DATES: Comments must be submitted on or before July 31, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For a copy of the ICR, call Sandy Farmer at EPA, by phone at (202) 260–2740, by E-Mail at Farmer.Sandy@epamail.epa.gov or download off the Internet at http://www.epa.gov/icr/icr.htm, and refer to EPA ICR No. 1637.04.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Determining Conformity of General Federal Actions to State Implementation Plans, OMB Control Number 2060–0279, ICR number 1637.04, expiring July 31, 1998. This is a request for extension of a currently approved collection.

Abstract: Before any agency, department, or instrumentality of the Federal government engages in, supports in any way, provides financial assistance for, licenses, permits, or approves any activity, that agency has the affirmative responsibility to ensure that such action conforms to the State implementation plan (SIP) for the attainment and maintenance of the national ambient air quality standards (NAAQS). An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB control numbers for EPA's regulations are listed in 40 CFR part 9 and 48 CFR Chapter 15. The **Federal Register** document, required under 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on this collection of information was published on February 18, 1998 (63 FR 8196); two comments were received.

Burden Statement: The annual public reporting and recordkeeping burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 49 hours per response. Burden means the total time, effort, or financial resources expended by persons to generate, maintain, retain, or disclose or provide information to or for a Federal agency. This includes the time needed to review instructions; develop, acquire, install, and utilize technology and systems for the purposes of collecting, validating, and verifying information, processing and maintaining information, and disclosing and providing information; adjust the existing ways to comply with any previously applicable instructions and requirements; train personnel to be able to respond to a collection of information; search data sources; complete and review the collection of information; and transmit or otherwise disclose the information.

Respondents/Affected Entities: Federal Agencies.

Estimated Number of Respondents: 280.

Frequency of Response: 1.

Estimated Total Annual Hour Burden: 13,600 hours.

Estimated Total Annualized Cost Burden: 0.

Send comments on the Agency's need for this information, the accuracy of the provided burden estimates, and any suggested methods for minimizing respondent burden, including through the use of automated collection techniques to the following addresses. Please refer to EPA ICR No. 1637.04 and OMB Control No. 2060–0279 in any correspondence.

Ms. Sandy Farmer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, OPPE Regulatory Information Division (2137), 401 M Street, SW, Washington, DC 20460;

and

Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Office of Management and Budget, Attention: Desk Officer for EPA, 725 17th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20503.

Dated: June 25, 1998.

Joseph Retzer,

Director, Regulatory Information Division.

[FR Doc. 98–17520 Filed 6–30–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 6560–50–P

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

National Economic Council

Office of Science and Technology Policy

Enhancing Federal Training and Education Through Technology

AGENCY: National Economic Council and Office of Science and Technology Policy, EOP.

ACTION: Notice of inquiry.

SUMMARY: The National Economic Council and the Office of Science and Technology Policy, in consultation with the Office of Personnel Management, seek information about how to make the most efficient possible use of new information technologies for training federal employees in ways that also will accelerate the development of the broader commercial marketplace. This will require making full use of innovations in technology for commercial training, encouraging interoperability of products from competing vendors, and experimenting with new forms of public-private collaboration to develop high-quality instructional software.

DATES: Written comments should be received on or before September 15, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Interested parties should submit electronic version of comments at www.fed-training.org or written comments by mail to Martha Livingston, Office of Science and Technology, Room 423, Old Executive Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20502.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Diane Mayronne, Department of Labor, 2000 Constitution, Room N–5303, Washington, D.C. 20001. Telephone: (202) 219–9587, ext. 171. Fax: (202)-7968. Additional information and materials are available at www.fed-training.org.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Administration is interested in the ability of new information and communications technologies to enhance lifelong learning by expanding access, reducing cost, and improving quality. For example:

- Access to education and training could be expanded by allowing adults to learn at a time, place, and pace that is convenient for them—using the Internet, CDROM, and/or other technology-mediated forms of instruction.
- The quality of education could be improved through the use of technologies such as: modeling and simulation and case-based reasoning, which enable ''learning by doing''; intelligent tutoring systems, which can respond to the individual needs of the learner and recognize common mistakes; synchronous and asynchronous learning networks, which can encourage the formation of ''communities of learners'' between students and teachers; and the appropriate use of multimedia, which can increase retention and ''time on task.''
- Cost for the development of high-quality instructional content/software could be reduced by: greater re-use of instructional modules; better authoring tools; and open specifications for instructional management systems—such as the EDUCOM Instructional Management System.
- Relevance could be increased by reducing the time that is required to develop instructional software, thereby providing timely technology-based training materials to the learner.

