



Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative – PY 2022

Montana submits its WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for PY 2022 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 PY2022, Montana had three approved waivers.

1) 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.

2) Waiver to lower the expenditure requirement of Governor’s reserve funds from 75 to 50 percent for Out-of-School-Youth (OSY) – Under this waiver, ETA expects that the number of in-school youth (ISY) served will increase and performance accountability outcomes for overall WIOA Youth (both ISY and OSY) will remain steady or increase for the majority of the WIOA Youth performance indicators.

3) Waiver to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for ISY – Under this waiver, the use of ITAs may be expanded beyond OSY, ages 16-24, to include ITAs for ISY, ages 16–21.

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 (MTDLI) 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). After marketing materials for businesses were updated, MTDLI collected additional data. Improvement in business specialist training included 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.

MTDLI updated 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 worker supply and demand. 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 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 (MRAP) and provided a comprehensive analysis of workforce gaps in the state. The analysis looked at graduates’ wage and employment outcomes to determine which trainings lead to worker retention in local labor markets and which result in the highest earnings. Using data from this report, Montana also created a postsecondary outcomes dashboard that allows data users, such as prospective students, to explore the labor market outcomes and supply/demand analysis of specific post-secondary programs.

MTDLI completed in-depth reports on workforce programs in the state. Every year, MTDLI updates its report to analyze MRAP participation trends and apprentice outcomes. The report consistently identified positive program outcomes, demonstrating the value of apprenticeship and providing information that can be used for continuous improvement within MTDLI.

MTDLI also produced information on topical issues in the labor market. This included updating a report on nursing, describing and identifying workforce trends and changes induced by the pandemic between 2020 and 2022. The report also highlights supply and demand issues faced by the nursing occupation, such as an aging workforce and decreasing numbers of Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) relative to other nursing occupations. This report included an analysis of data from the state occupational licensing board for nurses, supplemented by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing’s national survey of nurses conducted in 2020 and 2022. Similarly, reports on childcare supply and demand along with the workforce impacts of any lack of supply were updated in a report that analyzed childcare licensing data and population estimates of the number of children and working parents in the state. Finally, MTDLI produced its annual Labor Day Report that details statewide economic issues with a particular emphasis on labor market trends and topical issues of interest to workforce developers and professionals.

In March 2023, MTDLI began a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) evaluation of new service delivery strategies in the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. The RCT will make it possible to perform an impact analysis of an online reemployment “course” that delivers important information and strategies to job seekers. MTDLI partnered with the Minneapolis Federal Reserve bank on this research and intends to measure the impact of the new services on unemployment duration, wages, and employment outcomes. Additionally, the evaluation will examine impacts that this service may have on continued participation in WIOA activities, such as further Wagner-Peyser program participation or enrollment in the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program.

MTDLI continues to plan future evaluations, including further research into WIOA Title I programs to explore differences in outcomes by several factors. One such report will explore outcomes by service provider and typical spending per participant. This report will be used to establish guidelines and work with specific providers to improve performance outcomes. Additionally, a second report on WIOA Title I programs will explore outcomes by worker demographic. This report will expand upon typical outcomes reported in PIRL processes to examine measures such as training program completion, duration, and other relevant metrics. In doing so, MTDLI intends to improve its understanding of how program success varies between participants across of different backgrounds, be it race, ethnicity, age, education, or prior income background. Together, these two reports will be leveraged for improving program policy and guidelines in future iterations.

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>

Childcare Deserts: https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/EAG-Articles/EAG-0223_Final.pdf

MT Nursing Report: https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/2023_NursingSurvey.pdf

Labor Day Report: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Labor-Market-Publications/LDR20221.pdf>

[MT Apprenticeship Report: https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/Apprenticeship-Data-Report-2021.pdf](https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/Apprenticeship-Data-Report-2021.pdf)

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

Montana utilized remote and on-site visits to evaluate participant records, validate data, and provide reports to service providers. All service providers were monitored during PY2022.

