



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE  
FOR REGULATORY  
INNOVATION & ASSISTANCE

# Biennial Performance Report



**2021–2023**

## **Governor's Office for Regulatory Innovation and Assistance**

P.O. Box 43125 Olympia, WA 98504

[www.oria.wa.gov](http://www.oria.wa.gov)

800-917-0043 or 360-725-0628

To obtain this document in an alternate format, contact the  
Governor's Office for Regulatory Innovation and Assistance.

September 2023

# Table of Contents

<b>Director's Message</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Customer Service Efficiency .....	5
ORIA Innovation .....	6
<b>Information Center</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Service Success .....	8
Inquiries .....	8
Response and Attentiveness .....	9
<b>Regulatory Programs</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Permit Timeliness .....	11
Significant Legislative Rulemaking .....	12
Regulatory Fairness Act .....	13
<b>Social Media</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Social Media Branding .....	14
First Quarter Statistics .....	15
<b>Small Business</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Small Business Liaison Team .....	16
<a href="http://www.business.wa.gov">www.business.wa.gov</a> .....	16
Small Business Guide .....	18
Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops .....	20
Reaching Small Business in Underserved Communities .....	20
Economic Business and Resiliency Newsletter .....	23
<b>Environmental Guidance and Assistance</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Permitting Advice and Guidance .....	26
ePermitting/JARPA Migration .....	26
Project Scoping .....	26
Fully Coordinated Permitting Process .....	27
Voluntary Cost Reimbursement Services .....	28
<b>Technology Services</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Web Redesign .....	29
Translation .....	30
Zendesk .....	30
<b>Final Thoughts</b> .....	<b>31</b>

## Director's Message

I am pleased to present the Office for Regulatory Innovation and Assistance (ORIA) 2021–23 Biennial Performance Report. This report provides an overview of our achievements, challenges, and future goals, reflecting our commitment to trust, integrity, and excellent customer service.

In the past two years, ORIA staff have continued to work hard to meet the needs of our customers and advance the interests of our state. Despite the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, our team has remained steadfast in its efforts to deliver first class service to the people and businesses of Washington state.

Like many other organizations, the pandemic caused many of our staff to rethink their participation in the workplace, resulting in significant turnover. By the spring of 2023 half of the ORIA workforce were new hires. We were fortunate to be able to hire experienced people with the same dedication to excellence in customer service and the outstanding problem-solving ability ORIA is known for.

This biennial performance report is different than most in that it celebrates our staff and introduces them to our customers and colleagues. I'm especially proud to present this report to the public as it honors those who work tirelessly to bring our values to life.

One of the highlights of this past year was the development of our strategic plan for the next four years. As part of this process, we refined our mission, vision and value statements to reflect our commitment to customer service. These can be found at the end of this report, but our vision statement bears repeating as it says what ORIA is all about:

***ORIA aspires to be the State's most customer-focused organization and the first place customers contact when needing assistance.***

You will find that every one of us at ORIA works hard to achieve this vision for the benefit of the citizens of Washington state. We are confident our strategic direction will deliver value for years to come.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report and learn about our organization. All of us at ORIA value your trust and support.



**Dan McConnon**  
**Director**

Dan McConnon has served as the Director of ORIA since his appointment in 2021. He has over 30 years of executive experience in state government and higher education. Dan has led numerous statewide projects including transitioning the state's vocational institutes from the K-12 system to the two-year college system as technical colleges, creating the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, establishing the Office of Independent Investigations, and chairing the Washington Recovery Group after the COVID-19 Pandemic. Dan holds a doctorate in educational leadership from Gonzaga University, a Master of Business Administration and a master's degree in organizational development from Nova University, and a bachelor's degree in business administration from Eastern Oregon State University.

## Executive Summary



**Tami Johnson**  
**Executive Assistant**

Tami is an accomplished executive assistant with a proven track record providing top-tier administrative support to senior executives. With nearly 30 years in state government, she has honed an impressive array of administrative, communication and organizational skills that consistently enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of everyone at ORIA.

Tami has worked with senior executives at the Office of Financial Management, Results Washington and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. This experience gives her the ability to handle the most difficult problems effectively and with a smile. Tami's dedication to customer services makes her an excellent fit at ORIA.

In today's dynamic business landscape, small enterprises play a pivotal role driving economic growth. Over the course of the 2021–23 biennium, Washington businesses transitioned from the constraints of rigorous COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines into a fresh era characterized by hybrid work models, revitalized employee compensation packages and the escalation of consumer product prices due to inflation. Amidst these transformative shifts, the Office of Regulatory Innovation and Assistance (ORIA) remained unwavering in its dedication to supporting Washingtonians in matters pertaining to both business and the environment. To support their success and streamline their operations, ORIA specializes in offering tailored small business assistance, regulatory guidance, and permitting expertise.

### Customer Service Efficiency

At the core of ORIA's commitment to excellent customer service lies the efficient and effective Information Center (IC). Serving as the central hub for customer inquiries related to small business operations, permits, and regulatory matters, the IC acts as the first point of contact for customers seeking assistance.

Complex or specialized inquiries are seamlessly directed to subject matter experts within the organization, ensuring accurate, reliable responses and fostering customer confidence.

ORIA's small business consultants facilitate and manage the Small Business Liaison Team, Small Business Guide, Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops, and Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter. ORIA collaborates with 29 state agency representatives to develop outreach programs, solicit ideas for regulatory improvement and create new business assistance tools. The work of the small business consultants and partners ensures that ORIA strives to save businesses from unwarranted penalties, educate on best regulatory practices and share bottom line cost-saving programs.

## ORIA Innovation

The push for information from Washington citizens and businesses during the pandemic highlighted the need to improve ORIA's systems of record and assistance tools. This performance period saw ORIA migrate the ePermitting/JARPA (Joint Aquatic Resource Permit Application) website content to the ORIA website for improved visibility and ease of use

As the COVID-19 pandemic subsided, ORIA rebranded their web presence with a new logo and web design to raise brand awareness of their programs and services. Additionally, on-demand automatic translation has been added in eight languages to the ORIA-managed websites to increase overall accessibility. ORIA's IC prepared to migrate to a single unified customer service system called Zendesk. This new system will improve collaborative efforts between IC customer service agents, ORIA consultants and experts at sister agencies to dramatically improve customer service.

Lastly, ORIA has begun implementing its goal of increasing their social media presence by creating an array of social media platforms to bridge the gap between generations looking for ORIA provided information.

In a landscape where small businesses often grapple with regulatory complexities, ORIA stands as a beacon of support and guidance. By harnessing expertise, seamless communication and an unwavering commitment to customer satisfaction, ORIA paves the way for small businesses to thrive, innovate and contribute to the economy.



### **Rafael Fernandez Communications and Engagement Specialist**

Rafael Fernandez's primary role is to provide leadership for agency-wide efforts to raise awareness of the ORIA brand and service, and align organizational messaging with the agency's vision, mission, and values. Rafael served in the United States Army for over 20 years and has recently transitioned into local and state government work. Originally from New York City, Rafael has Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in leadership degrees from Trident University International. He has over 15 years' experience leading, managing, and directing organization-wide strategic planning processes, business services, project and program management, risk management, and employee relations. Rafael thoroughly enjoys working with the staff of ORIA and helping the organization achieve its overall goals and objectives.

