

WHAT A LIMS REALLY COSTS

The Sabine Industrial LIMS Cost of Ownership Study, 2026

sabineindustrial.com/research/what-a-lims-really-costs

The license is the price a lab gets quoted. Over five years it is a small part of what the lab pays. We wanted to know where the rest goes: implementation, upgrades, integrators, interfaces, hosting, change orders, the people who run the system, and the systems bought alongside it.

The Sabine Industrial LIMS Cost of Ownership Study reviewed what 39 labs spent on their LIMS and sorted the spending into eleven categories.

THE NUMBERS

FIVE-YEAR COST

\$230,000 to \$930,000

About \$230,000 to \$930,000 for a small lab, \$1.5 to \$3 million for a medium lab and \$5 million and up for a large one, once you count the system, the staff who run it and the time spent re-keying data.

THE LICENSE

8 to 35 percent

Only 8 to 35 percent of what labs spent. Implementation, integrators and staff took the rest.

SOMEONE TO RUN IT

\$60,000 to \$176,000 a year

Most medium and large labs hire a full-time LIMS administrator, often a programmer, at \$60,000 to \$176,000 a year before benefits.

MAINTENANCE

14 to 30 percent

of the license price every year, and the bill rises 1 to 5 percent a year during a contract.

UPGRADES

\$634,628 and \$654,400

Moving a heavily customized system to a current version cost two labs \$634,628 and \$654,400.

RE-KEYING DATA

\$69,000

One technician who spends an hour a day re-entering results costs about \$69,000 over five years. Ten cost \$689,000.

REPLACING A LIMS

\$217,331

One water science program is paying \$217,331 to keep its old system supported for five and a half years while the new one is built.

WHEN A REPLACEMENT STALLS

\$2.27 million

One large utility approved \$2.27 million for its LIMS over six years and still runs the system it set out to replace.

1. Where the money goes: eleven categories

Every LIMS budget we read falls into these eleven categories. The amounts are what labs paid or vendors published. Small means about ten users or fewer at one site; medium, ten to forty users; large, several sites or an enterprise system.

CATEGORY	WHAT IT COVERS	WHAT LABS PAID
License or subscription	Perpetual seats (named or concurrent) or an annual subscription	Small labs: \$3,654 to \$33,700 a year. Medium: \$69,480 to \$97,589 a year, or \$123,680 one time. Large: \$284,468 a year for a four-lab program; about \$2.1 million a year for a national lab network, including implementation and support. Published list prices run \$4,214 to \$8,479 per concurrent seat, or \$350,000 to \$500,000 for unlimited users. ^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11}

CATEGORY	WHAT IT COVERS	WHAT LABS PAID
Maintenance and support	The annual fee on a perpetual license; support tiers	14 to 15 percent of the license a year on federal price lists, 20 to 30 percent of current list price on one vendor's 2026 list, and "usually 20-25 percent" in another vendor's guidance. Small labs paid about \$16,000 to \$25,000 a year; medium \$23,298 to \$171,444; large \$39,515 to about \$407,000 (the high end is an estimate from a 2026 solicitation). ^{9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 5, 15, 16, 17}
Implementation	Configuration, data migration, testing, training, project management	Small: \$43,065 to \$62,280. Medium: \$135,198 to \$984,288. Large: \$603,200 to \$13.4 million. One vendor says implementation and validation "usually cost more than the first year's licence"; another has done projects "for as little as \$20,000" and others where "the price was over a million dollars." In the records, contracts allowed about 10 to 19 months for the build. ^{18, 2, 5, 3, 19, 20, 21, 22, 12}
Upgrades and redeployment	Moving the same product to a supported version or platform	\$37,296 for a runtime upgrade at one lab; \$121,373 and \$132,156 on two upgrade orders at a science lab network; £462,143 for a lab in the United Kingdom to move one product from version 12.1 to 21.3; \$634,628 to redeploy the existing system at the Midwest utility; \$654,400 to update a fuel-testing lab network's system; \$1.1 million for a health and environmental lab's move to the vendor's newer product; about \$2.8 million for a workplace-safety agency's two-lab LIMS modernization. ^{23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29}
Consulting and integrators	Day rates, hourly blocks, multi-year integrator orders, owner's representatives	Published day rates \$1,269 to \$2,473; hourly \$225 to \$230. Engagements from \$45,870 to \$1.27 million. One defense lab pays \$410,000 a year for support services; a fuel and materials lab network pays about \$1.13 million a year to two integrators. A Southern California water district is hiring an outside project manager for two years to run its replacement. ^{10, 9, 30, 1, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35}
Training	Per-seat courses and onsite days	\$2,052 to \$2,995 per seat for a three-to-five-day course; \$2,473 a day for onsite instruction in one vendor's quote; \$19,000 for one five-day onsite class at the Midwest utility. ^{9, 30, 36}

