

# Gravitational Wave Observatory

## Statutory and/or Budget Language

\$2,036,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 is provided solely for a gravitational wave observatory located in southeastern Washington that is supported through the national science foundation to purchase hands-on, interactive exhibits to expand the number of developmentally appropriate learning activities available for K-12 students attending the observatory.

## Purpose

This proviso provided one-time funding to the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), located in Richland, WA, via a contract with LIGO's owner, the California Institute of Technology (CalTech). LIGO is required to use these funds to create and update hands-on, interactive exhibits in their LIGO Exploration Center (LExC), a museum that serves as a visitor center for the public, including students on field trips.

## Description of Services Provided

Allowable uses for the funding span from original solicitation of bids for the building of exhibits through the construction and completion of the exhibits themselves. Per the timeline submitted to OSPI by LIGO as a contract deliverable, the exhibits are expected to be finished in fall 2025. Once the exhibits are built and installed, LExC will be open to the public, including public school students and classes.

## Criteria for Receiving Services and/or Grants

To be awarded the contract, LIGO had to meet the criteria outlined in the proviso language, that is be a gravitational-wave observatory, be located in southeastern Washington, and receive support through the National Science Foundation. LIGO also agreed to contract terms in compliance with state contracting requirements and guidelines, and was paid on an agreed schedule upon receipt of agreed deliverables.

## Beneficiaries in the 2023-24 School Year

<b>Number of School Districts</b>	0
<b>Number of Schools</b>	0
<b>Number of Students</b>	0
<b>Number of Educators</b>	0
<b>Other - LIGO</b>	1



## Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No

## State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2024	\$2,036,000	\$2,036,000

## Number of Beneficiaries Per Fiscal Year (e.g. School Districts, Schools, Students, Educators, Other)

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2024	1

## Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

None. This proviso was funded for a single fiscal year.

## Program Evaluation or Evaluation of Major Findings

One thing OSPI learned in executing this contract is that it is difficult to contract for a multi-year project with funding made available across a single fiscal year. At the same time, LIGO communicated that they preferred to receive funds in a single fiscal year as they needed the dollars to be able to budget and begin the work. One solution could be to consider funding items like this one in the state capital budget which is better aligned to these types of projects.

## Major Challenges Faced by the Program

Aside from the challenge of setting deliverables that were both impactful and realistic within a one-year timeline for a multi-year project, the main challenge OSPI experienced in this work is the length of time it takes to execute a contract, even with a sole-source determination. Despite beginning the contract process soon after the operating budget was signed into law, the contract was not submitted to CalTech for signature until November 2023, and not signed until January, 2024. This forced LIGO to push out the timeline for beginning and completing the actual work.

## Future Opportunities

OSPI looks forward to checking in on the new LExC exhibits in fall of 2025 and working with LIGO on an awareness campaign to make sure all districts, educators, students, and families are aware of the learning opportunities available at LIGO. OSPI is open to working with LIGO in the future on other opportunities for the observatory to benefit Washington students and schools.

## Other Relevant Information

LIGO is one of two such observatories in the United States, and one of four or five locations globally, so it offers a unique learning experience to students and other visitors. LIGO received state funding in the past during its initial construction. This round of funding was originally requested by OSPI working in partnership with LIGO to cost out and submit an agency budget request.

## Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

[Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2024 Fiscal Year.](#)

## Program Contact Information

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