## Information Center

The Information Center (IC) is the heart of ORIA. The IC is a free customer service center available by phone, text, chat and email. It is operated by a team of professionals who are passionate about providing an exceptional customer experience. The IC Team are knowledgeable, friendly, expert researchers who possess the ability to support the citizens of Washington state by connecting them with information, resources, programs and access to experts.



**Sonya Moore**  
**Customer Care Lead**

Sonya Moore serves as the Customer Care Lead at ORIA where she prides herself on providing personal attention to each customer's unique needs. Originally from Toledo, Ohio, Sonya is a self-motivated employee who believes herself to be a jack of all trades when it comes to lending customer support. She gained her experience through professionally regulated occupations, such as Escrow Officer, Limited Practice Officer, Notary Public, and as an Esthetician. Sonya's flexibility and customer-first mentality position her to best assist customers and meet the growing needs of ORIA's customers.



**Rachael Lindstedt**  
**Customer Care Associate**

Rachael Lindstedt serves as a Customer Care Associate at ORIA specializing in customer support through correspondence and friendliness. As the daughter of a U.S. Army veteran, Rachael is no stranger to a strong work ethic and moral values. Possessing a Bachelor of Science in business and IT management. Rachael has nearly completed her master's in data analytics from Western Governor's University. Every day Rachael brings a hard work mentality to serving the customers of ORIA while providing information and resources they need to successfully operate a small business in Washington state.

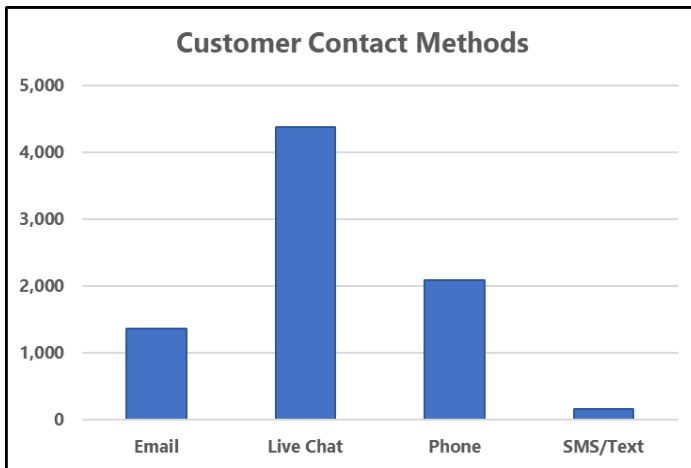


**Sonja Gissberg**  
**Customer Care Associate**

Providing a unique blend of small business experience, savviness and expertise, Sonja Gissberg serves as a Customer Care Associate at ORIA. Working at the heart of ORIA in the Information Center, Sonja is on the frontline of customer support. Every day she fields questions, comments, and concerns for customers of all kinds within the state of Washington and beyond. As a former small business owner of 8 years herself, Sonja thoroughly enjoys assisting customers to make it easier to conduct business in Washington

## Service Success

The IC is unique in that it is a one-stop customer service center providing information and assistance regarding regulations and requirements of multiple agencies. The team collaborates with ORIA’s small business and regulatory consultants and the Small Business Liaison Team. By leveraging this expertise and resources, the IC team can offer tailored solutions, current information regarding regulations and provide top-notch services to their clients.



**Figure 1**  
**Information Center Customer Contact Methods**



## Inquiries

Customers contact the IC through ORIA websites, referrals from state agencies, the Small Business Liaison Team and outreach events. Customers vary from citizens, businesses, and organizations to government agencies, municipalities, and partners. The IC received a total of 7,996 customer inquiries this reporting period.

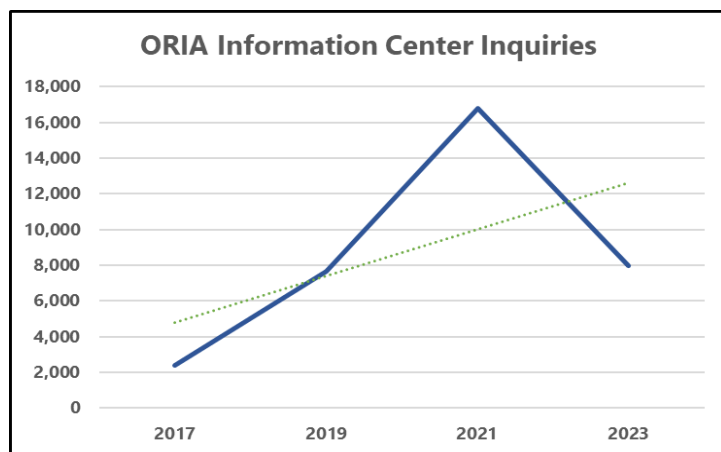
Among the contact methods, Live Chat emerges as the preferred choice for customers with a total of 4,377 inquiries. The robust use of Live Chat demonstrates its effectiveness meeting customer needs promptly and telephone calls with 2,091 inquiries, followed by 1,362 email inquiries, and 166 SMS/Text messaging inquiries.

Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown in percentages for each contact method. These figures collectively show the pivotal role the IC plays facilitating seamless communication and support for ORIA’s clients, this ultimately contributes to a more informed and satisfied customer base.



The 7,996 customer inquiries represent a decrease of 52.4% from the 2019–21 biennium (Figure 2). This decline was due to a combination of factors linked to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In early 2020, there was a significant spike in COVID-19 related inquiries as individuals and businesses sought information and guidance regarding the pandemic's effects on their operations. This influx of pandemic-related queries accounted for a substantial portion of overall customer inquiries during that period.



**Figure 2**  
**ORIA IC Inquiries 2017–2023**

By the middle of 2021, there was a decline in customer inquiries involving COVID-19 related concerns. With the removal of COVID-19 related restrictions and the gradual return to a semblance of normalcy, there was a decrease in the need for information related to pandemic impacts.

As businesses adapted to the new environment, fewer inquiries were directed towards pandemic-specific issues. While the number of inquiries dropped dramatically, they remained above pre-pandemic levels. In fact, the trendline in Figure 2 shows consistent growth in IC traffic from 2017 through 2023.

## Response and Attentiveness

During the 2021–23 biennium, ORIA addressed a wide range of inquiries. Nearly 7,000 inquiries pertained to business-related matters, 529 were related to environmental regulations and 473 attributed to other regulatory questions.

Most of these inquiries were efficiently resolved by the IC, often directly. For the remaining queries necessitating further investigation, the aim was to promptly link customers with the appropriate subject matter experts. Additionally, for questions that couldn't be immediately addressed, follow-up was conducted to ensure customer satisfaction with the assistance provided.

Of the 7,996 total inquiries, the top reasons customers contacted ORIA were focused on the following areas:

- Small Business Grants and Small Business Administration (SBA) Loans Essential Business Clarification
- Self-Employed Unemployment Assistance
- Workplace Rights, Workplace Safety and Health Regulations
- COVID-19 Mandatory Business Closures
- COVID-19 Landlord Rent Moratorium

Typical business questions the IC received included:

- What businesses are considered essential while the state is under COVID-19 restrictions?
- I have started a business recently and wanted to ensure it is listed as a veteran-owned business, but I am not sure what the process is. Could you assist?
- I own a company registered in Oregon and I am looking to hire an employee in Washington. How do I obtain an employer ID so that I can pay taxes in Washington?
- I had a business in the past that closed. I am starting my business back up again; will I use the old UBI number, or do I require a new one?

