

# *State of Washington*

## **PY 2004 Workforce Information Grant Plan**

### **A. Statewide Workforce Information System**

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW 50.30.050) designates the Employment Security Department (ESD) as the official source of Labor Market Information (LMI) in Washington State. The ESD accomplishes its tasks through the Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch (LMEA). LMEA is currently staffed with exemplary employees who develop and disseminate data and analysis at both the state and local levels. In addition to the Administrative Support Unit, LMEA is organized into five basic sections: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Programs; Economic and Policy Analysis; Agency Program Support; Information Delivery systems; and WorkFirst Program Support. These sections support the State's five-year plan for workforce investment by creating and disseminating LMEA products and services and by providing analyses to various customers. Out-stationed and central office staff economists accomplish this through a combination of electronic systems, publications, and in-person services. Specific information regarding these products and services to support workforce information systems are described in this plan.

- **The process used to ensure that the SWIB can exercise its responsibility for ensuring that state workforce information policy is responsive to the needs of the state and local workforce investment system.**

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Washington State's SWIB) is responsible for overseeing a statewide workforce development system. On June 30, 2004, the Board adopted the plan entitled "High Skills, High Wages: Washington's Strategic Plan for Workforce Development."

Included in the plan is the following vision: "A workforce development system that offers every Washingtonian access to high quality academic and occupational skills education throughout his or her lifetime, effective help to find work or training when unemployed, and the personalized assistance to make progress in the labor market, and Washington employers access to the skilled workforce they need."

In Washington State, labor market information (LMI) has been identified as a key component in creating a high skills, high wage workforce. Providing high-quality labor market information will enable programs to respond to changes in the workforce requirements and inform students and customers about current and future career opportunities. The Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch (LMEA) of the ESD is improving the quality of labor market information by working with partners and customers in order to shape products and services that best meet the needs of workforce development programs, partners, and participants.

The PY-04 plan will be submitted to the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) for their approval on September 13, 2004. The chairman of the WTECB

will work with LMEA and WTECB staff to approve the grant proposal, which will then be submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (ETA) for final approval. Some later changes to the approved plan may be submitted to ETA after LMEA and the WTECB jointly determine if such changes are required to fully meet the needs of the workforce system in Washington State.

- **How the statewide workforce information system supports the goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan for state and local workforce development.**

The Workforce Investment Act and Wagner-Peyser five-year operational plans were approved on July 1, 2003. Included in those plans was the One-Stop Career Development System called WorkSource. WorkSource "partners" provide labor market information and career planning services to jobseekers and businesses. This grant ensures that current and high quality labor market information is utilized to make informed decisions. The goal of "universal access" specified in the five-year plan is made possible through the Internet by using the award-winning Workforce Explorer website ([www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com)). Job seekers, employers, students, workforce development, and anyone else who has Internet access can utilize this resource 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This access is available at WorkSource offices, libraries, schools, and from home. For customers who cannot access the Internet, LMEA has a toll-free telephone number to a Labor Market Information Center (LMIC) that addresses customer questions and provides printed copies via mail of on-line and print publications.

- **How the grant activities are consistent with the strategic vision of the Governor and the SWIB.**

Activities carried out through this grant will be consistent with Governor Gary Locke's goals (Executive Order No. 99-02) and Washington State's unified plan for Workforce Development and the Workforce Investment Act. The 12 Workforce Development Councils finalized local plans as well. These local plans also include labor market information as an important part of the workforce system.

- **The strategy of the SWA and the SWIB for consulting with local workforce investment boards and stakeholders in the workforce investment system to determine customer needs for workforce information.**

The State Workforce Agency (ESD in Washington State) has a representative on each of the Local Workforce Investment Boards (Workforce Development Councils in Washington State). In addition, LMEA staff work closely with the WDCs on a variety of subjects, make presentations at their meetings, and work with WDC members and staff on a wide range of topics. These contacts will be developed into a more cohesive consultative strategy with the SWIB strategy as LMEA continues to work more closely with the SWIB throughout the year.

- **The broad strategic approach for workforce information delivery to principal customers.**

The broad strategic approach is to provide the highest quality labor market information through the most convenient access possible. Many customers are satisfied by accessing

electronic forms through the internet, while some customers prefer to have individual attention and others publications. This grant provides funds to meet the preferences of every customer.

