



# Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY

## **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative – PY 2021**

Montana submits its WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for PY 2021 to the Secretary of Labor in accordance with the “WIOA Common Performance Reporting-OMB Control No. 1205-0526.” This report serves as a complement to the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report (ETA 9169).

### **Waivers:**

During PY2021, Montana had one approved waiver.

Waiver to allow the State Board to carry out the functions of the Local Board - Under this waiver, Montana continued to allocate WIOA Title I funds by local area. From each local area, funds are allocated to counties utilizing local unemployment and poverty data to ensure funds are distributed in an equitable way to maximize service delivery. County-elected officials sit on the State Board and were able to provide local input into activities carried out throughout Montana.

### **Two approaches the state chose for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers performance indicator pilot:**

Montana focused on all three performance indicators: Retention with the Same Employer; Repeat Business Customers; and the Employer Penetration Rate. Montana Department of Labor & Industry (MDLI) gathered performance indicator data when recording business contacts and their activities, including collection of business information and reporting combined data from partner agencies—Adult Education (AE) and Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS). Montana collected additional data after marketing materials aimed at businesses were revamped and training for business specialists was improved to include to the use of data to develop business engagement strategies.

### **Include brief descriptions of:**

- a) current or planned evaluation and related research projects, including methodologies used;**
- b) efforts to coordinate the development of such projects with WIOA core programs, other state agencies, and local boards. For the sake of thoroughness, a) and b) are combined throughout the descriptions below.**

MDLI produced the Post-Secondary Workforce Report, research that synthesized data on Montana's labor market demand with statewide training program graduation information to provide a broad assessment of the supply and demand of workers in the state. This study combined occupational employment projections data alongside Montana University System graduate data and Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) by degree and certification type to assess the numbers of people being trained each year compared to the projected demand for those skillsets in the workforce. The report also included graduates from private and tribal educational institutions, along with the Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program, providing a comprehensive analysis of workforce gaps in the state. This analysis also looked at wage and employment outcomes of graduates to determine what trainings lead to worker retention in local labor markets, as well as which result in the highest earnings.

MDLI continued to complete in-depth reports on workforce programs in the state. Every year, MDLI updates its report on participants in the Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program (MRAP) to analyze program participation trends and apprentice outcomes. This consistently identified positive program outcomes that demonstrated the value of apprenticeship, while also providing information that can be used for continuous improvement within MDLI. Additionally, MDLI produced a report summarizing the Return-to-Work Bonus program implemented by the state under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), incentivizing unemployment insurance claimants to find new jobs.

MDLI also produced information on topical issues in the labor market. This included producing a report on nursing that sought to describe and identify trends in the nursing workforce, as well as highlighting supply and demand issues that the occupation faced. This report consisted of an analysis of data from the state occupational licensing board for nurses, supplemented by the National Council State Board of Nursing's national survey of nurses. Similarly, Child Care deserts (areas where childcare availability is extremely undersupplied) were studied and summarized in a report that analyzed childcare licensing data alongside population estimates of the number of children and working parents in the state. MDLI also worked with local organizations to produce local area labor reports that described local markets and challenges that they faced. In PY2021, MDLI produced the Helena Area Labor Report.

MDLI planned for (with the intention of beginning in 2023) a Randomized Control Trial evaluation of a new virtual services platform that the department created in Moodle. MDLI will evaluate this new service using the RESEA program, creating a new requirement for a randomized selection of participants in the program. In doing so, MDLI intends to measure the impact of the new services on unemployment duration, wages, and employment outcomes. Additionally, the evaluation will examine the impacts on enrollment in WIOA training programs compared to the existing program that does not offer this service.

**c) a list of completed evaluation and related reports and links to where they were made accessible to the public electronically:**

Montana Post-Secondary Workforce Report: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/MTCollegeReport2022.pdf>

Apprenticeship Report: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/Apprenticeship-Data-Report-2021.pdf>

Return to Work Bonus Program: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/ReturnToWorkReport.pdf>

Childcare Deserts: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/ChildCareDesertsWhitePaper-FINAL.pdf>

MT Nursing Report: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/Nursing-Report.pdf>

Helena Area Labor Report: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/HelenaAreaLaborReport2021.pdf>

**d) State efforts to provide data, survey responses, and timely site visits for Federal evaluations:**

Desk reviews and virtual and on-site visits were utilized to evaluate participant records, gather data, and provide reports to service providers. In addition, unit managers met regularly to improve the alignment of service delivery elements, including the use of data gathered through the monitoring process. All service providers were monitored during PY2021.