Typical environmental questions the IC received included:

- We are currently looking to do a project in Lake Forest Park wherein our scope of work would install 55 linear feet of concrete bulkhead behind the existing wood bulkhead. Would this require a review and approval by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers?
- Is a Washington state licensed Professional Engineer allowed to decommission monitoring wells?
- I am trying to apply for SEPA exemption with Jefferson County. Can you assist?
- Where do I send my completed JARPA form?
- What do I require to do for my employee regarding masking requirements and documentation?

Other typical questions the IC received included:

- Who would I contact about the egress and ingress permit?
- Our rotary club is looking to host a chili cookoff with vendors in a park. What are the licensing rules?
- I'm interested in purchasing a vehicle from an owner over the weekend and I want to know what's needed for a trip permit. Can I even get a trip permit for a vehicle that isn't registered in my name yet?

# Regulatory Programs

## Permit Timeliness

Businesses of all sizes in Washington state benefit from timely review and approval when applying for a business permit. Providing the public with better information about permit decisions can help with planning and decision-making for business owners, developers and project managers. Together with the state’s principal regulatory agencies, ORIA created the Permit Timeliness program to provide this information to the public.

- Department of Agriculture (WSDA)
- Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)
- Department of Ecology (ECY)
- Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW)
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Gambling Commission (WSGC)
- Department of Health (DOH)
- Department of Licensing (DOL)
- Department of Labor and Industries (L&I)
- Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB)
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Parks and Recreation Commission (PARKS)
- Department of Revenue (DOR)
- Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
- Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC)

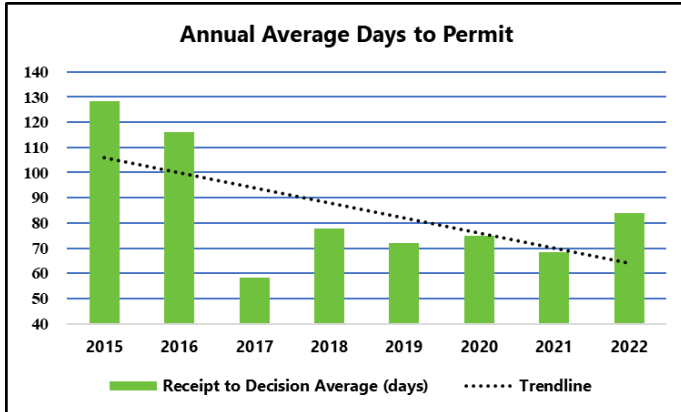
The goal of Permit Timeliness is to ensure permit performance data is accessible to citizens and businesses to improve timeliness, hold the government accountable and enhance public service. Permit Timeliness also helps overall project schedules and allocation of resources. Improving permit clarity, predictability and timeliness is the top priority of all permit timeliness agencies.

Each of the state’s major regulatory agencies report permit application and issue information to ORIA, who prepares and posts this performance data to the ORIA central repository at [data.wa.gov](http://data.wa.gov) by March 1 each year. The last full year of data was in 2022, which was posted on March 1, 2023.

**Figure 3**  
**Permit Timeliness Agencies**  
**(Outlined in ESS HB 2192 – 2014)**

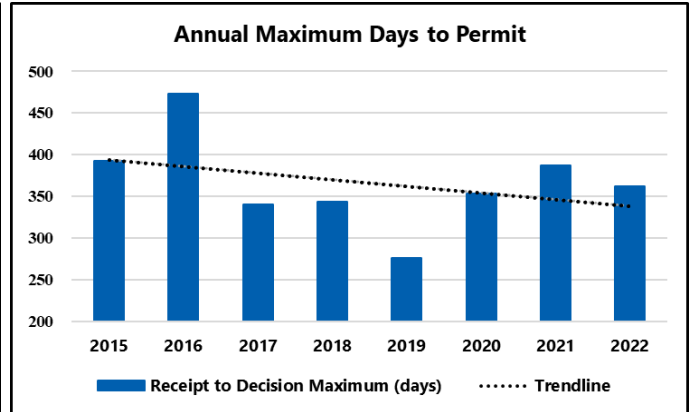
There are 14 agencies (Figure 3) who report each year on how much time it takes to receive these permits. However, reporting will look different from year to year. The changes come from the number of permits as well as the type of permits. State agencies reported performance data for more than 500,000 permit applications which are tracked every year for over 150 permit types.

Over the last eight years, the amount of time it takes to receive these permits has declined. This is good news for business owners. When the permit processing takes less time, businesses can make better fiscal decisions which positively impact their customers. When the permitting process is delayed, higher costs and loss of revenue can occur. Figures 4 and 5 depict the continuous downward trend of the annual average and maximum days it takes to complete a permit from submittal to approval.



**Figure 4**

**Annual Average Days to Permit 2015–2022**



**Figure 5**

**Maximum Days to Permit 2015–2022**

ORIA continues to compile and post raw performance data annually from agencies to the [ORIA central repository](https://data.wa.gov) hosted on [data.wa.gov](https://data.wa.gov).

## Significant Legislative Rulemaking

Significant Legislative Rulemaking (SLR) guides how regulating agencies adopt rules which impact regulatory programs. ORIA collects and prepares a report detailing the effects these rules have on the rulemaking process. SLR was established in response to the legislature’s desire to look at the costs and benefits of the new rules, determine alternatives to reduce costs, ensure new rules align with state and federal law, and develop an implementation, evaluation, and education plan ([RCW 34.05.328](https://leg.wa.gov/RCW/rcw3405328)). This data comes directly from 12 agencies listed in Figure 6.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Ecology (ECY)</li> <li>• Department of Health (DOH)</li> <li>• Department of Natural Resources (DNR)</li> <li>• Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)</li> <li>• Forest Practices Board</li> <li>• State Board of Health (SBOH)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW)</li> <li>• Department of Labor and Industries (L&amp;I)</li> <li>• Department of Revenue (DOR)</li> <li>• Employment Security Department (ESD)</li> <li>• Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC)</li> <li>• State Building Code Council (SBCC)</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

**Figure 6**

**Significant Legislative Rulemaking Agencies**

All participating agencies and stakeholders support three main goals within the SLR. The first is to report on their rulemaking process. The second is to make sure agencies are not duplicating rules and that rules are not contradicting one another. The third is making sure the rules are necessary, cost effective and minimizing the barriers of bureaucracy.

Reporting is done through an interactive reporting tool located on the ORIA SLR webpage. This facilitates review by businesses, environmental groups and labor organizations. This tool also makes it easier for agencies to submit information.

By January 31 of each even numbered year, ORIA collects the data, organizes it, and distributes the report to the governor, legislature, agencies, and stakeholders. This data is also accessible on the ORIA website. The most recent [SLR report](#) for 2020–21 was completed in 2022. The next report will be published January 31, 2024, and will report on the years 2022–2023.

