



BIENNIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Expanding Our Horizons

2023-2025



GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
FOR REGULATORY
INNOVATION & ASSISTANCE



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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

At ORIA, we know that when Washington's people succeed, our communities and economy thrive. Over the past two years, we've worked alongside agency partners, small business owners, and community leaders to make government processes simpler, clearer, and more responsive to your needs.

From answering over 9,000 questions in our Information Center to bringing workshops in multiple languages to communities across the state, ORIA and our agency partners have made it our mission to meet people where they are—whether in person, online, or through trusted local community organizations. We expanded BizFair to new cities, launched the first-ever Spanish-language BizFair, and provided resources in 11 languages and Braille, so no one is left behind.

We also listened—through roundtables, surveys, and everyday conversations—and turned this feedback into action. Our new Total Business Access project will bring state business resources into one easy-to-use hub. And Executive Order 25-03 is now driving statewide efforts to make permits and licenses faster, fairer, and easier to understand. By streamlining processes and setting clear timelines, we're working to reduce delays, cut costs, and create more predictability for businesses and communities alike.

These results are possible because of the people who share their time, ideas, and determination—business owners, agency partners, and our dedicated ORIA team. Together, we're building a Washington where starting or growing a business isn't just possible, but a journey supported at every step.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. We invite you to explore the pages ahead to see all that ORIA and our partners have accomplished over the last biennium—and the many ways we're working to make Washington a place where every business can thrive.



Dan McConnon – Director of ORIA

Dan McConnon serves as the Director of ORIA since his appointment in 2021. With 30+ years of experience in state government and executive leadership to include being the first State Workforce Director for the Board of Community Colleges, Deputy Director for Washington State Department of Commerce, leadership positions within OFM and executive positions as a Dean and Vice President in higher education. Dan's love and dedication to public service has been unwavering throughout his career. An avid antique collector and lover of cats, Dan plays five instruments (Bass, Drums, Trumpet, Piano, Guitar) and enjoys helping people of all walks of life.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a changing economy where small businesses are important for the success of the state, the Office for Regulatory Innovation and Assistance (ORIA) provides accessible and practical support. ORIA is focused on continuous improvement, outreach, and great service delivery. During the past biennium, the agency expanded community engagement, enhanced service offerings, and adopted new technologies to help businesses and communities better understand and comply with state regulations.

Customer Service Efficiency

At the heart of ORIA's dedication to great customer service is the Information Center (IC), offering timely responses and reliable resources. The IC is the first place people go when they have questions about running a small business, permit needs, or understanding state rules. When inquiries are complex, the IC connects customers with subject matter experts to ensure accurate answers. ORIA's small business consultants support key programs and resources like the Small Business Liaison Team, the Small Business Guide, and workshops for small business requirements and resources. They also organize and share the Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter.

In collaboration with 29 state agencies, ORIA conducts outreach, gathers ideas for improving regulations, and develops tools to help businesses. These efforts help businesses avoid unnecessary fines, reduce compliance risks, avoid unnecessary penalties, and find ways to save money.

ORIA Expansion

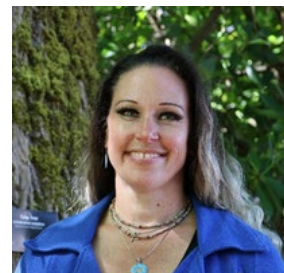
In Fiscal Year (FY) 24, ORIA made improvements to better help businesses, communities, and regulatory partners in Washington. With a new plan and outreach strategy, ORIA worked hard to strengthen its services, make the customer experience better, and build trust in the state's regulatory system.

During this time, more people reached out to ORIA for help. The IC responded to 5,473 questions by the end of FY24, which was 58% more than the year before. The website business.wa.gov had almost 274,000 visitors in FY24, a 17% increase from the previous year. ORIA also started using social media, resulting in 2,700 interaction and 80% more subscribers/followers across five platforms.

To gather input and build trust, ORIA held seven regional Small Business Roundtables during the summer of 2024. A statewide survey was sent to business leaders and other groups to learn about their experience with the state's regulations. The feedback helped ORIA improve services and systems.

Tami Johnson – Executive Assistant

Originally from Grants Pass, Oregon, Tami Johnson is a 30-year veteran within Washington state government where she has fulfilled various roles, duties, and responsibilities throughout her tenure. From her humble beginnings in state government as a temporary office assistant to her current role as an executive assistant, Tami embodies the definition of hard work and perseverance everyday while enjoying the variety of work being done at ORIA. With Olympia serving as her home since early childhood, Tami enjoys spending time with her family and friends outdoors and staying busy year-round.



ORIA expanded small business workshop offerings to include 24 events in FY24, both virtual and in-person. Some of these workshops were tailored for specific communities. Workshops were presented in English and several different languages including Spanish, Korean, Ukrainian, and even one for the deaf/blind community. ORIA also supported the growth of BizFair, a major event for entrepreneurs, expanding it to three locations, including the first-ever Spanish-language BizFair with nearly 500 registrants. To make it easier for people to join, ORIA created a website for BizFair with online registration. To make resources more accessible, ORIA added 11 languages to the Small Business Guide and created a Braille version. Translation tools were also added to the ORIA website.

ORIA continued to lead the way in making the regulatory system easier to use. The Online Permitting Assistance System (OPAS) was updated, making it easier to navigate. ORIA also helped speed up environmental permits after the Ilwaco Landing fire and reached out to over 70 renewable energy companies to offer early-stage help.

In 2024, ORIA also published its first Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Plan to ensure that programs are fair and inclusive, focusing on those most affected by inequality. The plan focuses on reducing systemic barriers and ensuring access to regulatory assistance for all Washington residents.

As demand for clear and equitable regulatory support grows, ORIA continues to serve as a trusted partner for Washington's business community. With better outreach, accessibility, and technology, ORIA is a trusted partner for entrepreneurs and small business owners, helping them navigate the state's systems with ease and confidence. With a focus on fairness and innovation, ORIA is committed to helping businesses grow and succeed in Washington state.

Publication of Initial 2024–2025 Pro-Equity Anti-Racism Plan

ORIA's first Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Plan shows how it's making fairness and anti-racism part of all its work - from training staff to delivering services. The plan follows Washington State's equity goals to ensure everyone has equal access to help, services, and opportunities.

PEAR is more than a rule - it's a guide to being inclusive, kind, and trustworthy. ORIA is focusing on five areas: leadership, services, workforce equity, communication and education, and building a more just Washington. This includes training leaders in fair practices, offering resources in multiple languages, and holding events for diverse communities, including the Deafblind and non-English speakers.