CATEGORY	WHAT IT COVERS	WHAT LABS PAID
Interfaces and reports	Instrument interfaces, integrations with other systems, custom reports	\$950 to \$3,825 per instrument interface on price lists and proposals; \$17,190 for one spreadsheet integration; \$74,394 for a single results interface at a health lab; \$20,000 in one amendment for reports. One environmental lab's request for proposals says only five of its 15 instruments can send data directly to a LIMS, and that "the transfer of data from lab instruments to the current LIMS is a manual process." ^{30, 9, 37, 38, 39, 40}
Hosting and infrastructure	Cloud hosting fees, servers, database licenses	Hosted, often bundled with maintenance: \$15,500 to \$33,700 a year for small labs; \$104,300 to \$140,000 a year for medium ones. On premises: a separate database license of \$8,919 to \$11,149 a year at one small environmental lab. ^{41, 2, 37, 42, 43}
Change orders	Amendments, extensions, maintenance during delays	Approvals typically allow 10 percent above the contract price for change orders. What was actually added: a 9 percent increase over four amendments at the county water quality lab; \$110,000 added at an Ohio city utility for software support and licenses during implementation; a 33 percent increase at the Midwest utility, including \$158,076 in maintenance fees on the new system while the build ran long and \$45,000 for 600 project-management hours. ^{18, 41, 39, 44, 45}
Headcount	A dedicated administrator, analyst or developer	None at labs of three to six people. One or two positions at medium and large labs, posted at \$59,883 to \$176,301 a year, plus help from IT. (Section 5.) ^{18, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55}
Separate systems	Quality management (CAPA, document control), instrument and calibration tracking, competency records, operations data, statistical quality control	Labs buy these alongside the LIMS: quality management software at \$16,000 to \$51,000 a year per lab; operations data software \$8,427 to about \$28,400 a year; calibration tracking software \$56,436 to buy plus \$4,343 a year. One large water district lab runs a separate quality system for CAPA, document control, training and instrument tracking that does not exchange data with its LIMS. ^{56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61}

A twelfth category never appears on an invoice: the hours lab staff spend entering, re-entering and chasing data. Section 3 covers it.

2. The license is the smallest line

The records that price the license separately show how small it is next to everything else.

- A water science program with four labs and 450,000 analyses a year awarded \$1.14 million for licenses and \$13.4 million for implementation over the same four years. Implementation cost about twelve times as much as the licenses.^{6, 21, 7}
- A fuel and materials lab network bought \$610,000 of LIMS software for 2023 to 2025, and is paying two integrators \$3.4 million from 2025 to 2028 to support it.^{62, 34}
- A county water quality lab on Florida's Gulf Coast, running 50,000 tests a year, paid \$123,680 for licenses out of a five-year contract that grew to \$383,112.^{5, 39}
- A large multi-site wastewater utility in the Midwest approved \$2.27 million for its LIMS from 2021 to 2026 and is still running the same system, now more than 20 years old.^{20, 63, 45, 26, 64}

3. The cost nobody invoices

Lab staff time on manual data handling never appears in a LIMS budget, and in the model labs in the next section it is the largest line or close to it. One technician re-keying results an hour a day, at the refining technician wage of \$38.53 an hour (about \$55 with benefits), costs about \$13,800 a year and \$69,000 over five years. Ten technicians cost \$138,000 a year and \$689,000 over five years.