## Regulatory Fairness Act

The Washington State Regulatory Fairness Act (RFA, “Act”) ([RCW 19.85](#)) was created to reduce the disproportionate costs of state regulations on small businesses. This creates more equality when comparing costs for small businesses to larger businesses. Under the RFA, state agencies are required to develop a Small Business Economic Impact Statement (SBEIS) if a proposed rule will result in more than “minor” costs to businesses. Exemptions are provided under the [Administrative Procedure Act](#). If a rule falls under an [exemption](#), an SBEIS is not required.

The [Legislature](#) gave ORIA the responsibility to “act as the central entity to collaborate with and provide support to state agencies” in complying with RFA requirements. To help with RFA compliance, ORIA provides guidance documents, checklists, FAQs, templates and other tools available on ORIA-based websites for agencies to use. ORIA continues to improve and add new tools periodically.

Along with these online resources, ORIA has State Master Contracts for SBEIS consultation. Agencies can contact ORIA to receive guidance on their specific SBEIS and receive tailor-made overviews of the Act. Another unique resource within ORIA are regular quarterly meetings with agency subject matter experts to share best practices. ORIA will continue to host this “community of practice” so they can grow and learn from each other.

In 2020, the Office of the Washington State Auditor (SAO) conducted a [performance audit](#) which revealed marked improvement in agency compliance with the SBEIS requirement. Additionally, agencies found the level of support ORIA provided to navigate the Act’s requirements to be helpful.

To view the tools and guidance documents to support better implementation of the Act, visit: [Regulatory Fairness Act Support](#).



**Elle Hirotaka**  
**Regulatory Program Specialist**

Elle Hirotaka is responsible for managing ORIA's regulatory programs including Permit Timeliness, Significant Legislative Rulemaking, and the Regulatory Fairness Act. Originally from Tumwater, WA, and the daughter of two public servants, Elle earned a Bachelor of Arts in communications from Whitworth University and has considerable experience with social media campaigns. Elle loves the overall uniqueness of ORIA in that the agency staff is small but have huge hearts. She takes considerable pride working for ORIA not just because of the work but also because of the people she gets to work with.



## Social Media

### Social Media Branding

Early in 2023, ORIA began implementing its goal to establish and grow multiple social media accounts. Through these accounts ORIA is working to connect to the community, bring more awareness to the brand and showcase the work of the agency and its partners.

Social media is a helpful tool to bridge the gap between generations that might be looking for the same information. For example, younger generations might be more inclined to use platforms such as [Instagram](#) or [Twitter](#). Whereas older generations might be more comfortable with [Facebook](#). ORIA has also had a [YouTube](#) channel for the past two years which provides videos on specific tools and resources for small businesses

ORIA is using these platforms to help diversify the client base. ORIA is also highlighting the Small Business Liaison Team which will allow the community to know them and take advantage of their resources.

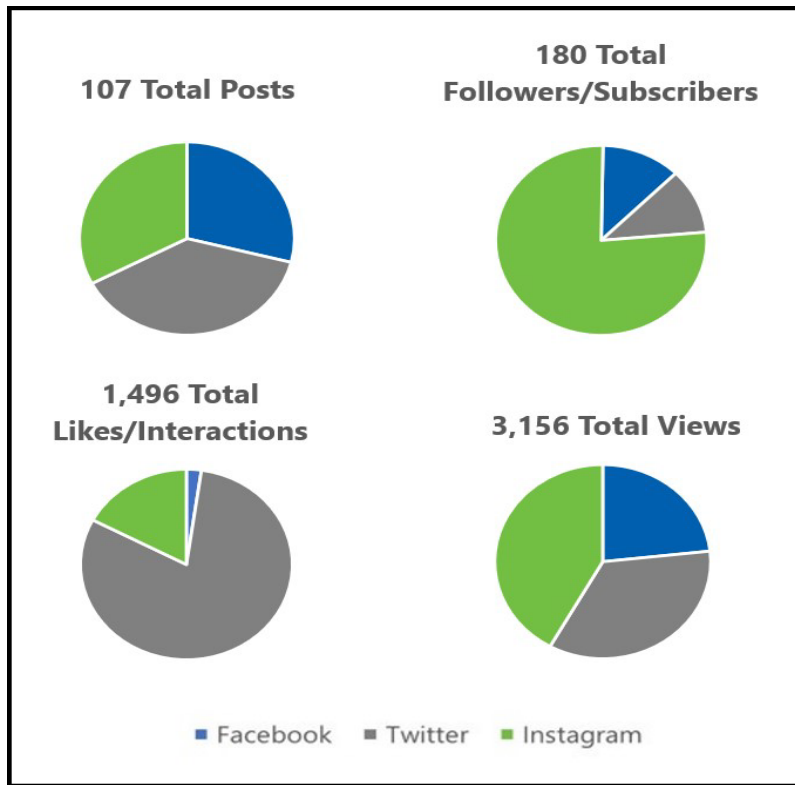
The social media accounts are placing an importance on people; specifically, ORIA's employees, partners, customers and small businesses. Through social media initiatives, ORIA is better positioned to serve the needs of all communities.

### First Quarter Statistics

Over the first quarter of operation, the data shows the growth of engagement for each platform. Twitter has the most interactions/likes. This shows the interest in the content posted and attraction of both followers and non-followers. ORIA's followers have also grown significantly with Instagram seeing most of the growth.

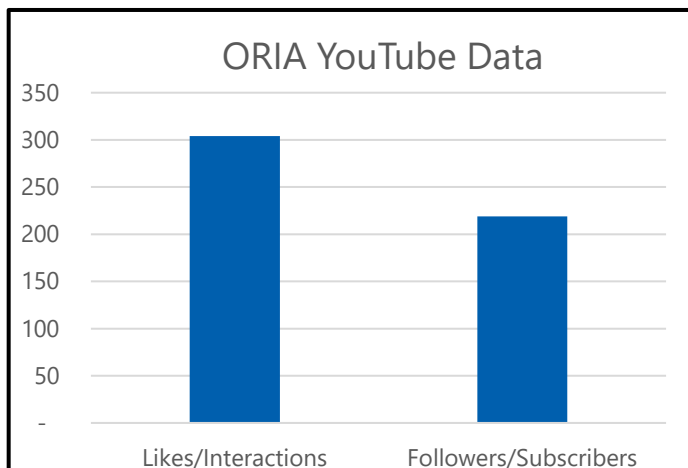
The data relating to the total number of views also indicate the engagement of the content posted with more than 3,000 views on the new platforms.

Views differ from interactions/likes because views show the reach ORIA’s content has on the viewers whereas the interactions/likes show an action is being taken to express how they feel about the content.



**Figure 7**  
**Social Media Data**

YouTube traffic has also grown over the last two years. Even with as few as eight posts, the number of subscribers is impressive.



**Figure 8**  
**YouTube Data**

Subscribing to a channel shows interest beyond a single video. It displays that users want to be informed when more videos are uploaded to return to the channel.

The likes on YouTube can come from subscribers but can also come from one-time users/watchers. Often, users are looking for a specific video which is why the number of likes on ORIA’s YouTube channel are significant as well.