Listening to the public is key. In 2024, ORIA held statewide roundtables to learn what communities need. By weaving equity into all its work, ORIA aims to set an example for fair and open government. The PEAR Plan is a commitment to making Washington better for everyone now and in the future.

Figure 1

INFORMATION CENTER

The Information Center (IC) is a key part of ORIA and supports the agency's commitment to excellent customer service. The IC reflects core values of honesty, respect, and trust. The friendly and professional staff provides free assistance through phone, text, live chat, and email. IC staff members are trained to deliver accurate, timely, and courteous support.



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 professional and friendly customer support. 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 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



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 the state of Washington.

The IC serves a wide range of users, including individuals, small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government entities—by delivering consistent and reliable information. As a central resource, the IC coordinates responses from multiple state agencies to provide clear guidance in one location. Staff collaborate closely with subject matter experts and the Washington State Small Business Liaison Team to ensure information is current and helpful.

Service Enhancement

To improve efficiency and customer experience, the IC implemented Zendesk, a customer service platform that consolidates phone, email, text, and live chat into a single system. This integration enables faster response times, improves accuracy, and ensures a consistent level of service across all contact channels. The new platform supports both staff productivity and the quality of public service delivery.

Customers and Inquiries

Customers reach the IC through the ORIA website, referrals from other state agencies, outreach events, and the Small Business Liaison Team. Users include individuals, prospective and current business owners, local and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other partners. Figure 2 shows the different types of customers based on how many questions they asked.

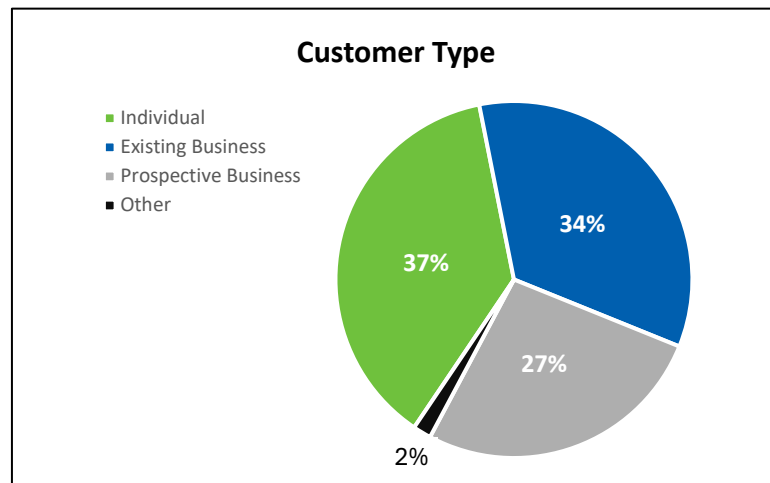


Figure 2

Between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2025, the IC responded to 9,356 inquiries, a 15% increase from the previous total of 7,996. Figure 3 shows the trend in IC inquiries from 2017 through the end of the current reporting period on June 30, 2025.

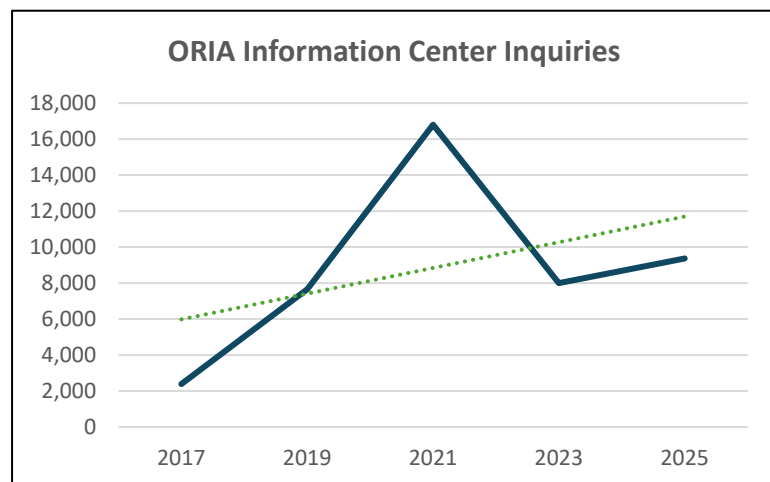


Figure 3

Figure 4 displays how many questions were received by each method used to contact the IC between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2025. In total, there were 9,356 messages (called “tickets”) across all channels. The most common way people reached out was live chat, followed by phone calls. Email, web forms, and text messages were used less often.

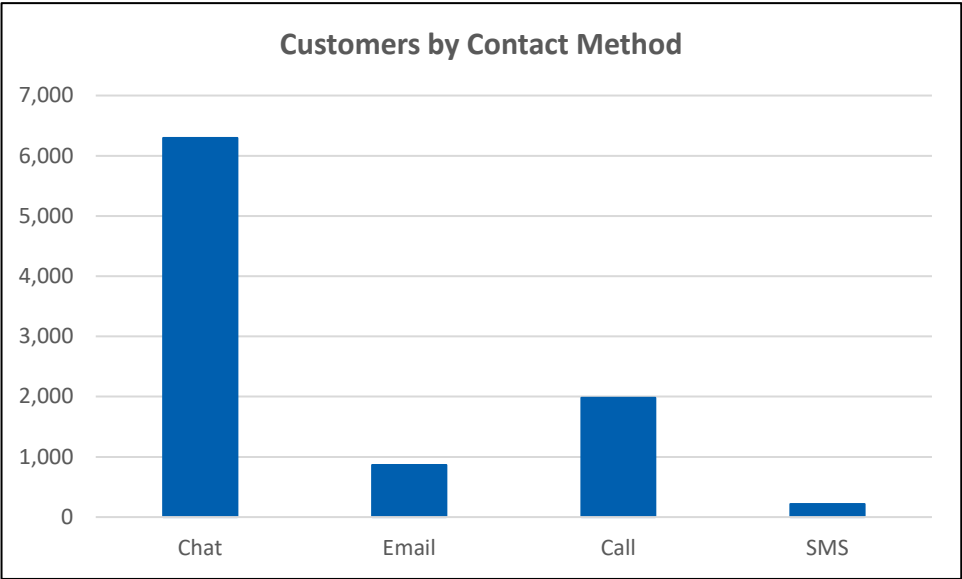


Figure 4

Customer Satisfaction

The IC customer satisfaction survey is designed for ease of use and accessibility. It encourages open feedback to assess service effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. Responses are reviewed to enhance service delivery and ensure public needs are met.



“The service was perfect. My agent was very polite, while at the same time very efficient and pulled together all the resources I was looking for to research a new small business opportunity.”