MTDLI's PY2022 reorganization resulted in a new bureau: Data and Operations. Data and program teams are now housed together to facilitate more frequent cooperation and the alignment of goals across teams.

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

MTDLI continued to expand the agency's access to program-related data across multiple formats. MTDLI distributed the research and reports to the WIOA core programs, providing presentations and question and answer opportunities for core program managers so that the information is understood and applied effectively. Additionally, MTDLI generated new data dashboards and data visualization tools to support the use and accessibility of the information created in this research. This included dashboards providing on-demand tracking and outcomes information for a variety of workforce programs including Montana's ARPA Rapid Retraining, HELP-Link, RESEA, and Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) programs. 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 improved monitoring and auditing, information sharing, and management decisions.

An in-progress evaluation of the new virtual service platform (“Reemployment Central”) 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, MTDLI will gain valuable knowledge about whether barriers such as internet access or computer literacy are significant impediments to the widespread adoption of the new services.

Finally, MTDLI has applied the knowledge gained from research on childcare, nursing, and apprenticeship to ongoing practices. This information is used to improve service to businesses and job seekers who are 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:

MTDLI refined a customer experience survey to gain greater understanding of Wagner-Peyser customer satisfaction, sending it to 1935 individuals from July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. 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 4.68—up from last year’s average of 4.63. The lowest-rated response of “I feel more hopeful and prepared to achieve my career goal(s)” averaged 4.43. These results and other survey responses were sent to the specific Job Service Montana (JSM) managers to ensure follow-up and service delivery changes as needed.

Montana revised the process for certifying the one-stop system to ensure full compliance with 20 CFR 678.800, while also making the process more streamlined and transparent statewide. In addition to obtaining necessary information, Montana included new certification components and solicited feedback. Each section pertaining to JSM added an opportunity to request assistance. Other qualitative measures were requested to ensure that MTDLI and/or the State Workforce Innovation Board (SWIB) could provide technical assistance or further guidance to strengthen program outcomes.

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

Based on favorable outcomes, MTDLI continued with the customer- and human-centered approach to continuous improvement initiated during PY2021. After JSM staff received training, work started on the development and implementation of services based on customer needs and wants. MTDLI clarified the eligibility policy, reduced the amount of paperwork necessary to enroll a customer, and expedited the enrollment process.

After a business expressed concerns about the skill sets of a specific provider’s training program graduates, the relationship between the business and the training provider needed repair. An MTDLI-facilitated meeting between the business and the training provider improved their working relationship, resulting in a training program customized to meet the employer’s needs.

MTDLI also used customer feedback to improve statewide collaboration and service delivery to individuals with disabilities. Further details are provided in the promising practices section of this narrative.

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

During PY2022, MTDLI continued efforts to provide technical assistance for the Youth Program's performance indicators and saw improvement in performance indicator rates for this program. For PY 2023, MTDLI is prioritizing improvement in the negotiated performance rate for Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) and meeting with providers to assess performance results on a quarterly basis, providing training and technical assistance as needed.

Performance deficiencies on the primary indicators of performance:

MTDLI continued to place high priority on improving WIOA reporting and WIOA performance outcomes. During PY2022, MTDLI started the process of moving to the new 2021 PIRL schema and as a part of those efforts, also began reviewing data collection and reporting processes for all existing data elements.

MTDLI received in-person training from the US Department of Labor (USDOL) and applied the technical assistance from that training to update current processes- specifically around data collection and entry of MSGs, training and education activities, and technical assistance to providers. MTDLI also updated all logical and valid value reporting checks for the PIRL to proactively identify and correct potential data issues, as well as review current processes for collecting data. During the current program year, MTDLI is also re-assessing reporting processes to ensure that data is being reported in accordance with updated programmatic processes and guidance received from USDOL.