**e) Continuous improvement strategies utilizing results from studies and evidence-based practices evaluated:**

MDLI continued to improve the agency's access to program-related data in a variety of forms. MDLI distributed the research and reports to the WIOA core programs, along with presentations and question and answer opportunities with core program managers so that the information is understood and applied effectively. Additionally, MDLI generated new data dashboards and data visualization tools to support the use and accessibility of the information created in this research. These tools provided visual analytics of labor market information and program activities to inform managers, workforce consultants, and other staff for decision-making purposes. Easy access to downloadable data on program activities provided improvement in monitoring and auditing, information sharing, and management decisions.

The planned evaluation of the new virtual service platform will provide key information about the ability to utilize virtual tools more broadly across all WIOA programs. By evaluating wage and employment outcomes and the medium for which assistance is being provided, valuable knowledge will be gained about whether barriers such as internet access or computer literacy are significant impediments to the widespread adoption of the new services.

Finally, the knowledge gained from research on childcare, nursing, and apprenticeship has been applied to ongoing practices. This information is used to provide better service to businesses seeking assistance, as well as better service to job seekers either interested in or affected by the issues that were studied.

**Describe the state's approach to customer satisfaction, which may include such information used for one-stop certification, in accordance with 20 CFR 678.800:**

MDLI refined a specific customer experience survey to gain greater understanding of Wagner-Peyser customer satisfaction, sending it to 1890 individuals from December 2021 – June 30, 2022. Responses were ranked 1-5; with 5 being the highest rating. The highest-rated response of "I felt comfortable discussing my questions and concerns with the Workforce Consultant" averaged 4.63. The lowest-rated

response of “I took a step towards my goal because of my conversation with the Workforce Consultant” averaged 4.23. These results and other survey responses were sent to the specific Job Service Montana (JSM) manager to ensure follow-up and service delivery changes as needed.

In much the same manner, a customer satisfaction survey was offered online for all Title 1B Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth participants. This survey was sent to participants who exited services each month.

Service providers regularly elicited feedback from business partners and individuals at hiring events, career and resource fairs, workshops, and virtual trainings.

**A description of Montana’s continuous improvement processes for incorporating customer satisfaction feedback:**

MDLI recognized that a customer- and human-centered approach offered more favorable outcomes. After JSM staff received training, they began working on the development and implementation of services based on customer needs and wants. MDLI clarified eligibility policy, reduced the amount of paperwork necessary to enroll a customer, and expedited the enrollment process.

Additionally, MDLI used customer satisfaction feedback to improve participants’ training experiences. For example, feedback provided to one of our CDL training providers enhanced their customer service, resulting in higher training completion rates. MDLI sought additional training providers such as Grow With Google, Coursera, and Accelerate Montana to meet participant requests for training in high-demand occupations.

**Specific state performance measures or goals and progress toward meeting them:**

During PY2021, MDLI continued efforts to provide technical assistance for the Youth Program performance indicators and continued to see improvement in performance indicator rates in this program. The results of technical assistance showed an increase of 5.6% in the Youth Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) performance indicator and a 9.4% increase in the Youth Credential Attainment performance indicator on the 2021 Annual Report.

For PY2022, MDLI negotiated performance levels of 50 percent for each of Youth MSGs and Credential Attainment. MDLI expects to meet these performance levels and included performance-level goals in recent contracts with service providers.

**Performance deficiencies on the primary indicators of performance:**

MDLI continued to place high priority on improving WIOA reporting and WIOA performance outcomes. During PY2021, MDLI started the process of moving to the new 2021 PIRL schema and as a part of those efforts, also began the process of reviewing data collection and reporting processes for all existing data elements as well. Data collection improvements, along with data validation and monitoring processes, have been essential to ensure consistent data integrity. The improvements also allowed MDLI to identify and address additional training needs.