“Our agent was immensely helpful. She was extremely kind and easy to work with. It is great to know this exists and that there is also support for a Spanish speaking client.”

Response and Attentiveness

During the 2023-2025 biennium the IC solved a total of 9,356 tickets in different topic areas. Most of these were about licensing (3,141), permitting (1,379), and general business (3,165). There were also 1,183 questions about taxes. There were fewer questions about agency issues (8) and other topics (480), which include things handled by ORIA's internal programs. Most questions were answered directly by the IC. If a question needed more research, the IC made sure to connect the customer with an expert who could help.

Here's a quick look at the kinds of questions asked in each main category:

Licensing: 33% of Inquiries

- How do I register as an LLC or Corporation?
- Where do I get a fertilizer product license?
- How do I renew my business license?
- Where can I find access to loans and grants for my small business?

Permitting: 14% of Inquiries

- Do I need a permit to cut my trees on my property?
- Where do I apply for a Temporary License (TRIP) Permit?
- Can I attach a floating platform to a mooring buoy?
- What permits are required for dock repair?

Taxation: 12.5% of Inquiries

- How do I set up payroll tax accounts for remote workers in Washington state?
- What are my payroll tax obligations as a self-employed business owner?
- Which purchases are tax-exempt with a reseller permit for a fine arts painter?
- How do I file my quarterly taxes?

General Business: 33% of Inquiries

- How do I create the operating agreement for my LLC?
- Do I need to file a Beneficial Ownership Information Report (BOIR)?
- How can I be effectively considered a Small Business in WA state for bidding purposes?
- Where can I check if my desired business name is available?



**“Good Information
Quickly!”**



**“Everything
was easy
and helpful”**

SMALL BUSINESS

Small Business Liaison Team (SBLT)

The Small Business Liaison Team (SBLT) is a cross-agency team made up of representatives from 29 different state agencies. Led by ORIA, the team was created through Executive Order 12-01 to coordinate support for small businesses and improve the regulatory experience. Member agencies are involved in making rules and providing services that affect small businesses in Washington state. The primary goal of SBLT is to support small businesses and make it easier for them to succeed in Washington.

The SBLT helps small business owners understand and comply with state regulations. The team works together to create helpful programs, gather ideas to improve rules, and create tools to support business owners. They also focus on preventing unnecessary penalties, providing compliance education, and offering programs that can help businesses save money.

In 2024, SBLT began updating its goals to better align with the current needs of Washington's small business community.

www.business.wa.gov

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 a business or grow your business.
- In-person English, Spanish, Ukrainian, 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.



“The business guide in Spanish provided is very helpful not only for business but also for me to be able to reference support, contacts, ideas, and guidance to other businesses.”



“Extremely easy to use and my question was fully answered, easy to print for future reference, and very quick turnaround time. I was very happy with the service.”

The website is updated often to make sure the information is current and helpful. It features a user-friendly design, easy-to-read content, and is available in multiple languages. These features make it easier for businesses to get the help they need in their area. According to Google Analytics, the site has received over 575,000 page views and more than 250,000 unique users, reflecting its growing reach and value to Washington's business community.

Hugo Nicolas – Small Business Consultant

Hugo Nicolas serves as the Small Business Consultant and facilitates the Small Business Liaison Team. An ambitious 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 in 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 assisting business owners navigate the ever-changing business environment as he believes businesses can have a big impact in the health of all communities and economies.



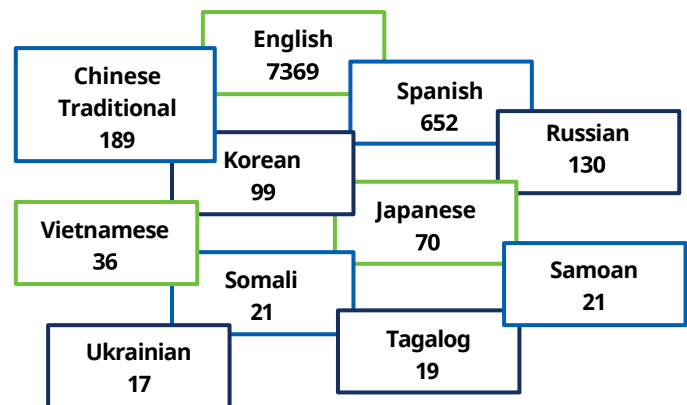
Small Business Guide

The Washington State Small Business Guide is a trusted resource created by SBLT and maintained by ORIA. It provides step-by-step guidance and links to help entrepreneurs plan, start, operate, and close a business in Washington. Subject matter experts review and update the guide regularly to ensure it reflects the latest regulatory requirements.

The guide is available at business.wa.gov and through partner agencies including ORIA, the Office of Minority and Women Business Enterprise (OMWBE), Department of Revenue (DOR), Labor and Industries (LNI), Secretary of State (SOS), Department of Enterprise Services (DES), and Department of Commerce (COM). Nonprofit groups that help small businesses also share and use the guide.

The Small Business Guide has become one of the most popular and trusted resources for businesses in Washington state. It is the most viewed page on the business.wa.gov website. It has been translated into many languages including Spanish, Russian, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Tagalog, Japanese, Somali, Samoan, and Braille. In early 2024, translation in Ukrainian was added as well. These translated versions are updated annually to match the newest English version. Figure 5 shows how many times these translated guides were downloaded during the 2023–2025 fiscal years.

Figure 5
Washington Small Business Guide Downloads



Small Business Requirements and Resources Workshops

Small Business Requirements and Resources (SBRR) Workshops provide critical information to help small businesses comply with Washington’s regulatory requirements.

Topics covered in the workshops include how to get business licenses and permits, how to keep your workplace safe, how to register a business, how to use state agency resources, and information about taxes, unemployment benefits, and paid family medical leave.

The most popular offering, the “Start a Business” workshop, is available in both live and pre-recorded formats in English and Spanish. These events are led by agencies such as ORIA, DOR, LNI, SOS, DES, OMWBE, COM, ESD, and the Washington Health Benefit Exchange.

In 2023, a video of the Spanish version of “Start a Business” was added to ORIA’s YouTube channel and has been watched 4,500 times. The English version has been viewed 9,900 times during the same time-period.

Reaching Small Businesses in Underserved Communities

To better support rural and underserved areas, SBLT expanded outreach in 2024 to Okanogan, Grays Harbor, Port Angeles, Friday Harbor, Clarkston, and Wenatchee. Many of these communities had limited access to state services.

A notable example occurred in Friday Harbor, where 32 local business owners attended in person and 15 participated online. Feedback highlighted appreciation for direct access to state agencies, some for the first time in years.

Multilingual Outreach and Language Access Expansion

In August 2024, SBLT expanded its SBRR workshop offerings in multiple languages.

