



NW Income Indicators Web Site, Boon to Economic Development

Government decision makers, planners, and anyone interested in understanding local and regional economic trends will find a helping hand at a WSU Cooperative Extension Web site that delivers not just data, but user-tailored analysis and reports—on the spot.

The Web site was conceived and developed by Extension Economist Gary Smith who makes extensive and productive use of computers to analyze Bureau of Economic Analysis data for many counties in Washington by preparing detailed profiles of county economies.

It gives visitors instant access to data that could take many hours, if not days, for them to develop by other means. In addition, it includes software that performs analysis on the data selected by visitors and prints or downloads to their computers economic reports that might cost thousands of dollars to produce by traditional means.

“Public officials, planners, and economic development practitioners perpetually confront questions and issues that center on understanding the sources of growth and changing structure of their local economy,” Smith says. “The underlying purpose of this Web page is to assist them in describing and documenting changes in their local economy in a way that enables them to support business and community leaders in making sound and informed decisions.”

Smith says it is important to replace opinions about what makes local economies work with solid data and sound analysis. His Northwest Income Indicators Project site lets visitors create graphic trends analysis of local economic indicators, generate shift-share analysis of local employment growth, and download customized tabulations of economic data for the regions and counties of the Northwest compiled by Regional Economic Information System (REIS) of the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). The annual data spans 30 years—from 1969 to 1998.

Unsolicited responses from users have been highly positive. “The information on the web site has been extremely useful,” said Neil Meyer, University of Idaho extension economist. Last spring, Meyer introduced 160 people to the WSU site as part of a series of workshops he conducted. Jon Cecil, Jerome, Idaho, city administrator, said he visited the site “and found a wealth of information that I can use to help educate local decision makers and general public about past, current, and future trends on a wealth of information.”

“A really spectacular site. A tremendous tool for all of us in economic development,” wrote James Armstrong of the Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce. Dana Peck, director of Resource Development for Klickitat County, says he frequently uses the Web service. “Your site actually prompted me to contact some census data user folks for the first time in years.” Dodd Snodgrass, economic development planner, Clearwater Economic Development Association, wrote, “You’ve created a powerful tool.”

Kathleen Miller, coordinator, WSU Learning Center, Wenatchee, said Smith’s Web page is “a useful tool to keep economic development decision makers current. They can publish planning documents off the web, tailored to their counties.” She said this will lead to better utilization of data, enhanced understanding, development of better economic development strategies, improved economic development decisions, and increased awareness and appreciation of WSU Cooperative Extension. Al Kowitz, WSU Stevens County Cooperative Extension, used the Web site to prepare for a presentation to local business and agency executives on telecommunications and rural economic development. “I was able to use income data and charts from your page that added substance and impact to the presentation,” Kowitz wrote Smith.

Visitors to the web site begin by clicking on the name of the state of their choice—Washington, Oregon, Idaho, or Montana. When they click on one of the states, they are taken to a list and description of nine on-line products:

- Graphic Trend Analysis of Local Area Economic Indicators, 1969–98. This web page generated graphic analyses and summary reports of local area growth and change. It compares local, state, and national economic trends that focus on the key indicators of population, personal income, per capita income, employment, industry earnings, and average earnings per job.
- Shift-Share Analysis of Employment Growth, 1969–98. This application of shift-share analysis will produce results that are valuable for diagnosing, describing, and building understanding of major differences between the industry pattern of employment growth locally and nationwide trends.
- Visitors may choose any of Washington’s 39 counties, select any time interval between 1969–98, and initiate a web-enabled program that generates shift-share results of local employment growth compared with the nation at large. The program will compile and output a tabular summary of shift-share results based on the options you choose, a tailored report on how the results may be interpreted, and a customized technical summary of how the results are derived.
- Selected Economic Indicators, 1969–98. These tables provide a one-page summary of BEA data for tracking the growth and performance of each region relative to the state and nation based on the following indicators: population, total personal income, per capital income, total employment, total earnings, and average earnings per job. Prepared by the author of this web site, these tables are derived from the personal income and employment data compiled by BEA.
- Comparative Economic Indicators, 1969–98. These tables compare the growth and relative standing of all counties and regions in terms of per capita income, population, total personal income, and employment.

- Personal Income by Major Source and Earnings by Industry. These data series are the cornerstone of the regional personal income accounts compiled by BEA.
- Full-Time and Part-Time Employment by Major Industry. County employment estimates are available at the one-digit (Division) level of detail based on Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) definitions. They measure the average annual number of full-time and part-time jobs. Each job that a person holds is weighted equally, thus BEA employment estimates represent a job count, not a people count. Also, BEA employment estimates are on a place-of-work basis, rather than place-of-residence.
- Transfer Payments. Transfer payments are a component of personal income representing payments by governments and businesses to individuals and nonprofit institutions. Unlike the other components of personal income which represent payments for services rendered, transfer payments are characterized as payments to individuals for which they have not “rendered current services.”
- BEARFACTS 1996–98. BEAR-FACTS (BEA Regional Facts) are one-page computer-generated narratives compiled and composed by BEA. They give a brief description of an area’s personal income, provide a breakdown of the major sources of personal income, and highlight the principal components of local area earnings by industry. BEARFACTS 1996–98 also report growth rates for selected income components over 1996–98. After visitors make a selection they are linked directly to BEAR-FACTS 1996-98 on the BEA web site.
- BEARFACTS 1987–98. BEAR-FACTS 1987–98 are akin to BEARFACTS 1996–98, but feature comparisons and average annual growth rates over the 10-year period—1987–98.

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