Through these efforts, MDLI identified the need for measurable skill gains and credential technical assistance for WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker, and the WIOA Youth program. In addition to providing technical assistance sessions to all service providers and a thorough review of data collection procedures, MDLI created an interactive training module that providers will utilize for new and continued training on MSGs and credentials. A combination of these efforts and a continued assessment of our data will result in MDLI being closer to meeting all WIOA Performance Indicators. Towards the end of PY2022, MDLI plans to review and assess technical assistance efforts to improve performance and adjust accordingly.

### **Common exit policy:**

Montana has a common exit policy for Wagner Peyser; WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; TAA; Veterans; and any National Dislocated Worker Grant. A date of exit is determined after ninety days have lapsed since the last countable service with no additional services planned. The exit date is retroactive to the last date of service and is not delayed, postponed or affected by self-service or information-only services or activities.

### **The state's approach to data validation and ensuring data integrity:**

During PY2021, MDLI monitoring staff conducted outreach with providers which included entrance and exit calls. These sessions provided monitoring staff an opportunity to share and discuss the data validation policy and procedures to safeguard service providers' comprehensive understanding of data validation requirements and expectations.

The data validation requirements applied to:

- WIOA Core Programs; and
- Non-Core Programs:
  - National Dislocated Worker Grants (DWG)
  - Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)
  - Monitor Advocate System – all requirements that apply to Wagner-Peyser Employment Services apply to this system.

MDLI's procedures also included the following:

- Recording retention time frames based on Primary Indicator of Performance exit date, not the date that the participant stops receiving Veteran, Wagner-Peyser, and WIOA services.
- Monitoring team provided service providers and program managers with a written report of identified errors or missing data and a request to correct the inaccuracies.
- Program managers and the reporting analyst provided technical assistance.
- Service providers responded in writing to correct all inaccuracies and/or inconsistencies.

MDLI's Monitoring, Audits, Performance and Sanctions Policy details monitoring protocols, consistent with 2 CFR 200.328 to ensure program staff are following written procedures.

A review of program data, including the United States Department of Labor's (USDOL) required elements, was conducted and the data validation process was assessed for effectiveness.

### **Information on activities provided by state funds:**

#### **Become An Alum**

The Become an Alum program offered employed workers an opportunity to improve their skill set or finish a credential. During PY2021, \$75,754 was spent on Become An Alum activities across the following JSM locations: Kalispell, Missoula, Helena, Billings, Glendive, and Miles City.

The Become An Alum office teams coordinated with 11 statewide higher education campuses and multiple businesses to identify skills or credentials in high demand regionally. The team called and/or emailed former students with unfinished credentials to ask what kind of support they needed to complete their degree or improve their skills. The team also assisted individuals to obtain employment based on their current skills or connected them with additional resources.

#### **A & T Equity Coordinator**

MDLI created and funded a new temporary Equity and Diversity Coordinator position for the Registered Apprenticeship program. The Equity and Diversity coordinator worked with MDLI staff, registered apprenticeship sponsors, and community partners to identify and increase inclusion of underserved populations in registered apprenticeship programs. The position conducted outreach efforts, public presentations, and participated on boards to increase opportunities for awareness of diversity and equity efforts in registered apprenticeship. The total amount spent on staffing and operating for PY2021 was \$93,938.

#### **Tribal Computer Coding Pilot Program**

MDLI provided grant funds to qualifying organizations that deliver a self-paced computer coding training program to eligible youth in tribal communities to prepare students for in-demand technology occupations. The grant of \$50,000 was awarded to Code Girls United during PY2021 and \$14,327 was spent on the project. This project ends December 31, 2022.

### **Promising practices, lessons learned, and success stories that focus on serving employers, communities, and individuals with barriers to employment:**

#### **a) Serving Individuals with Employment Barriers:**

##### **Montana's Department of Corrections (DOC) Re-entry and JSM**

According to Montana's DOC, recidivism decreases when individuals re-entering society obtain employment. DOC case managers and probation and parole officers helped offenders navigate a variety of re-entry challenges before and after release. JSM workforce consultants skillfully assisted individuals to overcome employment barriers including criminal convictions. JSM helped individuals identify and

obtain the appropriate resources, training, and connections necessary to become successfully employed. Statewide, Montana businesses are experiencing workforce shortages throughout most industries, sectors, and occupations. Justice-involved individuals are often an underutilized pool of workers.