The Korean-language SBRR program was redesigned to provide more detailed guidance. Each Sunday, participating agencies—including the SOS, ORIA, DOR, COM, and LNI—delivered one-hour informational sessions. These were followed by an additional hour for live questions and discussion, allowing participants to gain deeper understanding of regulatory topics.

The Ukrainian-language SBRR program was also enhanced and now includes a full-day Business Resource Fair. Ukrainian business owners are invited to attend four 45-minute sessions covering:

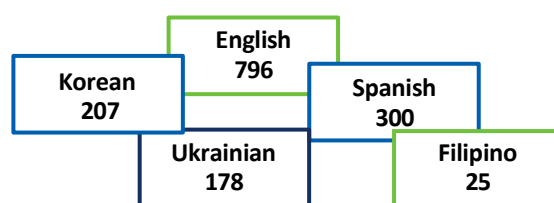
- Business registration with the Secretary of State and Department of Revenue
- Operational compliance and day-to-day management
- Business development tools
- Funding opportunities

Spanish-Language Program and Community Safety

The Spanish-language SBRR program continued to grow in reach and impact, becoming the second most-used language across all workshop offerings. This reflects the significant demand for regulatory support within the Latino business community. In FY24 the Small Business team visited a total of 21 locations with 1,446 participants.

Early in 2025, several community partners expressed concerns about participant safety and fears of immigration-related repercussions. In response, ORIA made the decision to temporarily pause in-person Spanish-language workshops to protect the well-being of attendees and host organizations. While some partners remained open to hosting, the agency prioritized public trust and safety.

Figure 6
Small Business Workshop Participation FY 24



The temporary pause may impact future attendance; however, ORIA remains committed to supporting Spanish-speaking business owners. Alternatives under consideration include:

- Hosting events in trusted community locations.
- Expanding virtual workshop options.
- Partnering with culturally rooted organizations to co-host events.

ORIA will continue working closely with stakeholders to restore trust and ensure equitable access to services for all small business communities, regardless of language or background.

Supporting Community-Based Organizations

To support ongoing professional development, ORIA partnered with the Washington State Microenterprise Association and the Department of Commerce's Small Business Resiliency Network (SBRN) to deliver a follow-up training to ORIA's April 2024 immigration webinar. This training helps support organizations to better understand federal immigration policies, enabling them to serve immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs more effectively.



Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter

ORIA is dedicated to helping small businesses succeed by sharing important, up-to-date, and trustworthy information. Since small businesses are an important part of our state's economy and communities, ORIA works hard to make communication easy and useful. The goal is to not only share helpful updates, but also to build a strong connection and sense of community among business owners.

The Economic and Business Resilience Newsletter is a team effort between several state agencies. Each agency adds their own knowledge and resources, making sure the information is helpful and complete. By working together, the newsletter becomes a one-stop place for small business owners to find the latest news, rules, and opportunities that affect their work. One of the main goals is to keep businesses updated on rule changes that might impact them.

The newsletter also highlights events like workshops, trainings, trade shows, and networking meetups. These events help business owners learn new things, meet others, and grow their presences in the business world.

To make things easier for business owners, the newsletter includes reminders, answers common questions, and provides tips that help them work better with government agencies. Another important part of the newsletter is sharing information about grants, loans, and financial programs — and guiding business owners on how to apply.

With this helpful and team-based approach, ORIA wants to create a well-informed, connected, and strong small business community. By keeping communication open and sharing easy-to-understand resources, ORIA helps businesses not only grow but also stay prepared for challenges in the future.

So far this year, about 500,719 people have signed up for the newsletter. This shows that many small businesses across the state are interested and paying attention.

Newsletter Engagement Summary:

Over the past year, email engagement has stayed steady, with some ups and downs (Figures 7 and 8). Many people opened emails, especially in mid-2024, and those numbers stayed strong in 2025. Clicks on links inside the emails also followed a similar pattern, with noticeable jumps in late 2024 and spring 2025. This means that our messages are still reaching and interesting a large group of people.

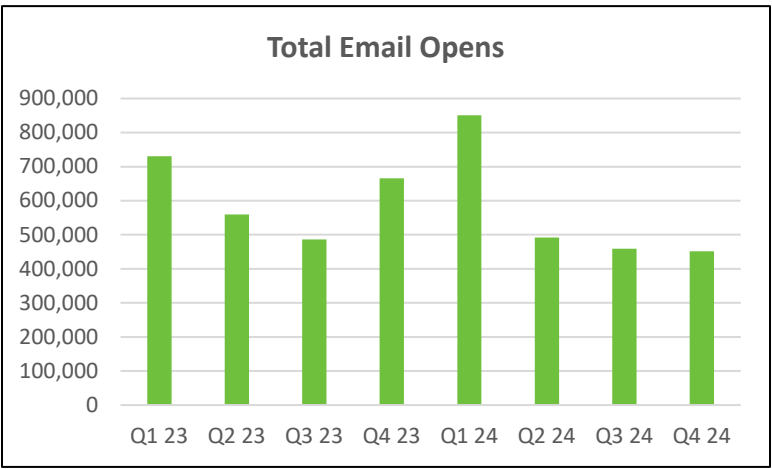
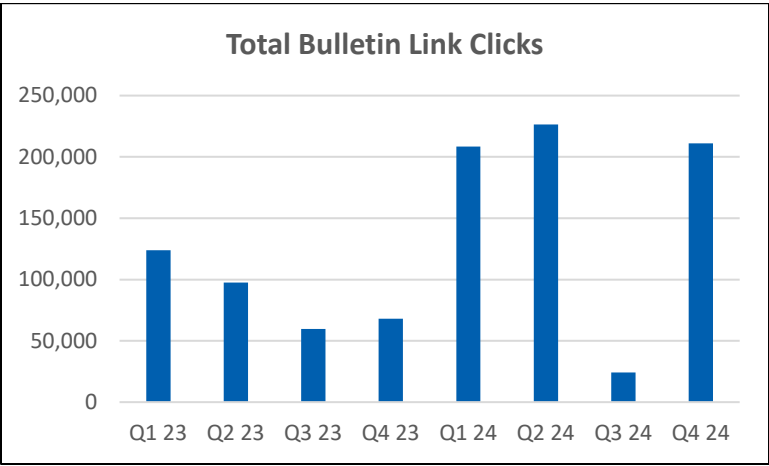


Figure 7 – Email Opens
Number of people who opened and read the newsletter.

Figure 8 – Bulletin Clicks
Number of people who click on links inside the emails to learn more about specific topics.