The Workforce Explorer web site is the primary means of access for most customers for most types of labor market information. The web site includes a sophisticated query tool for the ALMIS data base and downloadable Excel spreadsheets for most types of data demanded by customers. In addition, the web site includes a comprehensive electronic career center, an occupation explorer, industry explorer, regional data profile, business center, electronic assessment tools, links from occupations to job openings on Washington's electronic labor exchange, and numerous topical articles and labor market analyses.

In addition, LMEA staff provide direct services to customers with complex information needs or regular inquiries about labor market information. Specific staff are assigned specific regular customers whenever appropriate. For example, our Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) supervisor provides direct service to the state Office of the Forecast Council because they most often have questions about QCEW data. Similarly, the Regional Labor Economists most often provide service to the local Workforce Development Councils, as they are experts in local labor markets.

- **How workforce information and services are delivered as core services to customers through the state's One-Stop service delivery system.**

In Washington State, the WorkSource centers make up the One-Stop service delivery system. The Workforce Explorer is Washington's principal delivery system for labor market data and analysis. The system is accessible to all WorkSource centers in all 12 of the State's Workforce Development Areas. To promote the use of Workforce Explorer, LMEA is using bookmarks and presentations at workshops, training sessions, conferences, and symposiums. In addition, LMEA publicizes the web link in all hard copy publications and, as requested, LMEA provides training for local staff on how to navigate and apply the systems. Where LMEA has stationed Regional Labor Economists in One-Stop WorkSource centers, they provide training and other information for One-Stop staff and customers.

- **A description of the customer consultation and satisfaction assessment method(s) to be used to collect and interpret customer satisfaction information and the principal customers to be consulted.**

Several approaches will be used to collect customer satisfaction information. The Workforce Explorer web site will include feedback ratings for every article to ensure that articles written for the Internet are meeting the needs of customers such as jobseekers, businesses, and economic development agencies. We will continue to seek an overall web-based survey to rate the Workforce Explorer's effectiveness. We also have plans to incorporate focus group results into design changes and improvements along with innovative tools. We are working with the Association of Washington Business to develop a business advisory group to help ensure our products and services meet the needs of businesses to the maximum extent possible.

- **A concise summary of customer satisfaction findings for the most recent survey of products and services and the effect those findings had on the planned products and services for PY 2004 including how the plan addresses inadequacies or gaps identified by users.**

In June of 2004 LMEA surveyed the Workforce Development Council directors to determine the level of satisfaction with our products and services. Nine out of twelve directors responded. The rating scale was 5=Very Satisfied, 4=Satisfied, 3=Neutral, 2=Dissatisfied, and 1=Very Dissatisfied. Three specific areas were assessed: paper/electronic products (3.9); access to services (4.6); and workforce explorer (4.0). an overall satisfaction rating of 4.3 was recorded. Specific feedback was also received and incorporated into our goals of providing useful information.

We have solicited feedback and ideas from conference participants; surveyed publication readers, and have asked for comments and feedback electronically.

Washington's LMEA recognizes the ongoing importance of customer satisfaction assessment and its role in improving current products and services, and in meeting new and emerging customer needs.

Some of the new methods for collecting feedback will include an opportunity for readers to evaluate each article on the Workforce Explorer; overall web-based survey, and focus group results.

- **Identify funds leveraged or matched from funding sources other than these grant funds and how these funds will enhance delivery of products and services as part of the state's workforce information system.**

Washington State law requires several labor market information products that enhance, extend, and elaborate on the products required from this grant. RCW 50.38.040 and RCW 50.38.050 mandate the following from LMEA on an annual basis:

- (1) Oversight and management of a statewide comprehensive labor market and occupational supply and demand information system, including development of a five-year employment forecast for state and labor market areas;
- (2) Produce local labor market information packages for the state's counties, including special studies and job impact analyses in support of state and local employment, training, education, and job creation programs, especially activities that prevent job loss, reduce unemployment, and create jobs;
- (3) Coordinate with the Office of Financial Management and the Office of the Forecast Council to improve employment estimates by enhancing data on corporate officers, improving business establishment listings, expanding sample for employment estimates, and developing business entry/exit analysis relevant to the generation of occupational and economic forecasts; and
- (4) In cooperation with the Office of Financial Management, produce long-term industry and occupational employment forecasts. These forecasts shall be consistent with the

official Economic And Revenue Forecast Council biennial economic and revenue forecasts.