### **Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG)**

JVSG-funded staff continued to collaborate with, and often lead, a vast network of service providers dedicated to serving veterans. Montana continues to have one of the highest per capita rates of veterans served by grant-funded and non-grant-funded staff.

Events designed to help veterans network and/or obtain the services they need for transition, personal growth, and community are an important part of veteran outreach and the ability to identify veterans with barriers to employment—particularly those targeted for specialized services. Throughout the program year, Montana’s Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) promoted multiple service providers and related events, fundraisers, job fairs, workshops, and volunteer needs on social media. Montana’s DVOP served as a liaison between JSM offices, assisting with employment and education opportunities.

DVOP partnered with the Malmstrom’s Airman and Family Readiness Center, offering the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to service members within one year of separating or two years from retirement. DVOP partnered with agencies across the state including veteran centers, Montana’s Veteran Affairs Division (MVAD) and Aging Services, U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), colleges, XSports4Vets, and local housing authorities. The Veteran Service Network was established to provide regional support for veterans, service members, and their families.

DVOP served as the liaison for the Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court program. The Veterans Treatment Court Team is an interdisciplinary team of community partners including, but not limited to, police departments; the County Sheriffs’ offices; the Missoula, Silver Bow, and Cascade County Attorney’s offices; the Montana Office of Public Defender; chemical dependency/mental health community treatment providers; DOC Adult Probation and Parole Bureau; United States Probation and Pretrial Services; and pre-release centers. Through this collaborative effort, the Court promotes public safety by establishing individualized treatment plans and providing the tools necessary for successful reengagement.

DVOP partnered with homeless shelters ensuring veterans had a safe environment that offered job readiness training, employment counseling services, and career opportunities. DVOP identified gaps in competitive employment services for homeless veterans. DVOP briefed the shelter managers about the numerous programs available through JSM offices.

### **Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW)**

During PY2021, co-enrollment of job seekers who met eligibility for the WIOA Adult and the National Farmworker Jobs (NFJP) programs continued to a best practice. Collaboration between JSM staff who provide services to migrant and seasonal farm workers and partner agencies who also have similar functions continued to be encouraged and highlighted at the annual training and in regular communication. The State Monitor Advocate served on the Board of Directors for Rural Employment



Opportunities, the NFJP grantee for Montana. This promoted cross agency collaboration, coordination, and leveraging of resources.

### **Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG)**

The Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG) model is offered across the state in eighteen schools (middle schools, high schools, and one tribal college) that serve a high percentage of American Indian students either on or near the reservation. The model supported Project-Based Learning to achieve the thirty-seven core competencies; support employer engagement; and practice trauma-informed care to increase graduation rates and support workforce readiness. The model fosters students' retention and credential attainment and offers participants the opportunity to learn, practice, and master the professional skills needed to become gainfully employed in the future.

The follow-up data for American Indian students in the JMG model for the 2020-2021 school year was:

- 25% overall participation;
- 77% graduation rate for those in JMG;
- 94% full-time employment; and
- 38% furthering education.

During PY2021, JMG continued to work with Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) to support students in their career development, to understand and practice skills needed for employment, and to promote staying in school to obtain credentials for advancement in their career choices.

JMG is also a service provider for the WIOA Youth Program in the Northwest region known as District 10 of the Montana Association of Counties (MACo). The counties in this region include Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders. JMG provided out-of-school youth with opportunities to reconnect with their communities. Out-of-school youth were supported and encouraged to obtain the HiSET (High School Equivalency) and gain valuable job skills through Work Experience (WEX) or On-The-Job Training (OJT) activities. The overall goal is to assist participants with barriers to be successfully and productively engaged in Montana's workforce.