Washington BizFair

The Washington State BizFair is one of ORIA's most important outreach programs. It plays a big role in helping small businesses grow and succeed across the state. As the largest free small business resource fair in Washington, BizFair plays a key role in helping entrepreneurs and small business owners access critical tools for growth and success. BizFair also provides opportunities for business owners to connect with lenders, business support groups, and other business owners.

Now in its 28th year, BizFair is a key event for small businesses. It is usually held in Puyallup and has built a strong reputation as a place for learning and working together.



In 2023, ORIA became a primary partner and supported the expansion of BizFair to reach a wider audience. As a result, BizFair now includes three locations: Puyallup, Spokane, and a Spanish-language BizFair that rotates to different communities.

In 2024, two new events were launched: the Spokane BizFair and the first-ever Spanish BizFair in Eastern Washington. The Spanish BizFair was the first event of its kind in Washington—completely in Spanish. It was held during Hispanic Heritage Week and welcomed over 90 attendees, 40 exhibitors, and 12 workshops, along with entertainment that celebrated Latino culture. The event demonstrated BizFair's commitment to fairness, inclusion, and meeting the needs of diverse communities.

ORIA also created and manages the website [BizFair.wa.gov](https://bizfair.wa.gov); which shares event information, a list of exhibitors, and keynote speakers. The site gets approximately 19,000 views every year, showing that small business owners are very interested in what BizFair offers.

By teaming up with groups like the Small Business Development Center and Small Business Association, expanding to more locations, and creating new programs like the Spanish BizFair, ORIA is showing its strong support for small businesses in Washington.

Annika Pederson – Small Business 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.



One person at BizFair said it had “lots of information, enthusiasm, and a willingness to help,” and called it a “rich source of references.”

Regulatory Roundtables

Roundtable Summary

In 2024, ORIA hosted a series of Small Business Regulatory Roundtables across the state. These events provided small business owners, local lenders, tribal members, and community groups a chance to share feedback on how regulations impact business operations. Attendees discussed challenges, proposed improvements, and identified barriers to compliance. Agency representatives participated in listening sessions to better understand community-specific and statewide concerns.

The roundtables were held in different places across the state, including Spokane, Yakima, Mount Vernon, Seattle, Longview, Aberdeen, and the Port of Grays Harbor. Having meetings in different areas helped show the unique problems each community faces. This is important because every region has its own needs when it comes to starting and running a business. Although each place had different challenges, many of the same issues came up in more than one community.



Key Themes

Each region had its own concerns, depending on the needs of the community. However, there were 10 common themes that were raised across multiple areas:

- **Clearer Rules and Expectations.** Many small business owners said the rules are too confusing, especially when it comes to permits and licenses. They want these processes to be easier and all in one place. They also said the rules change often, and it's hard to keep up. They asked for a system to notify them when changes happen.
- **Lack of Education and Help Following Rules.** Businesses, especially in rural areas, don't always have access to the information they need. Educational materials they do have are often written in complicated language, making it difficult for them to understand.
- **Better Coordination Between State and Local Municipalities.** Business owners said that they are often sent from one agency to another and can't figure out who to talk to about certain rules. This wastes time and causes frustration.
- **Agency Communications.** The way agencies share information is often unclear. Business owners want simpler and more direct messages, no matter the stage of their business.

- **Customer Service.** Many people said they didn't get the help they needed. They mentioned long waiting times, feeling rushed, or not getting the answers they were looking for. Also, some felt that staff weren't friendly or helpful.
- **Multilingual Services and Resources.** There is a lack of services and materials in other languages. Communities that don't speak English as their first language want equal access to resources and support.
- **Hard-to-Find Resources.** Even when help is available, businesses don't always know where to look. Many online tools are difficult to use. People asked for more user-friendly websites and easier access to important information.
- **High Costs and Multiple Fees Across Municipalities.** Businesses shared that the cost of following all the rules is very high – and it costs even more if they make a mistake. These fees make it hard to run a business.
- **Unfair and Inconsistent Rule Enforcement.** Sometimes, different inspectors give different rules during inspections. This leaves business owners confused about whether they are actually following the rules. Business owners want inspectors to have better training and be more consistent.
- **Better Outreach to All Communities.** Businesses asked the state to do a better job reaching underserved, rural, and non-English-speaking communities. If more people are included, the state can support all types of small businesses.

The feedback from the roundtables will help make the state improve its systems. By listening to the most common concerns, agencies can make changes that help small business succeed. Each agency is now working on ways to improve the areas mentioned.

Solutions

From the roundtables, ORIA started a new project called Total Business Access (TBA). This project's goal is to make it easier for small businesses to follow state rules, improve how state agencies work together, and help businesses easily find the resources they need. Several state agencies are part of the TBA project including DOR, L&I, ESD, Department of Licensing, Department of Health, Liquor and Cannabis Board, and SOS.

Rafael Fernandez – Communications and Engagement Specialist

Rafael Fernandez's primary role is to provide leadership for agency collective efforts to raise awareness of the ORIA brand and services, and aligning organizational messaging with the agency's vision, mission, and core 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, NY, Rafael possesses a Master of Business Administration and Bachelor of Science in Leadership degrees at Trident University International. With over 15 years of experience leading, managing, and directing organization-wide strategic planning processes, business services, project management, program management, risk management, and employee relations, Rafael thoroughly enjoys working with the staff of ORIA and helping the organization achieve their overall



At the project's outset, agency directors responsible for the Unified Business Identifier (UBI) system convened to review the initiative and designate representatives to a working group. The group was tasked with:

- Developing a strategic plan.
- Identifying system inefficiencies.
- Compiling existing tools and services.
- Recommending targeted improvements.

The working group developed a resource inventory to map agency offerings, highlight duplications, and identify service gaps. This work was supplemented with customer input gathered from surveys, frequently asked questions, and frontline feedback from agency support teams.

Using both the resource list and customer feedback, the group started planning three major parts of the TBA project.

- Business Hub – a place where business owners can easily find all the information they need.
- Small Business Pages for each agency – with simple, clear information just for small businesses.
- Virtual Learning Center – where businesses can learn more through online lessons and videos.

Implementation planning is currently underway, in collaboration with SBLT, to ensure coordination with existing programs and outreach efforts.

Regulatory Programs

Permit Timeliness

Timely permit review and approval are essential for supporting businesses, economic development, and project planning in Washington state. Clear and accessible information about permitting timelines helps businesses make informed financial decisions and plan with confidence. To improve transparency and accountability, ORIA worked with the main state agencies to create the Permit Timeliness Program (RCW 43.42). The program tracks and publishes data on permit processing times, enabling agencies and the public to monitor performance.