Wages (Bureau of Labor Statistics, mean hourly): chemists \$45.94 nationally, \$51.50 in petroleum refining, \$55.60 at utilities, \$43.62 to \$48.72 in chemical manufacturing; chemical technicians \$29.29 nationally, \$38.53 in refining, \$43.85 at utilities.^{65, 66, 67, 68, 69} Benefits add about 43 percent to wages.⁷⁰

Some labs have measured the time. One agriculture lab in our replacement study counted about 2,000 hours a year of unnecessary data entry. A Southern California city water lab reports "saving 60 minutes a day per technician" since it stopped re-keying field data.⁷¹ An Indiana utility lab saved 2.5 hours a week on sample log-in and

QC batch setup.⁷² An environmental lab in Brazil reports "at least 100 hours per month in data transcription and manual calculations."⁷³ The last three come from vendor case studies.

Hand-entered results also contain errors at a measurable rate. Our companion study, *What a Lab Data Error Costs*, covers how often and what those errors have cost.

4. Three labs, five years

These three labs are composites built from the records. Each cost line is an amount a real lab paid or a vendor published, from the source cited. Staff who run the system are priced at posted salaries with benefits. Re-keying is priced at one hour a day per technician, as one lab measured it, at about \$55 an hour with benefits: \$69,000 per technician over five years.

SMALL

Five staff at one site, three on the bench, a hosted system. About \$540,000 over five years.

Subscription	\$168,500 (\$33,700 a year, hosting included) ²
Subscription increases	\$17,700 (at a 5 percent annual cap, the highest in the records) ¹⁸
Implementation	\$62,280 (install, data migration, training) ²
Instrument interfaces	\$30,600 (eight instruments at \$3,825 each) ^{46, 9}
Training	\$6,000 (two seats at a vendor course, \$2,995 each) ³⁰
Change orders	\$6,200 (10 percent of implementation, the usual allowance) ¹⁸
Operations data software	\$42,100 (\$8,427 a year) ⁵⁸
Someone to run it	none; no LIMS position at a lab this size ^{18, 46}
Re-keying	\$206,600 (three technicians, an hour a day)

MEDIUM

20 staff at one site, ten on the bench, a perpetual license on the lab's own servers. About \$2.4 million over five years.

License	\$134,300 (20 concurrent seats at list price) ⁹
Maintenance	\$107,400 (20 percent of the license a year from year two) ¹²
Implementation	\$178,600 (kickoff, configuration, testing, training, acceptance) ³
Instrument interfaces and integrations	\$74,600 (15 instruments at \$3,825; one spreadsheet integration at \$17,190) ^{40, 9, 37}
Custom reports	\$20,000 (one lab's amendment for reports) ³⁹
Training	\$19,000 (one five-day onsite class) ³⁶
Database license	\$55,700 (\$11,149 a year) ⁴³
Change orders	\$31,000 (four amendments at one medium lab) ³⁹
One version upgrade	\$132,200 ²⁴
Someone to run it	\$733,200 (a senior LIMS programmer analyst at the posted midpoint, \$102,539, with benefits) ⁵¹
Quality management and calibration software	\$208,800 (\$27,000 a year for quality management; \$56,436 plus \$4,343 a year for calibration tracking) ^{56, 59}
Re-keying	\$688,700 (ten technicians, an hour a day)

LARGE

40 staff across several sites, thirty on the bench, an enterprise system hosted by the vendor. About \$9.5 million over five years.