## **Hugo Nicolas** **Small Business Consultant**

Hugo Nicolas serves as ORIA's Small Business Consultant and facilitates the Small Business Liaison Team. A respected leader within the small business community, Hugo strives to improve access to regulatory education and agency resources for small business owners across the state of Washington. Originally from Heroica Veracruz, Mexico and certified as a Search and Rescue professional, Hugo's love of helping small businesses grow was nurtured through seven years of prior banking experience helping small business owners achieve their start-up dreams. An individual who enjoys the outdoors and exploring new hiking locations, Hugo's professional fulfillment stems from helping business owners navigate the ever-changing business environment as he believes businesses can have a significant impact on the health of all communities and economies.

## **Small Business**

### **Small Business Liaison Team**

The Small Business Liaison Team (SBLT) is a partnership of 29 different state agency representatives; led by ORIA and created by Executive Order 12-01. The SBLT is made up of state agencies whose regulatory services and requirements impact small businesses. Their core mission is to engage with businesses and make it easier to do business in Washington state.

The SBLT helps small business owners navigate and understand the state's regulatory requirements. The SBLT agencies collaborate to develop outreach programs, solicit ideas for regulatory improvement and develop new business assistance tools. SBLT members strive to save businesses from unwarranted penalties, teach best regulatory practices, and share bottom line cost-saving programs. The SBLT is currently working to further develop their vision and mission to better align with current needs of Washington business owners.

### **[www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov)**

Most state agencies that support or regulate businesses provide customer support through a combination of in-person help desks, call centers or email, which can still leave customers requiring additional forms of assistance. To close this gap, the SBLT created [www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov) as a centralized location to help customers find regulatory requirements information, receive one-on-one assistance from SBLT members, and direct them to additional tools and resources which serve to simplify regulatory information and gather feedback from businesses.



The website provides the following SBLT-developed resources:

- Small Business Requirements and Resources Free Workshop page.
  - Virtual guides on how to start a business or grow your business.
  - Pre-recorded videos about how to start business or grow your business.
  - In person English, Spanish and Korean Business Requirements and Resources Workshop information.
  - Webinar notes and PowerPoint presentations.
- Directory of SBLT members.
- Washington State Small Business Guide (HTML and PDF) Road Map for Starting a Business.
- Business Loan Programs.
- Local, state, federal and nonprofit resources Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter

[www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov) is regularly updated to ensure relevance to business needs. The site is currently being updated with a fresh design focused on simplified, easy-to-follow content and improved usability. This will help business owners navigate their respective business ecosystems, receive localized business technical assistance and provide access in multiple languages.

Website traffic has continued to grow since ORIA re-released the website in 2018; by the end of FY 2023 it had 234,533 page views. This growth supports ORIA’s goal to provide information and tools to continually improve the customer experience and enhance small business operations in Washington state.



## Small Business Guide

The Washington State Small Business Guide (Guide) is a work product of the SBLT maintained by ORIA.

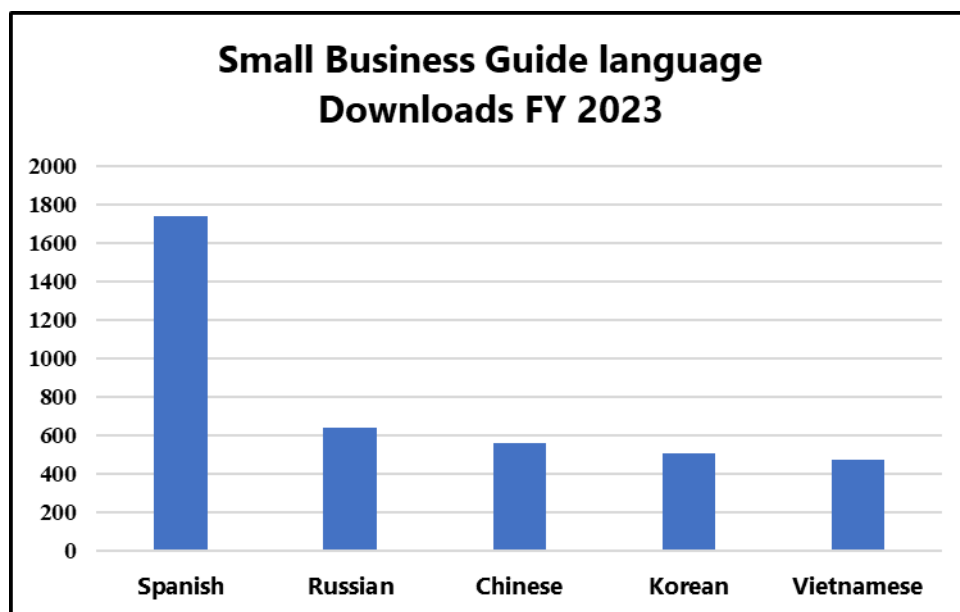
The Guide supplies helpful information, links to valuable resources, and outlines the steps for starting and operating a business. It includes sections to help plan, run, grow or close a business. Subject matter experts from the SBLT update the guide's English version through quarterly reviews and updates to reflect regulatory changes.

The Guide can be downloaded in PDF format. In addition to [www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov), the small business guide can be found on other SBLT-member agency websites including ORIA, OMWBE, DOR, L&I, Secretary of State (SOS), Department of Enterprise Services (DES) and Department of Commerce (COM) to name a few.

The Guide is also shared and used by nonprofit organizations who provide business technical assistance to businesses.



The Small Business Guide has become a mainstay of knowledge and information for Washington state businesses. It is the top page viewed on [www.business.wa.gov](http://www.business.wa.gov), and has increased in popularity as it is translated in Spanish, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese. Figure 9 shows the number of times these foreign language guides have been downloaded in FY 2023.



**Figure 9**  
**Small Business Guide Language Downloads**

In June 2023, ORIA and the SBLT added additional translations in Tagalog, Japanese, Somali, Samoan and Braille. The non-English translations of the guide are updated annually for consistency with the latest English version.

**Small-Business Guide**  
WASHINGTON STATE

Scan the QR code to access the Small Business Guide

**Includes information on:**

- Business assistance and training
- Business planning
- Licenses and permits
- Hiring and employer responsibilities
- Paying taxes
- Getting financing
- And much, much more

**We've got your back!**  
Contact us today at:

- (800) 917-0043 or (360) 725-0628
- help@oria.wa.gov or help@business.wa.gov
- http://www.business.wa.gov

**1 Plan**  
If you've never owned a business before, you may be unaware of all the things you need to do to get your business going. Careful planning and research will improve your chances of success.

**2 Start**  
Once you have a basic business plan in place, it's time to launch your business. Register your business and obtain the necessary permits required for your type of business activities and locations.

**3 Payroll**  
Hiring employees for the first time? Employers have a legal responsibility to comply with local, state, and federal labor laws and payroll taxes.

**4 Open**  
Are you an out of state business? Learn about out of state businesses reporting thresholds, nexus, and how expand your existing business into Washington state.

**5 Run**  
Keep your business in compliance. You must undertake certain steps on an ongoing basis to keep your business in good standing. These requirements vary for each business, based on your activities, employees, and locations.

**6 Grow**  
Do you want to expand your business? Expanding a business can require many different things, including money, employees, new locations, and new markets.

**7 Close**  
People close their businesses for many different reasons. A practical guide for creating an exit strategy plan.

**Figure 10**  
*Small Business Guide Content and Objectives*

## Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops

Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops (SBRR) provide important regulatory information for small businesses.