The program's goals include:

- Increasing transparency around permitting performance.
- Improving customer service.
- Supporting interagency coordination.
- Enhancing predictability and efficiency.

Every year, participating agencies submit permit processing data to ORIA. This information is published by March 1 in the ORIA Central Repository at data.wa.gov. The most recent full year of data was in 2024 and was posted on March 1, 2025. Reporting agencies include:

Department of Agriculture (WSDA)
Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)
Department of Ecology (ECY)
Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW)
Department of Health (DOH)
Department of Licensing (DOL)

Department of Labor & Industries (L&I)
Liquor & Cannabis Board (LCB)
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Parks & Recreation Commission (PARKS)
Department of Revenue (DOR)
Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC)

From 2015 to 2021, average permit timelines improved in eight out of ten years. However, beginning in 2022, processing times began to increase again (see Figures 9 and 10). Delays can result in higher costs and lost income for businesses.

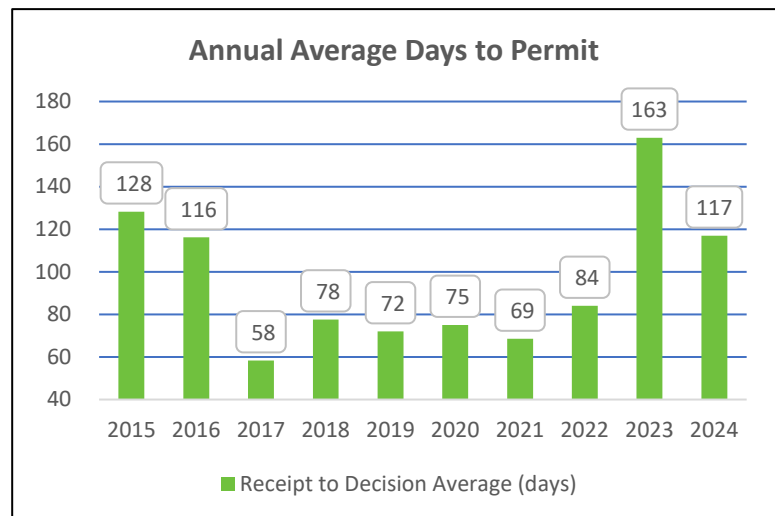


Figure 9

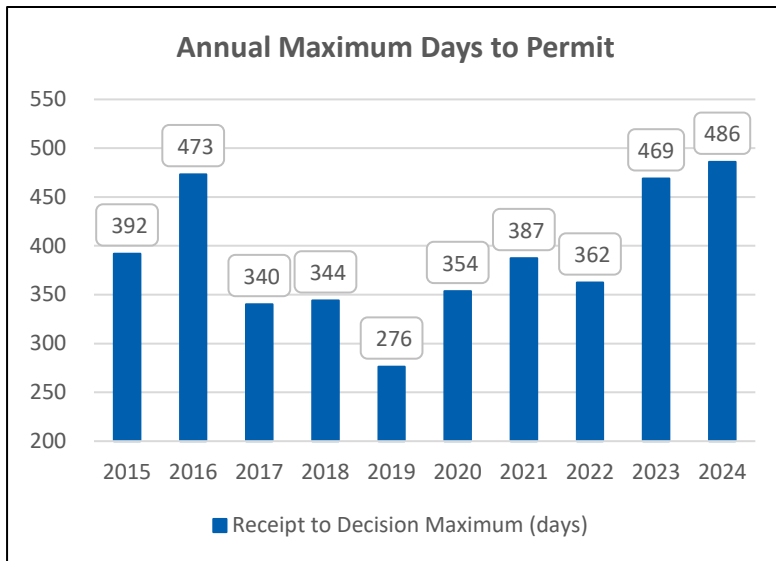


Figure 10

ORIA continues to gather and share permit data from state agencies each year on the ORIA Central Repository at data.wa.gov. In response to public concerns, Governor Ferguson issued Executive Order 25-03 to strengthen permitting performance and restore prior efficiency levels. ORIA will collect data for this order to find ways to make the process better and bring back the faster timelines that happened from 2015–2021.

Executive Order 25-03

Executive Order 25-03 (EO 25-03), issued in January 2025, directs state agencies to improve the fairness, efficiency, and clarity of permitting and licensing systems across Washington. The order applies to permits, licenses, certifications, ID cards, and other regulatory authorizations.

Key objectives of EO 25-03 include:

- Making the process clearer and more predictable.
- Shortening the time it takes to review and approve applications.
- Removing steps that aren't needed.
- Reducing incomplete applications.
- Giving clearer instructions and deadlines to people applying.

Thirty agencies turned in a total of 1,548 records for the catalog. Out of those, 169 reported a backlog (a delay in processing) at the end of 2024. The types of licenses and permits reported included:

- 782 Licenses
- 254 Permits
- 207 Certifications
- 14 ID Cards
- 291 Other

All executive branch and small cabinet agencies were required to submit a comprehensive catalog of permits and licenses to the Governor's Office by March 17, 2025. ORIA reviewed the submissions, provided technical assistance, and coordinated follow-up discussions between agencies and the Governor's Policy Office.

In the spring and summer of 2025, ORIA, the Office of Financial Management (OFM), and the Governor's Policy Office met with agencies to review the data. Following these discussions, agencies will develop implementation plans for EO 25-03. Each plan will focus on:

- Improving processing times, starting with permits and licenses that have the most impact on customer satisfaction.
- Establishing policies and procedures for refunding application fees when published processing times are not met.
- Communicating new deadlines and refund policies clearly to the public.

Due to the scope and complexity of each agency's permit and license portfolio, implementation timelines will vary and are expected to roll out over the next several years.

ORIA will provide technical assistance and monitor agency implementation of EO 25-03 action plans. A working group of participating agencies will be convened to support ORIA in improving and streamlining the permit and license data collection process.

Under the current plan, agencies will update processing time data annually. ORIA will compile and report the results to the Governor and publish them in the [Regulatory Handbook](#) to ensure public access and transparency.

Significant Legislative Rulemaking

Significant Legislative Rulemaking (SLR) ([RCW 34.05.328](#)) guides how state agencies create rules that affect government programs. ORIA collects and compiles data from participating agencies and produces a biennial report summarizing how these rules affect the rulemaking process.

SLR was created because lawmakers wanted to understand the costs and benefits of new rules. They also wanted to look for ways to lower costs, make sure rules follow state and federal laws, and create a clear plan for putting the rules into action. Twelve state agencies and other regulated entities contribute to the SLR process.