The Department shall submit an annual report to the Legislature and the Governor that includes, but is not limited to:

- (1) Identification and analysis of industries in the United States, Washington State, and local labor markets with high levels of seasonal, cyclical, and structural unemployment;
- (2) The industries and local labor markets with plant closures and mass layoffs and the number of affected workers;
- (3) An analysis of the major causes of plant closures and mass lay-offs;
- (4) The number of dislocated workers and persons who have exhausted their unemployment benefits, classified by industry, occupation, and local labor markets;
- (5) The experience of the unemployed in their efforts to become reemployed. This should include research conducted on the continuous wage and benefit history;
- (6) Five-year industry and occupational employment projections; and
- (7) Annual and hourly average wage rates by industry and occupation.

For these purposes, LMEA receives funding from the state through two fund sources to provide this specified labor market information to customers. By leveraging these resources with funding under this grant, LMEA is able to provide Washington State labor market information customers with a higher level of service of improved quality than would be possible if we did not use these funds together with funds from the ETA One-Stop LMI grant in an integrated manner.

Funds from the Wagner-Peyser program are used to help support the dissemination of local labor market career and occupational information to jobseekers across the state. These funds help support the nine Regional labor Economists (RLEs) stationed at LMEA headquarters and throughout the state. This funding is combined with funds from this grant to ensure that local labor market information is distributed in a coordinated and complete manner. In addition, the activities of the Regional Labor Economists are, in some cases, supported by their primary customers, the WDCs. Some of the WDCs provide office space and other support for the RLEs for their area

Other grants and contracts that are leveraged with funds from this grant include the America's Career resource network (ACRN) grant from the WTECB. The WIA dislocated workers program supports the Washington State Job Vacancy and Benefits surveys, and the U.S. Census Bureau, through the Local Employment Household Dynamics (LEHD) program also provides data for a broad range of labor market information products and services.

## **B. Core Products and Services**

### ***State Workforce Agency Deliverables***

#### **1. Continue to populate the ALMIS Database with state data.**

##### ***Description of core product, service or other demand activity***

Washington State's Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch (LMEA) will continue to populate and maintain all ALMIS database tables designated as core tables in accordance with guidelines issued by the ALMIS Database Consortium. In addition to the designated core tables, occupational licensing tables such as LICENSE, LICAUTH will also be maintained and updated as well as coded to the Standard occupational Classification system (SOC). These data will be provided to the National Crosswalk Service Center for inclusion in America's Career Information Network upon their request.

This year, we will emphasize "local" information, putting a high priority on populating the core tables with multiple geographic levels, including state, county and workforce development areas. We will also work with data providers and customers to better understand their specific information needs to improve the data distribution process through the ALMIS database.

##### ***Customer support for product or service as indicated in customer satisfaction survey results or other consultations***

The primary electronic labor market information (LMI) system in Washington State is the [www.workforceexplorer.com](http://www.workforceexplorer.com) web site, called the Workforce Explorer. Washington led a multi-state consortium in the development of a common LMI web site design, culminating in the launch of the Workforce Explorer by the Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch (LMEA) of the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) in 2003. Customers report varying degrees levels of satisfaction with the Workforce Explorer internet website. LMEA uses their feedback to improve the site, its usability and content. LMEA staff will continue to update the ALMIS database, which ensures that the Workforce Explorer is always displaying the most current and most accurate information. This process seeks to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction. Over the period of this grant, we will collect user and provider feedback and self-reported levels of satisfaction on data items dealing with timeliness of data, quality of information, and amount of detail to help guide our ALMIS database activities. This assessment information also will be shared with data providers as well, for possible improvements which may lead to better uses of the information contained in the ALMIS database.

##### ***Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan***

In Washington's five-year plan, the products and services of LMEA that utilize data from the ALMIS database are an integral part of WIA implementation. The Workforce

Explorer is the principle data delivery system discussed in Washington's WIA plan as the source of core labor market information. The goal of "universal access" specified in the five-year plan is made possible through the Internet by using the Workforce Explorer website. Job seekers, employers, students, workforce development professionals, and anyone else who has Internet access can utilize this resource 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This access is available at WorkSource offices, libraries, schools, and from home. For customers who cannot access the Internet, LMEA has a toll-free telephone number to a Labor Market Information Center (LMIC) that addresses customer questions and provides printed copies via mail of on-line and print publications.