Key workshop topics include how to obtain permits and licenses, workplace safety, registering a business, navigating agency websites, unemployment benefits, paid family and medical leave, and tax-related information.

The workshops were initially started in 2019 through an SBLT effort involving ESD, DOR, and L&I.

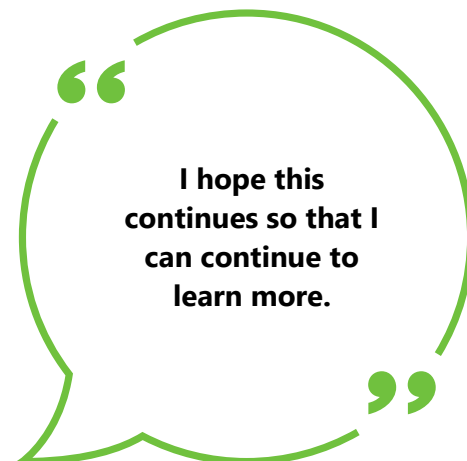


The most popular SBRR workshop, “Start a Business” is designed to help prospective and new business owners learn everything they need to know about state regulatory requirements.

The workshops are hosted by ORIA, L&I, DOR, ESD and SOS every other month. This SBRR workshop is also offered as an OnDemand video on ORIA’s YouTube social media channel receiving 5,912 views in FY 2022.

Due to the success of the OnDemand video, “Start a Business” was updated to reflect regulatory changes in 2023.

A Spanish translation was added to [business.wa.gov](http://business.wa.gov) in 2023. It has been viewed 677 times during the 2023 performance period.



## Reaching Small Business in Underserved Communities

Managing a business involves grappling with intricate regulatory requirements. There are multiple agencies, registrations, licenses, permits or regulations a business must follow.

Navigating those business requirements can become even more challenging if language, demographic or cultural barriers exist. Non-English speaking business owners with government mistrust may hesitate to contact state agencies or seek help due to past experiences.

After a Spanish SBRR Workshop, a constituent shared her story that underscored several of the obstacles. For Non-English speakers emerging from the pandemic, this business owner was uncertain about keeping her cleaning business operational. She shared that as she started her LLC, she went to a payroll service company that charged \$600 to register her business with the Secretary of State's Office. She understood it was wrong to be charged solely for having a document filled out, but frustrated and unable to speak English, she had no other choice but to pay the exorbitant fees.

The business owner said after our workshop she was inspired. She finally felt acknowledged because all the information she needed was provided in her own language, by representatives in her community. She was confident going forward with her business because she knew more about the options state government offered, such as certifying her business as a minority own business and looking at contracting opportunities with the state.

This recurring narrative surfaces consistently after workshops with Latino business owners. Within the Latino community, business owners are often uncertain about where to find help when needed. This is where the Small Business Liaison Team's (SBLT) use of Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops (SBRRs) comes into play, illustrating a strategic approach to strengthening support for underserved businesses, beginning with Latino-owned enterprises in Washington.

According to the 2022 estimates from the Washington State Office of Financial Management, Forecasting and Research Division, the Latino population has almost doubled since the 1990s, and now accounts for 14.49% of Washington state's total population.

As state agencies enhance their services and programs to meet the demands of Latino businesses owners, they are seeking ways to connect with the Latino community. The idea was to use the SBRR workshops to effectively engage and support Latino business.

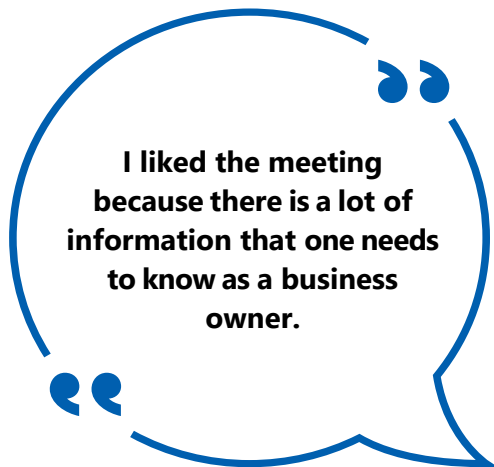


Since Washington's largest population of Spanish speakers is in Yakima, the SBLT decided to host their first Spanish SBRR workshop there in 2019. Unfortunately, only four Latino businesses showed up during this workshop. The SBLT learned valuable lessons, such as the importance of reaching out to local community programs, holding workshops in familiar and safe community buildings, and holding the workshops after normal business hours.

To improve the program, the SBLT built a relationship with the Washington State Department of Commerce and the Small Business Resiliency Network (SBRN). The objective was simple yet profound: to amplify their outreach initiatives to Latino business owners. As of now, trusted allies from the SBRN are working hand in hand with state agencies creating pathways that guide towards connections with the Latino business community.

In the wake of this partnership, state agencies have unveiled an avenue of empowerment to create in-language resources, to go to safe and trusted community spaces at times that works for business owners.

This isn't just about providing information; it's about the cultivation of an environment that aligns with the needs of Latino business owners. This paradigm shift is underscored by the unwavering commitment of all participating agencies to forge authentic relationships and nurture trust with the diverse businesses they serve. Their endeavors are prioritization of in-language presentations and resources, signaling an unwavering determination to transform the discourse around inclusivity and equitable growth.



The SBRR workshops in the Latino communities of Yakima, Wenatchee, Tri-Cities and Pierce County have impacted at least 239 Latino owned businesses. The number of attendees alone cannot measure the positive impact the SBLT is having on the health of the economy and the way they reach out to communities.

In 2023, the SBLT used the same program to connect with Korean business owners. All participating state agency representatives provided an in-person program completely in Korean, along with two virtual sessions. This resulted in the participation of over 100 businesses. In May 2023 the SBLT introduced a translation of the small business guide in braille and creation of a pilot workshop program to the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind communities.

The objective is to maintain partnerships with state agencies and local communities to consistently increase and offer accessible and inclusive SBRRs to business owners in Washington.



**Annika Pederson  
Small Business  
Program Specialist**

Annika Pederson serves as a Small Business Program Specialist at ORIA. In collaboration with the Small Business Liaison Team, Annika specializes in providing support services for small businesses across Washington state. Possessing an Associate of Arts from Peninsula College and a Bachelor of Arts in government and politics from Pacific Lutheran University, Annika's dedication to public service and keen interest in small business is invaluable within her continued work with Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops and small business outreach.