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Department of Ecology (ECY) | • Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) |
| • Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) | • Employment Security Department (ESD) |
| • Department of Health (DOH) | • Forest Practices Board |
| • Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) | • Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC) |
| • Department of Natural Resources (DNR) | • State Board of Health (SBOH) |
| • Department of Revenue (DOR) | • State Building Code Council (SBCC) |

Participating agencies work toward three primary goals: Report on how new rules are developed and implemented, eliminate duplicative or conflicting requirements, ensure rules are necessary, cost-effective, and practical.

The information is collected using an online reporting tool on the ORIA [SLR webpage](#). This tool allows businesses, environmental groups, and labor organizations to review the rules. It also makes it easier for agencies to send in their reports.

By January 31 of every even-numbered year, ORIA gathers the data, organizes it, and sends the report to the Governor, the Legislature, agencies, and other groups. The report is also available on the ORIA website. The most recent report, covering 2022–2023 was finalized in [2024](#).

Regulatory Fairness Act

The Washington State Regulatory Fairness Act (RFA) ([RCW 19.85](#)) ensures that state rules do not impose disproportionately high costs on small businesses compared to larger businesses. This helps create a fairer system for everyone.

Under the RFA, if a new rule will cost businesses more than a small amount (also known as “more than minor cost”), the agency must write a Small Business Economic Impact Statement (SBEIS). However, if a rule qualifies for an exemption under the [Administrative Procedure Act](#), the SBEIS requirement does not apply.

The [Legislature](#) designated ORIA as the primary resource for agency compliance with the RFA. To do this, ORIA provides agencies tools like how-to-guides, checklists, FAQs, and templates on the RFA webpage. These resources are maintained on the [ORIA RFA webpage](#) to ensure ongoing support. In addition to online help, agencies can join regular meetings to share tips and learn from each other. ORIA hosts these meetings as a “community of practice” so agencies improve compliance.

In 2020, the Washington State Auditor’s Office did a [performance audit](#) and found that agencies had shown signs of improvement in completing SBEIS requirements. Agencies also said that ORIA’s technical assistance improved their ability to understand and implement the law effectively.

Tools and guides can be found at [Regulatory Fairness Act Support](#).

Social Media

Since launching social media outreach in early 2023, ORIA has expanded public awareness of its programs and services. ORIA uses its social media platforms to connect with the community, share progress updates, and highlight the efforts of other agency partners.

Social media helps bridge generational preferences by delivering the same information in ways they are comfortable with. For example, younger audiences may prefer [Instagram](#) or [LinkedIn](#), while older generations may engage using [Facebook](#). ORIA also has a [YouTube](#) channel that features videos with tips and tools for small businesses.

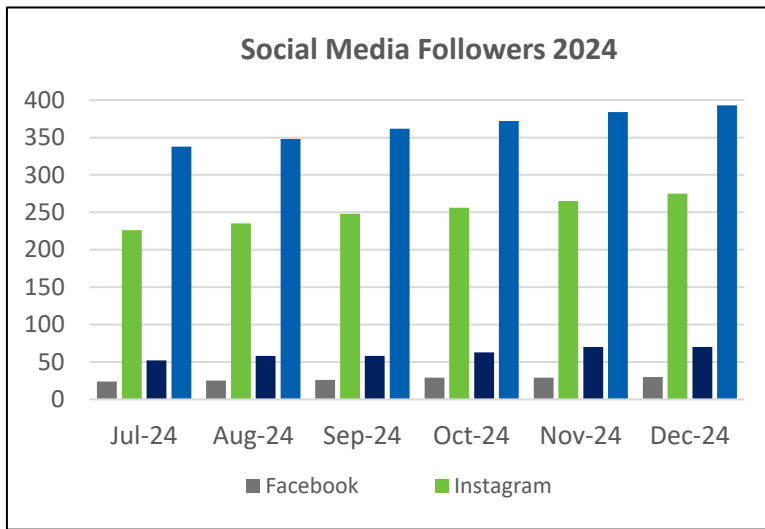


Figure 11

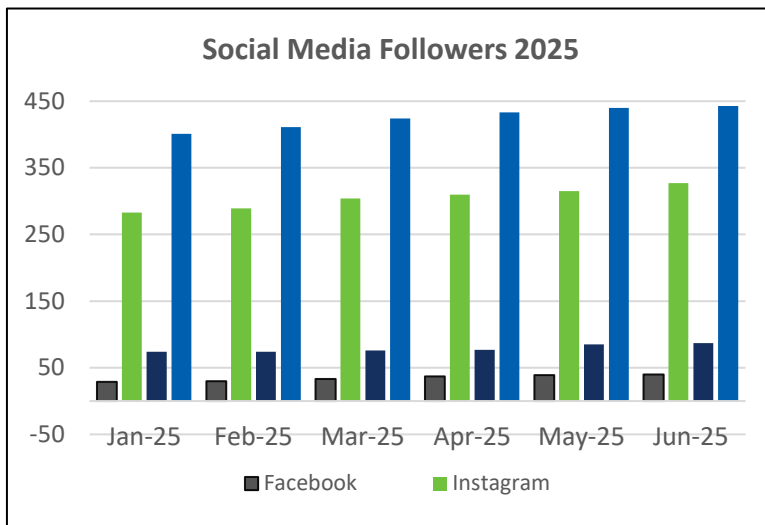


Figure 12

Social media serves an important introduction to the SBLT, enabling more people to learn about and access its services. ORIA's content focuses on people, employees, partners, customers, and small business owners—to strengthen connections across the state.

In the past year, the number of likes, shares, and followers has gone up on all platforms. Instagram had the most interactions reaching a peak of 105 engagements in August 2024. Engagement shows people are interested—their liking, commenting on, or sharing posts. ORIA's YouTube subscribers grew from 329 in June 2024 to 443 in June 2025, despite only 12 new videos being posted during that period. This growth demonstrates sustained public interest in the content.

ORIA's reach has expanded. Instagram has the highest reach right now, followed closely by Facebook. Reach measures the total number of unique viewers who see a post at least once. ORIA will continue using these platforms to connect with communities and small business owners statewide.