### **b) Services to Business:**

#### **ABC Clinics**

The Assistance for Business Clinics (ABC Clinics), one of MDLI's business outreach efforts, partnered with local Chambers of Commerce, economic developers, and JSM to provide new and established businesses with updated information from MDLI, Montana Department of Revenue, Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS), and Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

During PY2021, MDLI hosted 11 in-person ABC Clinics across the state, offering topics such as Labor Market Information, Unemployment Contributions & Benefits, Workers Compensation, Wage & Hour, Independent Contracting, Vocational Rehabilitation, Apprenticeship, Incumbent Worker Training, Child Support and New Hire Reporting, Withholding and E-Services, and Employer Services of the Guard and Reserve.



### **Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)**

The IWT program transitioned from Web Grants to Submittable and created a more user-friendly platform for our business community. Existing FY22 applicants will continue to finalize the application process on Web Grants to ensure post evaluations and data collection occurs.

The IWT program collaborated with ABC Clinics, creating an interactive training environment with attendees about eligible businesses, training types, and budgetary items based on the top 15 frequently asked questions.

The IWT program manager also created a bypass option for IWT participants enrolled in MRAP on the funding platform, removing duplicate steps of data collection.

These PY2021 developments resulted in a remarkable uptick in program applications and interest.

### **c) Promising Workforce Development Practices:**

#### **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding**

ARPA's Rapid Retraining Program resulted in positive outcomes. Building on ARPA's resource flexibility, 643 participants enrolled in training for high-demand occupations. Health care and transportation (CDLs) were the top two training programs categories. Service providers cumulatively enrolled 461 individuals and exited 182 participants, with total expenditures of \$993,099. We anticipate expending all program appropriated funds by June 30, 2023.

#### **Covid-19 Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG)**

MDLI closed out the COVID-19 DWG on June 30, 2022. This grant provided supplemental, flexible resources to respond quickly to and recover from layoff events attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. MDLI pivoted from service delivery in physical offices to a remote/virtual point of service access. MDLI partnered with Coursera, an online training provider. The partnership enrolled over 1,300 Montanans in at least one Coursera on-line training course from a variety of excellent educational and training institutions, such as St. John's University, Dartmouth University, University of Colorado, and the National Institute of Health. Outreach activities included promoting the Covid-19 DWG's transitional and related services through our network of seventeen JSM offices, including some of the most remote areas in Montana.

MDLI enrolled 38 dislocated workers, some of whom were part of a significant layoff event at Idaho Forest Group's mill closure in St Regis, MT. Three workers immediately enrolled in truck-driver school to obtain their CDLs, obtaining employment as snowplow drivers with the Montana Department of Transportation who needed drivers immediately. MDLI partnered with Montana State University (MSU) Extension office to promote MSU's remote learning certification and assist graduates with work-search activity. If students qualified as dislocated workers, they received financial assistance.

### **d) Integration Efforts:**

JSM offices across the state utilized Unemployment Insurance (UI) information to contact unemployed individuals. JSM provided reemployment assistance to the individuals utilizing support and training

services available thru JSM and other community resources. Additionally, UI provided immediate information to JSM offices about natural disasters impacting both job seekers and employers. Based on the information, JSM offices provided timely, well-informed Rapid Response services.

JSM and Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services utilized a common platform to cooperatively case-manage clients. The platform provided a timely exchange of information and improved opportunities for case managers to collaboratively serve their common participant(s).

As the result of an independent business study, MDLI initiated structural changes to improve its integration of data and communication across various WIOA Programs and other relevant workforce partners. The new structure and related process is young, but MDLI is optimistic there will be benefits for participant services through the use of data to inform decisions and the development of alignment strategies.

#### **e) Using Data to Inform Decisions:**

MDLI used EconoVue's on-line tool which provides real-time data and information about local businesses. JSM offices used specific data and information to proactively reach out to businesses in their communities and offer customized services. This approach proved valuable to both business customers and JSM staff. Much of this data helped MDLI understand how to improve alignment of our resources to meet business needs. When MDLI adjusted staff positions and set an intention to improve business and educational engagement, the data provided sound logic

Additionally, UI gave JSM real-time data about the number of individuals and businesses impacted by recent natural disasters across several counties in Montana. This data helped MDLI connect intentionally with those impacted, offering them timely, pin-pointed resources.

