

INL contributed more than \$2 billion to Idaho's economy last year

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From left, Freddy Rodriguez and Brian Simmons, Process Nuclear Operators at the INL, use master-slave manipulators to work with radioactive material on the other side of the glass.

Chad Estes

IDAHO FALLS — Idaho National Laboratory's economic impact in Idaho was more than \$2 billion in 2018.

The lab's reported impact includes both the 4,349 people employed directly by contractor Battelle Energy Alliance in Idaho and the thousands more who worked for the site through indirect or induced jobs, INL's annual economic report said.

“Idaho National Laboratory takes great pride in being a major economic driver for our state ...,” lab Director Mark Peters said in the report. “... The Laboratory’s success is rooted in our relationships around the nation and throughout Idaho with our citizens, communities, businesses, elected officials, and public schools and universities. ...”

Battelle was the state’s sixth-largest private employer and the ninth-largest overall, the same positions that it held in 2017. The average worker at INL made \$97,893 last year.

Dana Kirkham, CEO of Regional Economic Development for Eastern Idaho, said the lab’s impact was as much about the indirect benefits from the employees as direct money from the site.

“That’s the kind of employment we want to see because those dollars come back and have an economic impact in the community,” Kirkham said.

INL’s impact also spread to the local businesses the site subcontracted to last year. According to the report, nearly 60 percent of the site’s spending last year was with small businesses, and the lab exceeded its goal for the number of women-owned and veteran-owned businesses it worked with. INL spent more than \$148 million with Idaho businesses.

“That’s a big number anywhere, not just in eastern Idaho,” Kirkham said.

INL’s impact could increase even more after work begins on building a new small modular reactor plant at its desert site. A report created for REDI by the University of Idaho said the construction of the new reactor plant could create more than 13,000 jobs over the next four years and add another \$644 million in labor income to eastern Idaho.

The report also emphasized the charitable work done by INL and its employees last year. Battelle contributed \$628,700 to charities through INL, nearly half of which was awarded to Idaho schools for STEM grants, and volunteers led 40 STEM-related events for students across the state.