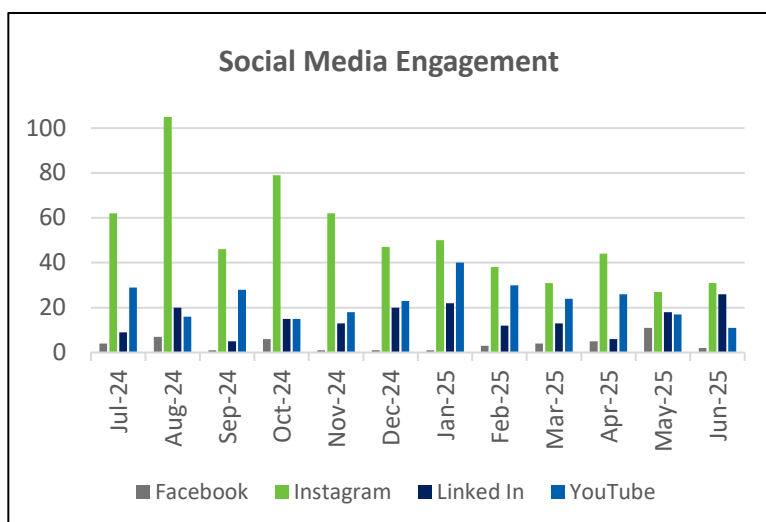


Figure 13

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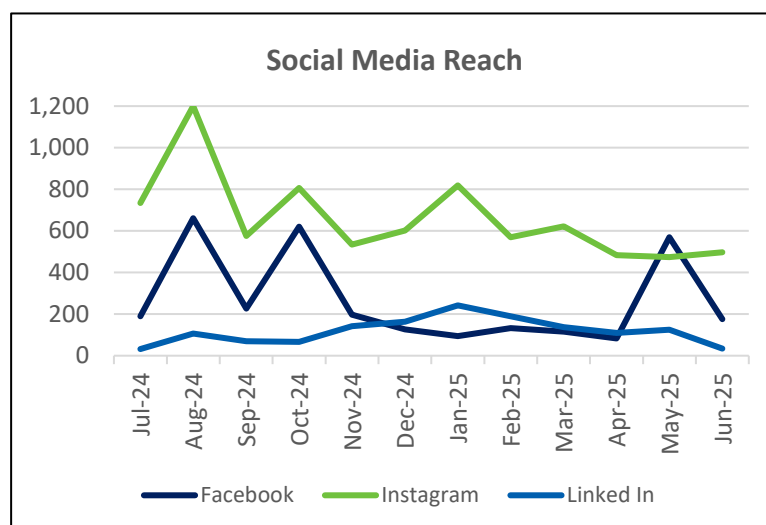


Figure 14

Elle Hirotaka – Regulatory Programs/ Social Media & Graphics 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 significant experience with social media campaigns. Elle loves the overall uniqueness of ORIA in that the agency staff is small but have huge hearts and takes great pride working for ORIA not just because of the work but also because of the people she gets to work with. The work ORIA is impactful, and she enjoys collaborating with and contributing to the ORIA team.



Environmental Assistance

Washington state works hard to create a place where businesses can grow and succeed. One significant challenge for new or expanding a business is navigating the complex environmental permit process. To help with this, ORIA has renewed its efforts to give support and guidance for getting local, state, and federal environmental permits.

Permitting Advice and Guidance

During this reporting period, ORIA provided permitting advice and assistance for projects across Washington including:

Hydrogen production	Salmon restoration permitting
Solar energy projects	Dam removal project
High voltage transmission permitting	Marina permitting

JARPA Revisions

ORIA manages the online Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA) form, used to apply for permits that impact water. Permits may be issued by federal, state, or local government agencies.

Examples include:

- Corps of Engineers Section 10 permit (Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899).
- Corps of Engineers Section 404 permit (Clean Water Act).
- Corps of Engineers Section 408 permit (Section 14 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899).
- U.S. Coast Guard Section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 and the General Bridge Act of 1946.
- Department of Ecology 401 Water Quality Certification (Clean Water Act).
- Department of Ecology Wetland Administrative Order (RCW 90.48).
- Department of Fish and Wildlife Hydraulic Project Approval (RCW 77.55).
- Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Use Authorization (RCW 79.105).
- Local jurisdiction Shoreline Permit (RCW 90.58).

The JARPA form is over 20 years old. Over time, new laws and rules have made it longer and more confusing. Many of the help links on the form are also outdated. ORIA is updating the form to remove outdated content, repair broken links, and improve usability.

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 number of accomplishments over his career to date; with one of 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.



Project Scoping

Under Washington law ([RCW 43.42.040](#)), ORIA may lead project scoping at the request of a business or project sponsor. This process brings together local and state agencies to identify required permits, necessary information, and estimated timelines. The goal is to streamline the process and help projects move forward smoothly.

Technology Services

BizFair

ORIA played an expanded role in organizing BizFair, including managing the [BizFair.wa.gov](https://bizfair.wa.gov) website. This included migrating from the former site bizfair.org, to bizfair.wa.gov in spring 2024. Legacy BizFair event details and content were archived, and 2024 event content was updated.

The move to the wa.gov domain increased public trust by signaling that the site is an official Washington State government resource. The site is now available in 12 different languages including English and Spanish.

Regulatory Handbook and Online Permitting Assistance System (OPAS)

The Regulatory Handbook and Online Permitting Assistance System (OPAS) are two older websites ORIA assumed responsibility for in 2012. While the content in the Regulatory Handbook is periodically updated, both sites use outdated technology. OPAS also hadn't had any changes to its content or tools since ORIA started managing it.

In 2024 and 2025, ORIA updated both websites to:

- Remove the need for outdated technology.
- Use modern tools and coding languages to make the websites easier to improve and update.
- Create a modern design that works well on phones, tablets, and computers.
- Improve accessibility so more people can use the websites easily.

The [Regulatory Handbook](#) website hadn't seen major changes in over 10 years. ORIA and its partner agencies update the content every few months, the website itself needed a full upgrade. In 2024, ORIA moved the site to a modern platform, integrated it into the main oria.wa.gov website, and prepared it to host data from EO 25-03 in the future. In 2025, OPAS was also moved to the modern platform and integrated into the ORIA website. While the features remain largely the same, the updated technology improves accessibility and allows for easier future enhancements. ORIA plans to review OPAS to identify major improvements and streamline usability.

Retired ePermitting Website

The ePermitting website previously provided instructions and resources for JARPA. After review, ORIA determined all essential content could be transferred to [ORIA.wa.gov](https://oria.wa.gov). The ePermitting site was retired, and all relevant materials were consolidated on ORIA's main website.

Translations

ORIA uses an online translation tool (google translate) to help non-English speakers access its website. In this reporting period, Japanese, Ukrainian, and Farsi were added to the list of supported languages. While automatic translations aren't perfect, ORIA continues to look for better ways to support a growing number of multilingual audiences.

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 over technological support and being generally helpful to assist in any ways 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.



Zendesk

ORIA's IC helps people and businesses understand and comply with local, state, and federal regulations. The IC is accessible via live chat, email, text, or phone. All interactions are logged to improve service quality. In fall 2023, ORIA adopted Zendesk to manage all communications in one centralized system, streamlining response tracking and customer service management.

The ORIA Commitment

Mission

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

Vision

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

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.