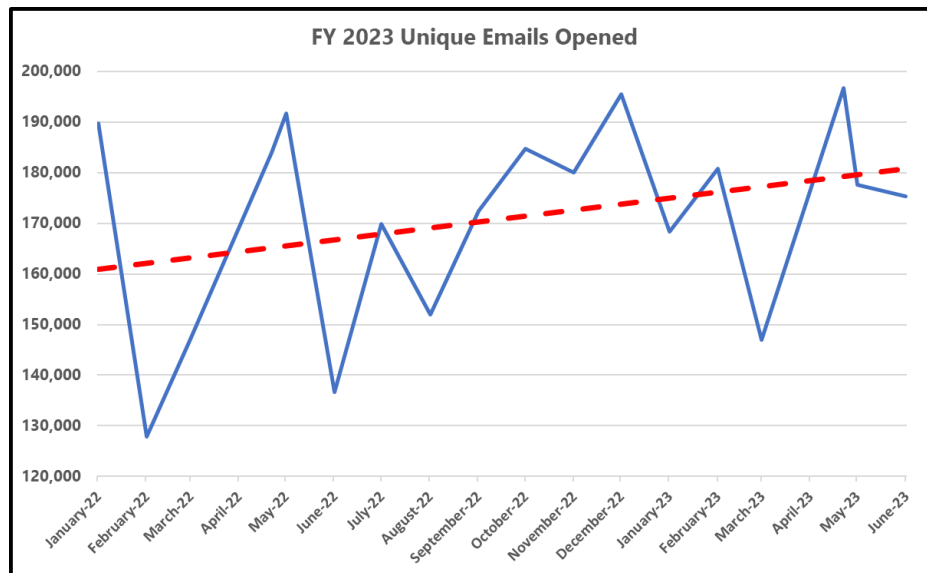
## Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter

The Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter was originated by the state Economic Resiliency Team (ERT), with the Joint Information Center (JIC) at Camp Murry, as part of the state’s COVID-19 Response. The purpose of the newsletter was to keep businesses informed of the fast- changing regulations caused by the pandemic and quickly provide the latest resources to help small businesses.

ORIA acquired the newsletter after the JIC closed operations in December of 2021. ORIA’s goal is to continue to provide timely and relevant information to small businesses. ORIA will preserve the connection with the subscribing businesses to provide information during future emergencies. The newsletter is a collaborative effort by multiple state agencies to provide the latest cross-agency news affecting small businesses and ensuring resources are accessible to all.

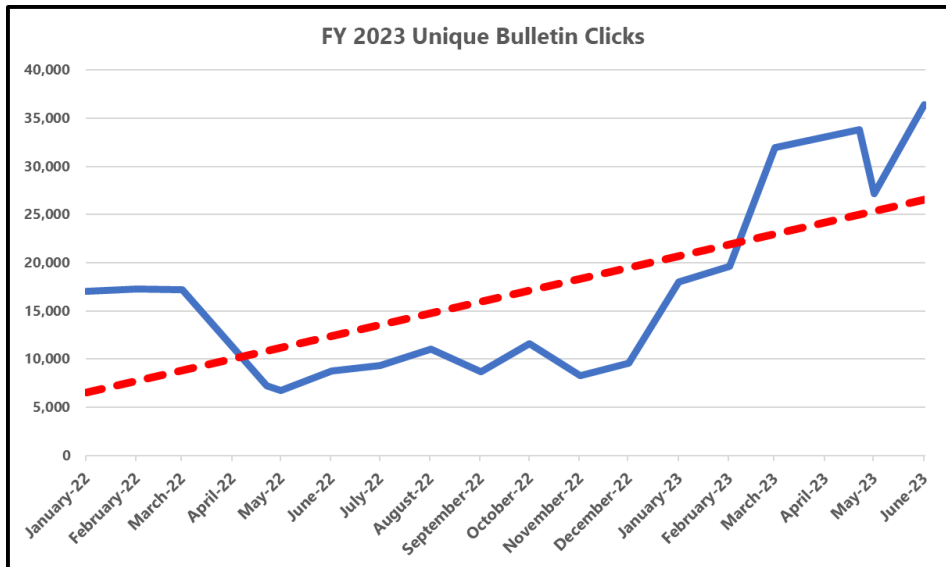
The Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter reaches over 538,000 subscribers every month. As the newsletter has shifted to provide small business owners with information and resources, data is tracked to provide a picture of the effectiveness and value of the content to subscribers. The data shows an increase in subscribers, emails opened and unique bulletin clicks indicating readers find value.

Figures 11 illustrates this increasing trend of unique emails opened, while Figure 12 shows the unique bulletin clicks in the newsletter since ORIA acquired it. These measures provide an accurate summary of downloads sharing, or information clicking recorded only once by each subscriber.



**Figure 11**  
**FY 2023 Unique Emails Opened**

Unique Email Opens—Number of bulletins opened by recipients. Only the unique opens are counted (i.e., if a recipient opens the bulletin three times, only one open will be counted).



**Figure 12**  
***FY 2023 Unique Bulletin Clicks***

Unique Bulletin Clicks—The collective number of unique clicks for every link in the bulletin. The number of links included in an email impacts the collective number of unique clicks. A click is counted only once per link clicked by each recipient. For example, if one recipient clicks one link three times, only one unique bulletin link click is added to this metric.





## Environmental Guidance and Assistance

Washington state works hard to create an environment for businesses to thrive in order to attract new businesses and industries. One of the obstacles to siting new facilities and expanding or establishing businesses is the complexities of environmental permitting processes. To address these issues ORIA has renewed efforts to provide guidance, advice, and assistance with local, state, and federal environmental permitting processes.

In early 2023, ORIA contacted the President’s Council on Environmental Quality and the Western Governors Association to learn about other state and federal efforts to streamline permitting. They discovered ORIA is unique among states in providing governor level advice and guidance on environmental permitting. Interactions with business groups, economic development agencies, and local governments confirm customer surveys which reveal there is much interest in ORIA’s services, but little awareness that they are available. This has led ORIA to make outreach one of the agency’s strategic priorities. Efforts to date have included scheduling speaking engagements, meeting with individual developers, discussions with local jurisdictions and outreach to renewable energy companies. These efforts will be enhanced by the development of a comprehensive outreach plan in FY 2024.

ORIA is well positioned to explore innovative ways to work with local and state governments to streamline permitting processes while maintaining a commitment to a clean and healthy environment. ORIA’s legislation provides for establishing criteria to certify local government’s streamlined permitting processes. A certified process would give the local government priority for state infrastructure funds. ORIA has established development of the certification process as a strategic priority for FY 2024.



### **Jim Thornton Environmental Permitting Coordinator**

With over 45 years of environmental regulatory experience in state and federal government, Jim proudly fulfills the duties and responsibilities of the Environmental Permit Coordinator at ORIA. Jim has achieved several accomplishments over his illustrious career to date with one of the most significant achievements coming while serving as the project director conducting environmental studies and permitting for a 675-mile, \$3.5 billion natural gas pipeline across four states. Originally from Oroville, WA, this proud Washingtonian provides a wealth of knowledge and resources to ORIA customers and staff and enjoys being able to help citizens and businesses navigate the local, state, and federal environmental permitting processes.

## Permitting Advice and Guidance

During the reporting period ORIA provided environmental permitting advice and guidance for a broad range of projects in Washington State, including:

- Hydrogen production and pipeline
- Solar energy projects
- High Voltage Transmission
- Shoreside gasoline refueling station
- Dike restoration
- Neighborhood stormwater flooding
- Numerous projects requiring a JARPA (Joint Aquatic Resource Project Application)

## ePermitting/JARPA Migration

As part of ORIA's ongoing effort to improve and combine useful information for customers, ORIA has migrated the [ePermitting/JARPA](#) website content to the [ORIA](#) website. The ePermitting/JARPA website content fits very well under the 'Permitting' pages on the ORIA website. Rather than having a navigation link to the ePermitting/JARPA website, the content will be available for full use on the ORIA website. Having the information all on one site will improve search engine results and increase complete permitting coverage on the ORIA website.