JSM utilized UI claimant data to inform outreach calls to claimants. During the outreach calls, staff gained additional information about the types of support claimants needed and provided information about the tools, resources, opportunities, and funding available to get individuals back to work. Through this data-informed outreach effort, JSM enrolled a significant number of claimants in WIOA programs.

Occupational data and labor market information informed JSM and decisions about participant training. It also informed businesses of recruitment and retention issues and training and/or funding opportunities for new employees and incumbent workers.

Lastly, MDLI used Tableau Software to improve the presentation of data pulled out of MDLI's management information system to identify trends; look for potential opportunities to address local or statewide workforce development issues; and inform policy decisions.

#### **f) Using Technology to Assist Customers:**

##### **Island Mountain Development Group's (IMDG) Technology Apprenticeships**

In partnership with USDOL's national intermediary Safal Partners, MDLI assisted with the launch of IMDG's new Registered Apprenticeship Program based in the eastern Montana community of Hays. IMDG is a Native American economic development corporation dedicated to creating a self-sustaining economy by striving to create opportunities for the Aaniiih (Gros Ventre) and Nakoda (Assiniboine)

Nations through business, jobs, and resource development. The company will train apprentices as IT specialists through competency-based, mentor-led on-the-job learning (OJL), and online coursework on Safal's training platform. The platform features industry-built courses from Cybrary as well as a fifteen-week, short-term cybersecurity training program from the University of Montana.

IMDG board members and MRAP staff held an apprentice signing ceremony at the company's headquarters in Hays. Each of the company's four initial apprentices entered the program with an AAS degree from Aaniiih Nakoda College and, upon completion, will receive a micro-credential from University of Montana, completion certification from Cybrary, and a nationally recognized, portable credential from USDOL.

WIOA funding will be used for related classroom instruction in cybersecurity.

### **Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)**

Montana's virtual service delivery model for conducting RESEA continued with success, despite a fluctuation in the number of RESEA agents due to staff turnover and JSM organizational changes. The RESEA team provided services statewide, using virtual technology as the primary tool to serve claimants. RESEA team members are workforce consultants, DVOP staff, WIOA case managers, and career coaches—all collaborating to bring their expertise to UI claimants. To mitigate future coverage issues and stabilize the number of UI claimants served, MDLI will consider an appointment self-scheduler.

### **Coursera**

Montana continued to provide Coursera online training through a core group of workforce consultants who routinely request Coursera access for participants. During PY2021, Coursera added a product called Career Academy. It focuses on a combination of hard skills and "human skills." It includes career training in in-demand fields such as data management, sales, digital marketing, and AI+ machine learning. It also provides information on job readiness, job searching, navigating LinkedIn and networking, and resilience. Coursera also launched wrap-around services, such as assistance with resumes and interviewing. Coursera also provided a tailored menu of basic computer skills that could be helpful to participants who aspired to remote work, but need refreshers on Microsoft Office skills, Google programs, math, or data literacy. As MDLI focused on the needs of remote learners, that curation of digital skills might meet the needs of that segment of participants, resulting in minimal additional usage.

### **Grow with Google**

MDLI partnered with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) and Google to connect 500 job seekers statewide with no-cost access to Google Career Certificates training for well-paying, high-demand jobs in growing fields. The certificates equip individuals with job-ready skills in the high-growth fields of Data Analytics, Digital Marketing and E-Commerce, IT Support, Project Management, and UX Design. The online program can be completed in three to six months of part-time study—with no degree or experience required. After finishing the program, graduates are connected with an employer consortium of over 150 companies— including Deloitte, Ford, Verizon, Walmart, and Google—who consider them for relevant roles.

**g) Successes:**

Sarah, a single mother of three, enrolled in the WIOA Adult program to gain assistance with the costs to complete a dental hygiene program. When she applied for the program, she was unemployed and received Medicaid and SNAP. Once Sarah was accepted, she and her children moved from Arlee to Great Falls. Throughout the two-year program, she overcame several barriers, daycare and financial issues, as well as a lack of a support system. Sarah completed training in May 2022 and is employed at Tribal Health as a dental hygienist with a wage of \$40 per hour.