The Administration is pursuing a number of policies to realize this vision, including: (1) Eliminating barriers to broader adoption of distance learning by both individuals and institutions through reforms of the Higher Education

Act; (2) increasing investment in R&D for learning technologies; (3) encouraging experimentation and collaboration in the use of distance learning with a new Department of Education grant program called ''Learning Anytime, Anywhere Partnerships''; and (4) encouraging federal agencies to make better use of information technology to train their own employees. This Notice of Inquiry focuses on this last issue.

Encouraging Federal Agencies To Make Better Use of Learning Technology

Clearly, efficient management of the federal government requires continuous investment in training. The demand for training has increased as new technologies reshape the workplace in ways that both make federal employees more productive and allow them to improve the service they provide. Both military and civilian agencies face enormous challenges in this area. Advances in computers, communication, and other areas of information technology make it possible to improve the efficiency of the training process itself. Federal agencies need to take advantage of techniques, software, and specifications being developed for commercial training and for university and college instruction. This is a difficult undertaking since the field is changing rapidly.

Since all federal agencies share similar challenges in this area, the President issued an Executive Memorandum dated January 30, 1998 directing the National Economic Council to develop a plan which will describe how agencies can:

- make full use of best commercial practices when purchasing instructional software;
- work with businesses, universities, and other appropriate entities to foster a competitive market for electronic instruction;
- develop a model technical approach to facilitate electronic instruction building on existing agency efforts, such as the Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative Partnership; and
- develop and support a program of research that will accelerate the development and adoption of new instructional technologies.

Request for Comments on Technology for Federal Training and Education

To support this effort, we are interested in receiving information in the following areas:

Emerging or existing technical specifications and technologies that will enable:

- standardized methods for identifying software components and other tools that can facilitate electronic commerce. These methods can include specifications for ''meta-data'' such as ownership, licensing restrictions, unique identifiers, and other critical information.
- standardized methods for tracking student performance, preference, and records in instructional modules. These methods allow an instructional management system to link a student to a range of instructional modules and provide information to management systems about student performance and learning styles. This information can be used to maintain student records and to improve the instructional materials themselves.
- methods for handling individual questions presented by students. This includes systems for connecting students to databases of ''frequently asked questions,'' methods for creating and maintaining such databases, and systems for connecting students to live instructors who can provide personal answers to questions.
- methods for specifying software components that ensure interoperability. This can include exemplary use of specifications for software objects that can be combined to create simulations or other instructional tools. These specifications could, for example, allow simulated vehicles to be constructed from software objects manufactured by many different vendors.
- tools for creating instructional modules quickly and efficiently from components.
- management systems using components described above. These systems would provide some or all of the following services: methods allowing instructors to develop curricula for individual students, monitor individual student progress, maintain transcripts and certifications, allow easy movement between remedial and advanced instruction, protect student privacy and protect intellectual property, and keep records facilitating financial transactions to holders of intellectual property and others.

(2) Subject areas where there is significant overlap between government and private sector requirements—and proposed partnerships for taking advantage of these commonalities. We are particularly interested in: (a) instructional software that could improve adult basic education (e.g., GED equivalence; adult literacy, English as a Second Language); and (b) subject areas that will help workers compete for jobs in rapidly growing fields (e.g., information technology).

(3) New forms of assessment that are particularly appropriate for technology-mediated instruction.

(4) Methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of technology-mediated instruction on educational outcomes, costs, and productivity of training and published evaluations of technology-mediated training.

(5) New procurement mechanisms, public-private partnerships, and innovative business models that will encourage private sector investment in the development of highq-uality instructional software and wider deployment and utilization of technology-mediated instruction throughout the economy. Our strategy can only work if all businesses and educational institutions with technology and services capable of serving federal training needs are willing and able to compete for federal business. We are particularly interested in comments that will help federal agencies hold competitions that will attract proposals from creative institutions throughout the economy—even institutions that have had no previous experience in bidding on government contracts. We would like comments on how existing procedures create barriers to bidding on federal contracts and proposals for streamlining the process.

These comments will be used to develop a federal strategy to facilitate the emergence of a vigorous, competitive market in interoperable software products for instruction. Such a market ensures that institutions with training needs—including federal agencies—get high-quality, up-to-date, instruction for their employees at a low cost. It also ensures the widest possible market for creative developers producing products that can be sold into the large markets for instructional software products created by such open markets.

Please provide information and suggestions in these areas useful for developing federal policy that will ensure efficient federal use of information technology based on use of the best practices emerging in competitive commercial markets. This notice is for the purses of developing policy and *is not* a solicitation. Please do not send descriptions of specific products or services.

Dated: June 24, 1998.

Holly Gwin,

Chief of Staff and General Counsel; Office of Science and Technology Policy.

[FR Doc. 98–17502 Filed 6–26–98; 5:03 pm]

BILLING CODE 3170–01–U