Licenses	\$1,422,300 (\$284,468 a year, as one four-lab program pays) ⁶
Implementation	\$803,700 (\$603,200 awarded, plus 33 percent in change orders) ^{20, 45}
Vendor support services after go-live	\$820,000 (two years at \$410,000) ³³
Instrument interfaces and integrations	\$196,800 (32 instruments at \$3,825; one results interface at \$74,394) ^{61, 9, 38}
Training	\$38,000 (two five-day onsite classes) ³⁶
Hosting and maintenance	\$700,000 (\$140,000 a year) ⁴²
One upgrade to a current version	\$654,400 ²⁷
Two people to run it	\$2,098,400 (a LIMS administrator and a senior application developer at posted midpoints, with benefits) ^{48, 49}
Quality management, operations data and calibration software	\$470,900 ^{56, 57, 59}
The old system's maintenance during the build	\$191,200 (three years of renewals) ⁷⁴
Re-keying	\$2,066,200 (thirty technicians, an hour a day)

5. Dedicated staff just to run the LIMS

Most medium and large labs in the records have at least one person whose job is the LIMS. Posted salaries run \$59,883 to \$176,301 a year before benefits, about \$86,000 to \$252,000 with benefits. Over five years that person costs about as

much as the software, and often more. At the county water lab in section 2, the position costs \$413,088 over five years, or about \$590,000 with benefits, against a \$383,112 contract for the system.

- A Texas city water lab posted two positions in 2026 for one central lab: a senior LIMS programmer analyst at \$89,164 to \$115,914 and a LIMS programmer analyst at \$84,743 to \$95,796.^{51, 52}
- A Southern California water district with 32 lab staff, reporting more than 400,000 results a year, pays its LIMS administrator \$141,045 to \$176,301. The position sits on the team choosing the replacement, with the lab director and the director of information services.^{48, 61}
- A Maryland regional water utility pays \$99,869 to \$169,779 for a senior application developer to keep two LIMS products running.⁴⁹
- A Los Angeles-area regional wastewater utility posts its LIMS administrator at \$115,668 to \$143,724.⁵⁰
- A Northern Virginia water utility posts its laboratory systems administrator at \$59,883 to \$136,510 across three levels.⁵³
- A health lab pays its LIMS administrator up to \$85,000; the Florida county lab pays its LIMS database administrator \$63,565 to \$101,691.^{47, 54}

We read 35 LIMS job postings: 29 were dedicated LIMS jobs, 20 listed upgrade or patch work, and 28 asked for a programming or scripting language. SQL came up most often, then the major LIMS products' own scripting languages, then C#, Java and VBA. Contract developers in one product's proprietary language bill \$40 to \$90 an hour.⁵⁵

Salaries exclude benefits. The Bureau of Labor Statistics puts benefits at 30 percent of total compensation in private industry, so a \$100,000 administrator costs about \$143,000 a year with benefits.⁷⁰

6. The bill rises

Maintenance and subscription fees go up every year. Contracts in the records cap increases at 3 to 5 percent a year. At the cap, year five costs 13 to 22 percent more than year one. Actual renewals rose about 1 to 5 percent a year. When a contract ran out, the next one could cost much more: 42 percent more at one county utility. Another utility's bill rose 36 percent over nine years.

- Contract caps in the records: 3 percent a year (the Florida county lab and a large Bay Area wastewater lab), 5 percent (the Bay Area plant lab), and 3 to 5 percent or CPI, whichever is lower (a Utah water district's 2026 request for proposals).^{5, 3, 46, 18}
- An Ohio city utility renewed its old system's maintenance every year from 2016 to 2025, each renewal approved separately: \$49,371, \$51,006, \$52,194, \$54,792, \$55,341, \$56,166, \$58,974, \$60,453, \$63,774, \$66,963. Up 36 percent in nine years.⁷⁴
- The Midwest utility's annual renewal went from \$122,693 in 2021 to \$149,526 in 2026, and the amounts already approved for 2027, 2028 and 2029 are \$156,963, \$164,096 and \$170,988.^{63, 75}
- A metro Atlanta county utility paid \$112,312 for three years of LIMS maintenance and support starting in 2021, then \$159,498 for the next three years, which also covered training.⁷⁶

7. Paying twice

Replacing a LIMS means paying for two systems for a while, and how long depends on how fast the data comes out of the old one. If the history cannot be migrated, or the migration runs long, the old system's maintenance keeps getting renewed alongside the new contract. In the records, the overlap lasted three to six years and cost \$191,190 to \$811,755 on top of the new system.