MTDLI also secured a vendor for a new, more intuitive case management system to ensure that all activities conducted are captured for reporting. The new system will aid staff in monitoring participants who are enrolled in a training and education program, including calendaring and reminders to enter MSGs and credentials in a timely manner. A combination of all these efforts and a continued assessment of data will bring MTDLI closer to meeting all WIOA Performance Indicators.

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 PY2022, MTDLI monitoring staff conducted outreach with providers which included exit calls the week after monitoring. 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.

MTDLI'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.

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

A review of program data, including USDOL's required elements, was conducted and the data validation process was assessed for effectiveness. MTDLI also reviewed monitoring tools to ensure consistency with updated programmatic and reporting procedures.

Information on activities provided by state funds:

A & T Equity Coordinator

MRAP's Equity and Diversity Coordinator worked with MTDLI staff, registered apprenticeship sponsors, and community partners to identify and increase inclusion of underserved populations in registered apprenticeship programs. The coordinator conducted outreach efforts, public presentations, and participated on boards to increase awareness of diversity and equity efforts. The total amount spent on staffing and operating for PY2022 was \$120,601.

Tribal Computer Coding Pilot Program

MTDLI provided grant funds to qualifying organizations that deliver a self-paced computer coding training program to eligible youth in tribal communities to prepare them for in-demand technology occupations. The grant of \$50,000 was awarded to Code Girls United during PY2021 and ended December 31, 2022. For PY2022 the total amount spent on the project was \$37,672.52.

Jobs for Montana Graduates

MTDLI granted \$7,500 to the Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG) program. JMG provided funding for three additional schools: Fromberg Middle School, Fromberg High School, and Powell County High School. The schools received curriculum, program materials, professional development, training and technical assistance, and access to the National Data System. The program assists students with the development of skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the workforce.

Instrument Shop

Instrument Shop is a hands-on educational program dedicated to empowering teens through the building of musical instruments. Participants learn to build instruments in a workshop setting alongside qualified instructors in a small student/teacher ratio. Instrument Shop is a social and creative environment, that also offers plenty of room for independent work. It is also an excellent place for youth to develop soft skills such as problem solving and communication skills. The grant of \$65,300 was awarded during PY2022 and \$28,864 was spent on the project. This project ends December 31, 2023.

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. Montana businesses are experiencing workforce shortages throughout most industries, sectors, and occupations. Justice-involved individuals are often an underutilized pool of workers.

WIOA Statewide Coordination of ADA Referrals and Training

JSM, Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS), Adult Education, and the SWIB collaborated to bring statewide training to all individuals directly assisting participants with disabilities. This training provided guidance on how to respond to employers’ questions and concerns regarding employment of participants with disabilities, with the intent to increase individual awareness and confidence and improve the referral process to provide a lasting and positive impact on customers’ experience.

Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG)

During PY2022, Montana’s veterans and eligible spouses continued to receive priority of service over non-veterans in career and training services at all JSM offices statewide. JVSG funded a total of 6.5 positions that were co-located, fully integrated, and managed by MTDLI’s Job Service Operations Bureau.

Using its business services engagement team, MTDLI expanded outreach activities statewide to include and inform a greater number of veterans. At JSM-Great Falls, the full time Disabled Veteran Outreach

Program (DVOP) specialist position evolved into a combined DVOP/Local Veteran Employment Representative (LVER). The LVER role and its responsibilities were added to the State Veterans Program Coordinator. This enhanced collaboration between MTDLI's business services engagement team and veteran specialists resulted in improved advocacy for veteran employment in business and industry.

During PY2022, JSM-Billings was selected as one of several JSM offices visited as part of the USDOL VETS and Technical Assent LLC's efforts to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of veterans at American Job Centers across the U.S. and the impact of a human-centered design approach to JVSG services. As of this writing, no results have been shared with Montana.

DVOP partnered with homeless shelters, ensuring veterans 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.

Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG)

Jobs for Montana's Graduates continued to expand working relationships within its service area. A new school programs case manager successfully brought awareness of the WIOA youth employment and training programs to In-school youth (ISY) in the schools JMG serves. This outreach created greater interest in ISY activities.

