



Coming in 2018: Major Improvements to WBARS!

The State Department of Commerce and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission are pleased to announce a major upgrade to the Combined Funders Web-Based Annual Reporting System (WBARS) in 2018.

Why does WBARS need an upgrade?

WBARS was built more than 10 years ago. The system has outgrown the original technology, and unfortunately, that makes it challenging to adjust or improve. Over the past few years, more sophisticated coding technology has been developed. By making this upgrade, we can make WBARS more intuitive and flexible, and more capable of meeting the needs of our users.

How will WBARS be different?

Whether you are a property manager, asset manager, or regional funder, the data will now be much easier to access. We plan to offer more comprehensive and flexible reporting tools, a wider variety of user permissions, and easier access to exporting WBARS data for your portfolio.

What changes will I see right away?

The most noticeable visual changes will be on the initial log-in page and your organization contact pages. While the back-end architecture of WBARS (the code platform) is being rebuilt, our developer will be modifying existing screens to provide a more user-friendly experience. But even though things will look and feel updated, you will still be entering the same type of data you enter now. We do not plan to make major changes to the Tables, so the data-entry process should be familiar. As prototypes of the new screens become available, we will share them with you.

How did you decide what to change?

As you may have noticed, over the past few years we have been collecting suggestions from our users on how to improve WBARS. In November 2017, our team of developers visited the Seattle area and met with several housing agencies in the Puget Sound region and in Eastern Washington. They spent a week observing these staff using WBARS and collected focused feedback about what elements were working and what could be enhanced. Based on that information, we've assembled a list of items to improve or add to the system.

I haven't given my feedback yet!

No problem! Please [take a very short survey](#) to tell us how you think we should prioritize the potential enhancements to WBARS. Your feedback will ensure that we give precedence to changes that will have the most positive impact on the greatest number of users.

What is the timeline for this upgrade?

We will be writing the requirements for the upgrade throughout February (so please fill out the survey as soon as you can!). The development will occur throughout March, April and May of 2018. We then anticipate testing throughout the summer, and going live with the initial upgrade by the end of August.

Can I still use the current WBARS system while you are making the upgrade?

Yes! WBARS is not changing during this time. You will use the current system until we activate the upgraded version. You will not have to worry about transferring data to the upgraded version – all of that will happen behind the scenes.

Can I help test the upgraded system before it goes live?

Yes! We will need beta testers to help ensure that the new WBARS works, and that any new features are running smoothly. Once we are ready to begin testing, we will send another announcement and seek volunteers for testing. Stay tuned!

How will I find everything I need once the upgrade is live?

We will offer training once the system is live. We will also provide written instructions, videos, remote webinars and possibly in-person training sessions to make sure that everyone is comfortable using the upgraded system. We want you to be well-prepared for submitting your reports in January 2019.

I'm a property owner/regional funder – will you charge a fee for me to use WBARS?

No. Commerce and the Commission will be paying for the upgrade, and will continue to pay for the ongoing maintenance of the system.

How can I keep up with news about the upgrade?

Bookmark the Commission's WBARS web page at <http://www.wshfc.org/managers/WBARS.htm> so you can check in periodically and get the latest news. You can also easily access this page from www.WBARS.com. We will also send out email updates to let you know about significant milestones in the process.

Whom do I contact if I need more information?

At the Department of Commerce, please contact Nona White at nona.white@commerce.wa.gov.

At the Commission, please contact Melissa Donahue at Melissa.donahue@wshfc.org.