***Principal Customers***

Job seekers, employers, Workforce Development Councils, WorkSource staff, training providers, students, economic development councils, Chambers of Commerce, and other state and local government agencies all have products and services derived from the ALMIS database. Internally, it is used as a data warehouse, helping to improve the quality and consistency of delivering data to customers. Requests and feedback are monitored, and improvements are made to promote self-service of information through access to the ALMIS database.

***Projected outcome(s) and system impact(s)***

The principle outcome and primary impact will be universal access to current labor market information. Job seekers, students, employers, and workforce professionals will be able to apply current, accurate labor market information to make informed career decisions, job search efforts, and business plans. The ALMIS database will continue to be the central repository of data that our primary delivery systems rely on to meet existing and new customer needs.

***Planned milestones***

This work is expected to continue through program year 2005 with updates to the ALMIS database being made as soon as new data is available.

***Estimated costs (identify equipment purchases of \$5,000+ or more per unit cost)***

Estimated Cost: \$141,961

Other Funding Sources: \$90,395

## B. Core Products and Services

### 2. Produce and disseminate industry and occupational employment projections.

*Description of core product, service or other demand activity:*

LMEA will produce and distribute industry and occupational employment projections for Washington State and 12 local Workforce Development Areas (WDA). A NAICS based historical industry employment time series from January 1990 to June 2004 will be utilized for this project. NAICS based staffing patterns will also be constructed using confidentiality-screened information from the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) survey.

The standard software tools sponsored by the Projections Workgroup and Projections Managing Partnership have not been very useful to our state and have produced neither reliable industry projections nor occupational projections that satisfied our customer needs. A particular problem with these tools is that they are based on a “black box” approach that does not allow the level of flexibility we need to best serve our customers. Washington State will use the same methodology proposed by the Projections Workgroup and Managing Partnership, but implement the methodology internally using E-Views software and leading economic indicators from the Global Insights Company, rather than consortium software tools.

Long-term projections for the 2002 to 2012 period and the short-term projections for the 2004Q2 to 2006Q2 period will be produced for the state and all twelve sub-state (WDA) areas as required by ETA. In addition LMEA will produce the five-year industry and occupation projections mandated by Washington State legislation. In the preparation of the occupational projections LMEA will incorporate estimates of self-employment and use replacement rates from the Managing Partnership’s Micro Matrix software.

LMEA will populate the ALMIS database with both short term (2004Q2-2006Q2) and long term (2002-2012) industry and occupational projections and will submit the data for public dissemination following the procedures established by the Projections Workgroup and the Projections Managing Partnership. The short-term occupational projections will also be published in the state’s annual report, in the county profiles, and will be used to produce the official occupational “demand” and “decline” list for training benefit purposes.

LMEA also plans to send staff members involved in projections work to Projections Workgroup and Managing Partnership sponsored meetings and training sessions in order to utilize the latest methodology and share Washington’s expertise with other states.

***Customer support for product or service as indicated in customer satisfaction survey results or other consultations:***

Branch-wide efforts to solicit customer feedback indicate that industry and occupational projections are among the most sought after information that LMEA produces. The number of visitors to the Occupation Explorer tool on the Workforce Explorer has been greater than any other data tool on our website. In PY-2004, LMEA will continue to track projections data access on the web and solicit client feedback through direct contact and surveys of the WorkSource (One-Stop) Service centers. To insure that our efforts continue to be demand driven, LMEA will keep an inventory of all projections related presentations to different customer groups and will solicit feedback at every presentation. This feedback will be summarized and guide our projections-related product development and dissemination.

***Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan:***

LMEA will continue to support the state's five-year strategic plan, localized training benefits lists, and other state and local workforce information products. To support the state's five-year strategic plan, both industry and occupation projections will be made available to everyone in Washington State through our electronic delivery system, the Workforce Explorer. Paper copies of publications printed from the LMEA web site will be provided to those who cannot access the projections electronically. In addition, information will also be communicated to customers through the 1-800 telephone number of the Labor Market Information Center call center, other telephone requests, through formal presentations, and incorporated into occupational and career information products.

***Principal Customers:***

The main customer groups will include job seekers, employers, Workforce Development Councils, WorkSource center (One-Stop) staff, training providers, students, economic development councils, chambers of commerce, and other state and local government agencies.