In addition, JMG participated in a JSM-Libby job fair. This opportunity allowed JMG to increase employer engagement opportunities by providing information on the Youth Program's services and how JMG benefits employers by creating job-training opportunities for participants. This event also provided an opportunity to recruit new participants as area high schools were in attendance.

During PY2022, JMG maintained the working relationship with JSM-Libby by providing a "working space" for their staff to be in MTDLI's office once each week to meet with potential and current participants. This relationship improved program communications between the WIOA Youth and Adult programs, opening greater possibilities for co-enrollments for eligible participants.

JMG established new relationships with area employers including a greenhouse-manufacturing facility; a business that provides cleaning services for the Forest Service and other companies; and a business that provides home inspection services, including mold remediation and minor remodeling and repair.

2022-2023 Highlights

- 1,654 students served
- 300 American Indian students served
- 97% graduation rate (statewide avg: 85%)
- 60 schools participated across the state
- National "6 for 6" Award – Montana was among the highest-achieving states in the metrics of employment rate, full-time employment, total full-time positive outcomes, connectivity rate, and further education rate.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

As a result of Montana’s successful implementation of the ARPA-funded Rapid Retraining Program, MTDLI was awarded an additional \$1.25 million dollars. During PY2022, nearly one thousand Montanans were trained in a broad range of in-demand occupations. The National Association of Workforce Agencies (NASWA) highlighted Montana’s ARPA program as a promising practice, noting that Montana’s implementation of the ARPA rapid retraining programs helped train workers for in-demand occupations, and ultimately helped Montana businesses fill their need for skilled workers. Nominations for the Pinnacle Award for Workforce Development, including Montana’s and other states’ award summaries are available on the members-only side of the NASWA website (www.naswa.org)

.b) Services to Business:

ABC Clinics

The Assistance for Business Clinics (ABC Clinics), one of MTDLI’s business outreach efforts, brought together JSM, local Chambers of Commerce, economic developers, and the Montana University System. This partnership provided new and established businesses with updated information from MTDLI, Montana Department of Revenue, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, and the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR).

MTDLI hosted 17 in-person ABC Clinics across Montana in communities large and small, offering information from subject matter experts on topics such as JSM, unemployment insurance, workers’ compensation, child support and new hire reporting, VRBS, MRAP, the Incumbent Worker Training Grant Program (IWT), wage and hour, human rights, labor market information, withholding and e-services, and ESGR.

Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)

The IWT program completed its contract with Dulles’ funding platform (WebGrants) Montana Grants & Loans in June of 2023. Since FY23 funding’s cycle coincided with the launch of Submittable, FY23 IWT accruals are supported on our new funding platform.

The IWT program participated in ABC Clinics, creating an interactive training environment with attendees about eligible businesses, training types, upcoming legislative changes, and budgetary items.

c) Promising Workforce Development Practices:

Lite Laptops

JSM utilized lite laptops onsite with multiple statewide employers to deliver Rapid Response services. This enabled impacted employees to file for unemployment benefits with staff assistance during a Rapid Response event or at another prearranged time coordinated with either the employer or community leaders. Staff enrolled impacted workers in the Dislocated Worker program onsite as well. At regional

job fairs, employers encouraged job seekers to apply for positions and print their resumes onsite or use the laptops to meet other employer criteria.

Island Mountain Development Group's (IMDG) Technology Apprenticeships

Now a year old, this statewide initiative already counts as alumni middle school students conquering code at summer STEM camps and Montana National Guard members learning to identify and remedy cyber security breaches. While efforts to simplify the enrollment process were successful (and are ongoing), the process demanded significant communication between JSM-Havre, the University of Montana, apprentices, James Flansburg, Chief Technology Development Officer at IMDG, and Amber Lamb, MTDLI's Equity & Diversity Coordinator for MRAP.