- The Ohio utility kept renewing its old system's maintenance while the new one was built: three yearly renewals overlapping the new contract, \$191,190 in all.^{74, 77}

- The water science program is paying \$217,331 to keep its legacy system supported from 2022 to 2027 while the new one is built, because "the LIMS would need to be shut down absent security patches."¹⁶
- The Midwest utility paid \$811,755 in renewals on the old system across the six years it tried to replace it, plus \$158,076 in change orders for the new system's maintenance fees while the build ran long.^{63, 45}

8. Upgrades are a project of their own

If a lab owns its license, moving to a new version is a separate purchase, on top of maintenance. The more the system was changed to fit the lab, the more the move costs, because someone has to redo those changes on the new version. In the records, upgrades ran from \$37,296 for one lab's runtime upgrade to about \$2.8 million for one agency's two-lab modernization; the two systems described as highly customized cost \$634,628 and \$654,400 to bring current.

- A lab network that tests fuel paid \$654,400 in 2025 to update its system to a current version and interface. The work statement describes the system as "highly customized Commercial-Off-the-Shelf (COTS) software based on [the vendor's] programming language."^{27, 78}
- A lab in the United Kingdom contracted £462,143 to move one product from version 12.1, out of support, to version 21.3.²⁵
- The Midwest utility tried a version upgrade in 2017 with a \$298,915 consulting contract that never landed, and is now paying \$634,628 to redeploy the same product.^{26, 79}
- A science lab network paid \$121,373 to move from version 6 to version 8 of its product, and \$132,156 on a second upgrade order.²⁴
- A New England health and environmental lab is paying \$1,102,200 to move its system to the vendor's newer public health product, on top of \$321,756 for three years of licensing, support and maintenance.²⁸
- A workplace-safety agency spent about \$2.8 million from 2023 to 2025 on a LIMS modernization for its two labs.²⁹

What this means

The license is about a third of the bill, at most. In the records, 8 to 35 percent. Budget the five years: about \$230,000 to \$930,000 for a small lab, \$1.5 to \$3 million for a medium lab, \$5 million and up for a large one.

Re-keying is one of the biggest costs, and it never shows up on an invoice. An hour a day per technician is \$69,000 over five years. Count your lab's hours and price them with the wages in section 3.

A LIMS comes with a salary. Medium and large labs usually pay someone to run it, at \$59,883 to \$176,301 a year before benefits, and most of those jobs ask for programming.

The bill goes up every year. Caps of 3 to 5 percent a year put year five 13 to 22 percent above year one, and one county utility's next contract cost 42 percent more.

You pay for two systems until the data is out of the old one. In the records, three to six years and \$191,190 to \$811,755.

Budget for an upgrade. In the records, \$37,296 to about \$2.8 million, and \$634,628 and \$654,400 for the two highly customized systems.

Making the case for a new LIMS? Our companion study, *[Getting a LIMS Approved](#)*, looks at what gets a LIMS request approved, what stalls it, and what the approved requests did that the others didn't.

How we did the study

We reviewed what 39 labs and lab networks spent on their LIMS, from documents dated 2015 to 2026, most from 2019 onward, in which the buyer or the seller states the cost. Those records are contracts and the staff reports that approved them,

award records, state contract datasets, IT project reports and tender notices; we added published price lists, job postings and salary schedules, and wage and benefit tables from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

ABOUT SABINE INDUSTRIAL

Sabine Industrial builds SI LIMS for fuel, energy, utility and chemical quality labs. Our team has spent fifteen years working with data extracts from every major LIMS. This study is the third in a series on how labs buy, run and replace a LIMS. The others cover why LIMS get replaced, getting a LIMS approved, and what a lab data error costs.

Questions about the data: info@sabineriverpartners.com

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