***Projected outcome(s) and system impact(s):***

Past experience indicates that customers expect both accurate and timely industry and occupational employment projections. Thus, in PY 2004 industry and occupation projections will include several enhancements such as input-output tables for inter-industry relationship controls and integration of input-output tables. This will permit estimation of the employment impacts of major labor market disruptions such as plant closings or new plant openings. In addition, to improve our projections, LMEA utilizes national economic indicators from the Global Insights Company. LMEA will also use inputs from the State Forecast Council and the Office of Financial Management's forecasting staff. The projected outcomes and system impact will be the availability of critical information needed in the state for policy decisions, program administration, and curriculum development.

***Planned milestones:***

Refinement of NAICS based historical industry employment database - December 2004.  
Prepare NAICS based short-term and long-term industry projections - March 2005.

Prepare a screened NAICS based staffing pattern from OES survey data - April 2005.  
Prepare short, medium, and long term occupational projections - May 2005.  
Populate the ALMIS Database and the “Workforce Explorer” home page with state and area projections - June 2005.  
Transmit required projections to the Projections Workgroup for further public dissemination - June 2005.

***Estimated costs (identify equipment purchases of \$5,000+ or more per unit cost)***

Washington State law (RCW 50.38) requires five-year employment projections by industry and occupation, in addition to the two year and ten year projections required by this grant. For this purpose, LMEA receives funding from the state through ESD Client Placement Program (CPP) funds to provide this and other specified labor market information. By leveraging these resources with funding under this grant, LMEA is able to provide Washington labor market information customers with a higher level of service of enhanced quality that would be impossible if we did not use these funds in an integrated manner. This approach permits Washington to be among the national leaders in the development and dissemination of labor market information products.

Estimated Cost: \$109,277

Other Funding Sources: \$258,181

## B. Core Products and Services

### *State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB)/State Workforce Agency (SWA) Deliverables*

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

##### *Description of core product, service, or other demand activity:*

PY-04 funding will be used to produce and disseminate occupational and career information products, incorporating related information such as occupational projections, wages, benefits, and demand/decline occupations by Workforce Development Areas.

The occupational information will come from the Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) data and the ETA funded industry and occupational projections programs, benefits surveys, and Job Vacancy Surveys (JVS). LMEA will maintain links to the ETA-funded Occupational Information Network (O\*Net) system as a primary source for information on occupational requirements including typical tasks, knowledge, skills, abilities, work activities and work context. The benefits survey and JVS will be funded by other than ETA One-stop/LMI resources. All products will be SOC-based and demand driven in consultation with intended customers.

This core product benefits from a high degree of financial leverage in Washington State. Fund sources that support similar products include:

1. The state UI re-employment services (CPP) program supports the provision of local labor market information for job-seekers;
2. Local Workforce Development Areas
3. State law (RCW 50.38) provides for specific labor market information products that enhances those associated with this grant. These state-mandated products are funded through the Unemployment Compensation penalties and interest fund, and allocated by the state legislature.
4. Other grants and contracts that help support these and similar activities include the ACRN grant from the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB). The WIA dislocated workers program supports the Washington State Job Vacancy and Benefits surveys, and the US Census Bureau, through the Local Employment Household Dynamics (LEHD) program also supports the products and customers targeted by this core product.

Occupational and career information products, which will be supported in part through grant funds, and in part through other state and local fund sources, will include, but not be limited to:

1. A marketing brochure linking occupational projection and wage information to required training levels. The brochure will also provide information on how to

- link to the Workforce Explorer for more career planning tools. (to be produced in spring and summer of each year).
2. An assessment of occupational supply/demand conditions for each occupation (with estimated employment over 10) in each Workforce Development Area, (beginning of the calendar year).
  3. A designated list of high demand, high wage occupations for each Workforce Development area, (in the summer of each year).
  4. Published Job Vacancy Survey results for the late fall and late spring surveys. There will be an extended survey sample for key industries identified collaboratively by LMEA and the local Workforce Development Councils.
  5. Published employee benefit survey on benefits offered to employees by industry, area, and firm size, (annually).
  6. A monthly targeted occupations report on the Workforce Explorer, (monthly).
  7. An annual report on the occupational outlook for the state and each of the 12 Workforce Development Areas, (for the state in spring, for areas beginning in December of 2004 and working through third calendar quarter of 2005).
  8. Current unemployment insurance claimant information by county, occupation, and industry, (produced weekly and monthly)

***Customer support for products or services as indicated in customer satisfaction survey results or other consultations:***

The indicated products will be demand driven, developed in consultation with intended customers. LMEA will consult with other state agencies, the community colleges, and the state Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) and will gather information through the Workforce Explorer to develop both electronic and hard copy products that meet customer needs.

***Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan:***

To support the state's five-year plan, LMEA will produce an extensive range of SOC based occupational and career information products, which will be supported by One-stop/LMI funds leveraged with several other fund sources.

LMEA has determined that several approaches are needed to disseminate industry and occupational information. Our primary means of dissemination will be the Workforce Explorer website, supplemented by the Occupations of the Unemployed website, special purpose lists such as the qualifying occupations for training benefits program, and electronic and hard copy reports such as the "Occupational Outlooks" that are produced for each of the twelve Workforce Development Areas.

The project outcome will be "universal access" to occupational and career information as specified in the State's Five-Year WIA Operations Plan and support to effective career decision making and more effective training program planning.

***Principal Customers:***

- \* **Job seekers**, distributed through mass layoffs in WorkSource centers and by individual requests.
- \* **Businesses**, who want to understand the skill set of the local workforce.
- \* **Workforce Development Councils**, who extensively use LMI on skills of workforce and available labor to create, implement, plan, and maintain programs.
- \* **WorkSource One-Stop Centers**, providing career guidance to job seekers.
- \* **Economic Development Councils**, to understand the characteristics of their local labor force and probable future labor force.
- \* **Chambers of Commerce**, use information on labor availability to attract and retain businesses.
- \* **Students**, principally high school, community college, four-year college and university students.
- \* **Other governmental organizations** for policy information and to improve services.

***Projected outcome(s) and system impact(s):***

The projected outcome will be universal access to occupational and career information as specified in the state's five-year plan. The primary labor market impact will be that customers in every customer group specified above will be able to make more informed career and occupational decisions based on LMI estimates, projections, and impartial analysis of occupational and career information.

***Planned milestones:***

Workforce Explorer enhancements will be continuous throughout the program year. New versions of the Workforce Explorer are expected as are new products and e-services. As new and better defined customer needs are identified, new occupational and career information products will be developed and presented on the Workforce Explorer. Other product completion dates are indicated with the specific products listed above.

***Estimated costs (identify equipment purchases of \$5,000 or more per unit cost)***

Estimated Cost: \$57,313

Other Funding Sources: \$458,779

## **B. Core Products and Services**

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

#### ***Description of core product, service, or other demand activity:***

In Washington State, central office staff, out-stationed Regional Labor Economists (RLEs) and the Workforce Explorer internet site will provide state and local area support to the state Workforce Investment Board (WTECB), local WIBs (Workforce Development Councils, WDCs) , including WDC planning, analysis, policy development, and program operations.

In PY 2004 the RLEs will be required, as in previous years, to devote a large share of their time in working directly with WIBs and local WorkSource centers in order to support local planning activities and meet local LMI needs. In addition, each regional economist will provide periodic economic briefings to the WDC members in order to keep them current on changes in local labor market conditions.

Since each area has its own distinct way of achieving its employment and workforce development goals, LMEA does not have a blanket strategy for meeting local needs. Each RLE will work with local planners and program administrators to identify their needs and provide the necessary information. The RLEs have the responsibility to know the local labor market and to be able to answer questions about it. The RLEs will participate in the preparation of industry employment estimates, monthly narrative analysis for the Labor Area Summaries publication on the Workforce Explorer, and the preparation of special subject and area reports as they are identified by local client needs. Their local efforts will be client driven.

Each RLE is expected to contribute to the preparation of “County Profiles” and at least one special research report during this program year. The regional economists will assist local WIBs in the maintenance of their occupational supply and demand list used for “Training Benefits” administration. They will also be available to speak to interested local groups on subjects related to the economy and the local employment situation.

(Note: The LMEA Branch currently has several vacant economist positions. Those positions are vacant because of an agency-wide hiring freeze. We expect that freeze to be lifted and additional economists hired in order to accomplish all the tasks indicated in this plan.)

#### ***Customer support for product or service as indicated in customer satisfaction survey results or other customer consultations:***

Since PY 2002, the LMEA Branch has been conducting Job Vacancy and Benefits surveys. Those surveys have been very popular with employers, job seekers and other

customers, and LMEA will continue to administer them twice per year. Electronic customer surveys will gather client feedback on these products. Previous customer surveys have also indicated a need for assistance from trainers to locate and interpret data, and the skills of economists for an analysis of the employment situation in the local area. As these services are provided, feedback will be gathered to determine how well these needs are being met.

***Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan:***

The indicated products and services will support WIA/Wagner-Peyser plans by providing the information as outlined in the five-year plans. Both central office staff and regional economists will develop data, prepare reports, and provide services to assist state and local staffs in planning and implementing WIA training and employment programs.

***Principal Customers:***

In addition to the state and local Workforce Development Council planners and administrators, WorkSource service center staff and clients, principal customers will include employers, students, job seekers, analysts, reporters, and economic development planners.

***Projected outcome(s) and system impact(s):***

The measurable outcome will be electronic reports, data and publications that address the specific workforce information needs of WIA planners, and other state and local LMI users. Training providers, students, and job seekers will have improved access to data-based decision making.

***Planned milestones:*** The LMI delivery and support work will continue throughout the year. Currently, all WorkSource centers have electronic access to the LMEA data delivery websites and have LMI publications and/or brochures in their resource areas. Special reports will be posted monthly on the Workforce Explorer and electronic feedback opportunities for customers will be provided. Special efforts will be made to make sure that the local data users have access to the most current and most accurate information developed by the branch.

***Estimated costs (identify equipment purchases of \$5,000 or more per unit cost)***

The activities of the Regional Labor Economists are, in some cases, supported by their primary customers, the WDCs. Some of the WDCs provide space and other support for the RLEs for their area.

Estimated Cost: \$137,968

Other Funding Sources: \$289,961

## B. Core Products and Services

### 5. Maintain and enhance electronic state workforce information delivery systems.

#### *Description of core product, service, or other demand activity:*

Washington State will continue to improve our award-winning Internet website, the Workforce Explorer. The Workforce Explorer delivers workforce information through an integrated internet web site with a usability-tested design, specific customer groups and tools, all integrated into a system that relies upon a query system attached to the ALMIS database. The Workforce Explorer is integrated into the state's WIA service delivery system through linkages with WorkSource centers, WDA homepages and other state agency websites as well as the state web site, Access Washington. The application will be hosted and maintained, with three upgrades to be implemented during the year.

#### *Customer support for product or service as indicated in customer satisfaction survey results or other consultations*

The Workforce Explorer will include three primary ways of collecting customer feedback. First, articles and narrative information products will include a "rating system" to allow us to identify most frequently read articles, and favorites based on user ratings. This will be integrated into the article itself, and also for quality improvement for new content.

Second, we will collect needs and satisfaction from a comprehensive user survey, and also from periodic survey questions placed on the website. Surveys will be targeted toward different customer groups, helping to focus on specific needs.

Additionally, partnerships with agency liaisons and customer representatives will be used to better identify customer needs. Systematically, groups will be asked for feedback and to participate in needs analysis and prototype evaluations.

#### *Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan*

The WorkForce Explorer web site will support the state's five-year strategic plan, by providing a wide range of labor market information products for the full range of WIA customers.

The outcome for the Workforce Explorer web site will be "universal access" to the widest possible extent of labor market information as specified in the state's five-year WIA operations plan and support to effective labor market decision making in career planning, job seeking, employer and other training program planning.

#### *Principal Customers*

Job seekers, employers, Workforce Development Councils, WorkSource staff, training providers, students, economic development councils, Chambers of Commerce and other state and local government agencies.

***Projected outcome(s) and system impact(s)***

The Workforce Explorer is a fully functional system that is used extensively by the Workforce Information System and the citizens of the state of Washington. The number of visits and feedback from customers accessing the system will be used to measure the amount of use and level of satisfaction. To complement the number of visits, targeted customer groups will be asked questions to help determine specific levels of satisfaction with the web site. This will be combined with other customer satisfaction data to provide a complete picture of the strengths and weaknesses of this electronic information delivery system. Throughout the year, enhancements to the Workforce Explorer, to its usability, and to the display of information will be driven by the feedback collected from users.

***Planned milestones***

The maintenance and improvements of this system will continue throughout the year. New versions will be deployed as the contractor and consortium of states overseeing the system develop various improvements. Needs and satisfaction measures will be collected, analyzed, and acted upon for customer groups.

***Estimated costs (identify equipment purchases of \$5,000+ or more per unit cost)***

We expect a combined cost of application hosting, application enhancements, and upgraded licenses and maintenance of software to cost about \$100,000.