The ePermitting/JARPA website has not been updated for several years. As a result, it lacks a mobile friendly design and layout. The ORIA website supports mobile platforms, and by incorporating the ePermitting/JARPA content onto the ORIA website, it will all become mobile friendly for all customers.

The migration supports ORIA's accessibility efforts by increasing their mobile friendly rating. This improves the overall ePermitting/JARPA content reputation in search engines results.

## Project Scoping


As authorized by [RCW 43.42.040](#) ORIA can, when requested by a project proponent conduct project scoping and the Director may require attendance at the scoping meeting of any state agency or local agency. The purpose of the scoping meeting is to determine what state and local permits are required, the application requirements, specific information needed to process permits, and the estimated time to complete the permitting process.

## Fully Coordinated Permitting Process


The Fully Coordinated Permit Process (RCW 43.42.060) provides for ORIA to serve as the main point of contact for the project proponent and participating agencies during the permit process for the project. To ensure coordination, each participating agency designates a single point of contact for coordination and ORIA maintains a project management log and schedule of the procedural steps in the permitting process. In addition, ORIA identifies substantive issues to be resolved for the project to move forward. ORIA's responsibilities include:

- Ensure the project proponent has been informed of all the information needed to apply for the permits.
- Coordinate the timing of permit review by the respective participating permit agencies.
- Facilitate communication between project proponents, consultants and agency staff to promote timely permit decisions.
- Assist in resolving conflicts or inconsistencies among agency permit requirements and conditions.
- Contact tribes in the project area and federal agencies with jurisdiction and invite them to participate in the coordinated permit process or receive periodic updates in the project.

In March of 2023 a nonprofit organization known as the Friends of Toki asked ORIA what permits were required to move the captive orca Tokitae from the Miami Seaquarium to the Salish Sea. This request led to an effort by ORIA to provide advice and guidance on permitting requirements for the proposed move, and the construction and operation of a marine enclosure. The Friends of Toki formally requested that ORIA conduct project scoping a fully coordinated permit process.



To facilitate a fully coordinated permit process, ORIA established a multi-agency team of federal, state and local regulatory agencies to coordinate the environmental review and permitting to construct an ocean enclosure for Tokitae. This effort also included a commitment from the Friends of Toki to enter into a cost-reimbursement agreement with ORIA to complete project scoping and a coordinated permit process.



The Friends of Toki had also secured private financing for the project for the planning, siting, studying, permitting and construction of a marine enclosure for Toki.

Sadly, in August 2023 Tokitae's health quickly deteriorated and she succumbed to kidney failure ending efforts to return her to the Salish Sea.

The exhibit above "Permitting a New Home for Tokitae" provides an example of one of ORIA's most recent project scoping and "fully coordinated permit process".

## **Voluntary Cost Reimbursement Services**

ORIA has statutory authority ([RCW 43.42.070](#)) to enter into voluntary cost-reimbursement agreements with applicants to recover its costs for project scoping ([RCW 43.42.050](#)), a fully coordinated permit process ([RCW 43.42.060](#)) and the multiagency permitting teams ([RCW 43.42.090](#)). Expenditures may be related to permit coordination or processing, environmental review, technical studies, or other reasonable and necessary direct and indirect costs that arise from agency coordination and processing of permits. During the performance period, ORIA did not enter into any voluntary cost-reimbursement agreements.



**Michael McNabb**  
**Solutions Architect**

Michael McNabb serves as the Solutions Architect at ORIA and enjoys being a results-driven achiever within the ORIA staff. Holding a Bachelor of Science in fisheries from the University of Washington, Michael is ambitious and determined on solving everyday concerns for ORIA customers, staff, and partners through technological means and sheer resolve. Michael approaches each day at ORIA seeking and implementing solutions to problems or hinderances to technology support assisting in any way possible while supporting the overall mission of ORIA. Michael thoroughly enjoys working at ORIA and giving his honest, reliable, and complete self to ORIA and its customers daily.

## Technology Services

### Web Redesign

As the COVID-19 global pandemic subsided, ORIA aspired to rebrand their image as part of a renewed effort to provide great customer service to its citizens, small businesses and partners throughout the state of Washington.

The redesign began with ORIA contracting Orca Designs, a small minority women-owned business from Gig Harbor, to provide a new logo and new web design for the organization. The new web design needed to incorporate World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) accessibility standards to improve the accessibility and usability of ORIA websites for people with diverse abilities, in accordance with the Governor’s Policy Letter #188 – Accessibility.

As part of the redesign, the ORIA website content was evaluated for accuracy, relevancy, and usefulness. The new web design and all revised content were adjusted as necessary to enhance usability and accessibility.

The new ORIA logo has been officially adopted, while the new web design has been fully deployed within the ORIA website; with additional websites implementing the new design at a future date. Periodically, the website design and content are continuously assessed to ensure quality usability for customers.

## Translations

To increase the overall accessibility of the websites managed by ORIA, on-demand automatic translation has been added in eight different languages (Chinese, Korean, Russian, Somali, Samoan, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese).

With the understanding that online automatic translations are less ideal than actual translated versions, ORIA still strives to promote ongoing customer satisfaction by continually looking at new and innovative ways to benefit a growing population of website viewers.

A free online automatic translation service was employed and wrapped into a design consistent with each ORIA website. Translation was deployed on the following services within their respective websites: [ORIA](#), [Business](#), [ePermitting/JARPA](#), [Regulatory Handbook](#) and [Online Permitting and Assistance \(OPAS\)](#).

## Zendesk

The core service of ORIA is the IC, which helps individuals and businesses navigate, understand, and comply with environmental and business regulations at the local, state, and federal levels. Customers can contact the IC through various channel options such as live chat, email, text, or voice call, and all interactions are documented.

To support the contact channels and corresponding documentation, the IC uses four different systems of record which meets the needs of the IC, but in the least efficient manner. This inefficiency limits the organization's capacity to provide complete service to its customers.

To improve the efficiency and productivity of the IC, ORIA made plans to migrate the IC systems to a single unified system called Zendesk by the end of summer 2023. Zendesk offers many features which will enhance collaborative efforts between IC customer service agents, other ORIA staff members, and SBLT partners to improve customer service.

This single unified system will also deliver better analytic metrics and discovery tools to improve the capabilities, efficiency, responsiveness and service consistency of the IC. Zendesk will capture, manage and distribute all contact channels to prepopulate and automate many of the mundane tasks IC customer service agents currently do manually.

When fully employed, this unified system will increase the IC's productivity and efficiency while balancing the overall workload and customer capacity of the IC.

# Final Thoughts

## Our Mission

We provide people and businesses with information and resources to help them meet regulatory requirements and save time, money and frustration.

## Our Vision

ORIA aspires to be the State's most customer-focused organization and the first-place customers contact when needing assistance.

## Our Values

**Customer Service:** We strive to be empathetic listeners who respond in a respectful and efficient way.

**Innovation:** We are committed to incorporating creative thinking and solutions into our operations, products and services, and every aspect of the organization.

**Integrity:** We act as a unified team through honesty with those we interact with while staying true to our values.

**Respect:** We honor and accept one another by being considerate of everyone's needs and feelings and creating a culture of transparency through accountability, honesty and teamwork.

**Trust:** We believe in building a community through positive relationships, accepting each other and valuing different experiences

