and services during the course of PY2005, quarterly meetings of a Workforce Information Grant Advisory Committee will be held. This Committee will consist of representatives from North Carolina's Division of Employment and Training, JobLink centers, the Commission and LMID.

This plan proposes an integrated set of activities that are designed to address workforce system needs that have been identified and articulated by key partners in the system. 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 stake-holders 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 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 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. (\$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 will continue 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.

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. (\$143,000)

During PY 2004, long term projections for each of North Carolina's local workforce investment board areas were completed. During PY2005, statewide short term occupational projections covering the years 2005-2007 will be developed.

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, 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 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 presenting projections information will emulate 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.

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.

North Carolina is experiencing a rapid growth in the immigration from the Spanish Speaking nations of Latin America. In order to address their needs, LMID is identifying resources and products that might readily be translated into Spanish, and will form an advisory committee to address technical and content issues related to the development of such materials in user-friendly formats during PY2005.

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

During PY 2005, 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 is a continuing priority with LMID during PY2005. 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 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 will continue consultation 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.

Based on customer feedback and recommendations, LMID is proposing to undertake a demonstration Job Demands Survey, to be conducted in two regions of the State selected by the Workforce Commission and LMID's interagency workforce advisory team. This survey will be 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 will receive the results of a survey that identifies 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.

It is anticipated that, based on the findings and perceived utility of this demonstration job demands survey, other local workforce areas in the State will wish to participate in the future, potentially using leveraged funds from local and State resources. When fully operational, these job demand surveys will be conducted on a bi-annual cycle, with a potential for local area surveys of employee training needs in high growth-high-demand occupations being conducted in the alternate years.

In response to customer demand, LMID will conduct specialized surveys and regional studies, and find ways to incorporate existing data sources, that will 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. In conducting these activities, LMID will seek to leverage resources from appropriate State and local resources in addition to potential support available from regional and national entities such as non-profit foundations and institutes.

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 will continue 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 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.

As in previous years, LMID Outreach and Training team members will build upon and further develop customer 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. Among these prospective products to be considered for development in PY 2005 is the creation of a user-driven electronic newsletter format that local entities such as JobLink Centers can use to tailor communications with their clientele.

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) 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 will expand 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. 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. 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 will continue 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.

North Carolina is among the states with the fastest growing Spanish-speaking population. During PY2005, 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.

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.

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

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, in PY2005 LMID proposes to implement an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) web-based system which will enable customers to have delivery of information and data pertinent to their individually specified areas on interest. RSS 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.

During this program year, LMID will continue 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 will be 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 will continue to expand its mapping capability and further incorporate tools to facilitate spatial analyses of data, by making their use available to end users. LMID will implement its wage analysis application that presents employment and earnings data using temporal and graphical coordinate 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 PY2005, LMID will develop on-line applications that will enable 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 time.

During PY 2004, 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. In this program year, LMID will upgrade this application so that multiple counties can 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.

LMID will also explore the feasibility of incorporating a business intelligence data analysis system that end users can employ to access and analyze file data in short order. This application will enable designated customers such as policy analysts, planners and researchers to address information queries of a relational nature in response to their information needs.

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 2004, LMID undertook prototype training workshops and forums 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. Based on customer feedback and reactions, LMID will substantially expand the number of training opportunities available to North Carolina’s workforce information consumers in PY 2005. LMID is proposing to offer approximately 15 workshops that will provide the broad spectrum of present and potential users of workforce information the capacity to access and use workforce information in the most pertinent and effective manner. LMID proposes to utilize the

resources of the North Carolina's Workforce Development Training Center personnel to coordinate these events.

LMID is also exploring 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 will also continue to work jointly with the various customer groups to develop training and materials which are targeted to meet specific customer needs. Such training may 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.

As noted earlier, LMID will develop a flexible survey instrument that will enable not only the collection of customer use/satisfaction information, but also has the capability to address specific user questions that customers may propose.

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.