Estimated Cost: \$242,022

Other Funding Sources: \$0

## B. Core Products and Services

### 6. Support state workforce information training activities.

#### *Description of core product, service, or other demand activity*

Washington State will use PY 2004 grant money for training of LMI professionals and to conduct training sessions for LMI users. For LMEA staff, training will be funded to upgrade computer and analysis skills, as well as communication techniques for delivering LMI through the WorkSource (One-Stop) service delivery system. In addition, LMEA plans to send staff to ALMIS sponsored training courses dealing with industry and occupational projections as well as courses dealing with area analysis skills. Additional software training courses will be scheduled locally, as they are needed for new and existing staff to enhance their proficiency and productivity.

Training and technical assistance for new LMI users will be provided, whenever possible, by LMEA staff working with locally based trainers and regional economists. In November 2004, LMEA will present an economic symposium for economists, planners, program staff, and other LMI data users. Much of the content will be driven by electronic delivery such as Workforce Explorer. As usual LMEA presenters will also highlight recent economic developments and promote the use of the Workforce Explorer.

The Workforce Explorer will include training snippets to enhance the usefulness of the website and aid customers in finding answers to questions. Navigation will be enhanced as well through frequently asked questions (FAQs) sections.

A *Jobs for the Sidewalk Economist* publication will be available for downloads and be utilized as the basic curriculum for training LMI users in application of information on Workforce Explorer. Our LMEA trainer will continue to promote the use of this curriculum to a wide variety of customers through training sessions, conferences, workshops, and events.

#### *Customer support for product or service as indicated in customer satisfaction survey results or other consultations*

Training content will be designed to meet the needs of customers. All training sessions will include customer survey forms. The feedback from these customers will help to determine the content of future symposium and training curricula. The recommendations from readers of publications such as *Jobs for the Sidewalk Economist* will be reviewed and incorporated into subsequent versions of the publications as appropriate.

#### *Support goals of the state's WIA/Wagner-Peyser Five-Year Strategic Plan*

This activity will support the WIA/Wagner-Peyser program by providing training to program delivery staff and assisting clients in applying labor market information to assist them in their career planning and job search activities.

***Principal Customers***

LMEA staff, WDC staff, One-Stop staff, employment counselors, and a broad range of public and private customers interested in accessing and using the labor market information produced by LMEA.

***Projected outcome(s) and system impact(s)***

The focus of the training effort will be to increase staff training, and understanding of workforce information and to assist customers in accessing, understanding and using labor market information. All training will be done in consultation with clients. Increased use of labor market information tools such as the Workforce Explorer and associated publications should be a measurable impact of this activity.

***Planned milestones***

The Symposium, which has been held annually since 1995, is held during the second quarter of PY 2004 while training is expected to occur in all quarters of the program year. The regional labor economists will provide technical assistance to the staff of the WDCs and WorkSource centers as the need for training is identified.

The *Jobs for the Sidewalk Economist* publication will have total distribution both electronically and in print of over 5,000 during PY 2004.

***Estimated costs (identify equipment purchases of \$5,000 or more per unit cost)***

*Estimated Cost:* \$63,255

*Other Funding Sources:* \$62,500

## **C. Consultation and Customer Satisfaction Assessment**

LMEA will utilize a variety of tools and approaches to assess the level of customer satisfaction with its labor market information products and services. Many of the approaches outlined in the Workforce Information Council publication, *Customer Satisfaction Made Easy* will be used to collect customer feedback. The Workforce Explorer web site will include feedback ratings for every article to ensure that articles written for the Internet are meeting the needs of customers such as jobseekers, businesses, and economic development agencies. We will continue to seek an overall web-based survey to rate the Workforce Explorer's effectiveness. We also have plans to incorporate focus group results into design changes and improvements along with innovative tools. We will form a Workforce Explorer user advisory group to improve the usability and usefulness of the system. We are also working with the Association of Washington Business to develop a business advisory group to help ensure our products and services meet the needs of businesses to the maximum extent possible.

The feedback from all these assessment approaches will be utilized in a continuous improvement process to fine tune our products and services to customer needs. Each manager within LMEA will be responsible for assessing the degree to which their products meet their customers' needs, and incrementally improving the products to address the demands of customers. In this way, over time, LMEA will become more and more demand driven.