J.H. was released from prison and needed a fresh start. He contacted JSM in Polson in to inquire about CDL training. J.H. enrolled in the WIOA Adult program to assist with completion of a post-secondary highway construction program, obtaining Class A CDL and flagging and heavy equipment certificates. In March 2022, he passed the state driving exam on his first try. He graduated in June 2022.

Keith, a veteran employed by Idaho Forest Group, was laid off in November 2021 when the business closed permanently. He attended the rapid response workshop, learning about WIOA Dislocated Worker-funded training opportunities. Shortly afterwards, he followed up with JSM in Thompson Falls, gathering additional information about the Dislocated Worker program and developing a training plan to obtain a Class A CDL. He completed the training, attained his CDL, and works full-time as a truck driver.

After Rachel was laid-off from her seasonal job, she contacted JSM in Thompson Falls. She wanted to train for a different occupation that offered full-time, year-round work. Rachel enrolled in the WIOA Adult program and completed CDL training. To increase her employability, she requested additional assistance to obtain her Hazmat endorsement. That goal was added to her employment plan, and she attained the endorsement. Rachel is currently employed as a truck driver, earning a wage of \$31.28 per hour. She stated this opportunity provided the chance to earn a sustainable wage and no longer live in poverty.

In a participant's own words—"JSM in Helena provided me with information, resources, and support to be successful in the Local 400 union apprenticeship programs in my first year. Through the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program, they assisted me with my rent several times; purchased needed work clothing and tools; and paid my union initiation fee and dues. They also advocated for me with unemployment so I could participate in the apprenticeship program and still receive my unemployment benefits. I have been working for a company named Ceccanti Inc. in Coram, Montana since May as part of the union. I am making the best money of my life, currently \$2K per week. This has allowed me to buy a camper to live in near the work site, so I do not have to sleep in my truck. Most importantly, I am learning about operating a wide range of heavy equipment and a lot about life and myself."

**Challenges Faced by the State Workforce System**

Montana faced several workforce development challenges. The state's workforce retired at a faster pace than workers entered, resulting in slow growth of the labor supply at a time when the state was experiencing record-setting employment and job opening growth. Labor markets have been very tight, presenting opportunities for workers and challenges to employers. Often, PY2021 job seekers had more

barriers to employment, requiring intensive case management, training, and resources to gain employment and educational outcomes.

Additionally, the cost of living substantially increased and many individuals were priced out of housing in communities where jobs were located.

A substantial childcare shortage also directly impacted individuals' ability to be employed or work full-time. Some communities had no licensed childcare providers. In communities that did, potential employees were waitlisted for multiple years, reducing their ability to work.

MDLI continued to advocate for greater individual and community access to technology with related education and support. Lack of access to reliable internet prevented individuals from working remotely. In addition, many Montanans do not have the technological skills to be successful in today's workplace.

Lastly, Montana's large physical footprint and low population made it more difficult to gain economies of scale compared to those achieved by highly populated and/or smaller states.

### **Conclusion:**

Montana's WIOA Annual Statewide Performance PY2021 Report Narrative details progress towards meeting its strategic vision and goals for its workforce system. When updating its report on participants in the Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program (MRAP), MDLI conducted non-experimental analysis. Analysis of MRAP participation trends and outcomes demonstrated both the value of apprenticeship and of information that can be used for continuous improvement within MDLI. In addition, MDLI's report on the Return-to-Work Bonus program, implemented under the American Rescue Plan Act, summarized the relationship between incentives and unemployment insurance claimants' efforts to obtain employment. MDLI also produced the Post-Secondary Workforce Report, research that analyzed data on Montana's training program graduation and the state labor market—a broad assessment of worker supply and demand. These methodologies measured the impact and effectiveness of Montana's workforce services and interventions.

Montana's narrative also describes MDLI's use of technology to offer access to portable credentials—from Island Mountain Development Group's new Registered Apprenticeship Program in rural Hays to the established helping hands of Coursera and Grow with Google. These are a few of the many ways in which MDLI continued with its commitment to be forward-thinking, consider and use data in new ways to provide excellent customer service to job seekers and businesses, focus on continuous improvement, and play an active leadership role in the state's workforce development.