Flansburg worked closely with the MTDLI team to provide support for the apprentices as they progressed through their program. Staff at JSM-Havre and the University of Montana provided access to WIOA and ARPA funding, assisted with the enrollment process, and developed a plan to monitor progress. In addition to these partners, MTDLI also worked with an intermediary, Safal Partners, to supplement the course with industry-approved training. Initial planning for the next cohort occurred.

d) Integration Efforts:

JSM offices across the state collaborated with the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division to implement additional RESEA processes to improve employment outcomes. Additionally, JSM and UI collaborated on Rapid Response services, providing impacted workers with an immediate opportunity to file UI claims and get their questions answered.

MTDLI reimplemented monthly technical assistance (TA) with WIOA service providers, both virtually and in-person for the first time since the COVID pandemic. The in-person TA's focus was to improve referral opportunities and establish baseline program awareness across VRBS, Adult Education, Wagner Peyser, the Adult Program, and the Dislocated Worker Program service providers. Virtual TA calls focus on more process topics, particularly those identified during provider monitoring as areas of concern, or areas where new staff would benefit from additional support.

MTDLI also conducted a survey to determine how teams in the Central Office could best support service providers. As a result of that survey, enhancements are now being made by the workforce programs team, the monitoring team, and the technical and training team to provide specific supports and address program knowledge gaps.

e) Using Data to Inform Decisions:

During PY2022, MTDLI's Workforce Services Division (WSD) underwent a reorganization to prioritize the use of data to improve service delivery to workers and businesses. Technical teams, including the BLS team, PIRL reporting, economists, and the technical and training team, were merged with WSD's workforce programs team, policy, and monitoring teams. These units are now contained within a single bureau—Data and Operations—and are better situated to collaborate. Initial areas of collaboration have

included the development of dashboards to better understand program performance, training for front-line staff on PIRL reporting, and the use of monitoring reports to inform technical assistance and training prioritization.

As part of our reorganization efforts, MTDLI conducted a survey of all service providers to determine areas where support can be improved. Results from that survey helped us determine areas of prioritization including clarifications in policy and operational guidance, updates to the monitoring workflow, and increasing the number and variety of training opportunities for service providers. In addition to service delivery, MTDLI expanded our efforts to provide more information to the SWIB, internal teams, and external stakeholders in government and private business. We have developed data dashboards for the SWIB to better provide this oversight committee with information on service delivery across the state, program outcomes, and areas warranting review.

Finally, MTDLI and Minneapolis Federal Reserve bank began an evaluation of our RESEA program, conducting a RCT to assess the comparative efficacy of online and in-person RESEA appointments. Once complete, this trial will help us determine the most effective way to serve RESEA clients in Montana. Results will show whether one service delivery strategy is more effective than another in getting clients back into the workforce and reducing the number of weeks of UI support.

f) Using Technology to Assist Customers:

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 and a low number of appointments due to the low unemployment rate.

The RESEA team provided services statewide, using virtual platforms (Zoom) as the primary medium to hold RESEA appointments. Beginning in March 2023, MTDLI began a RCT evaluation to determine the impacts of new services being delivered a digital platform (Moodle courses) on the claim, wage, and employment outcomes of UI claimants. The RCT will assess the impact of the virtual services on program outcomes compared to a service delivery strategy that does not provide the service. 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 potential coverage gaps and accommodate the growth of the team, we have expanded our service availability. This strategic approach included adding more days and times to the weekly schedule, ensuring that we can consistently serve the needs of UI claimants.

Access to Program-related Data Dashboards

MTDLI continued to improve the agency’s access to program-related data across multiple formats. MTDLI generated new data dashboards and data visualization tools to support the use and accessibility of workforce data, including dashboards that provide on-demand tracking and outcomes information for

a variety of workforce programs including ARPA Rapid Retraining, HELP-Link, RESEA, and IWT programs. 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.

Lite Laptops

JSM's Lite Laptops were available to both job seekers and employers state-wide. Microsoft Office and signature-capture software were installed on all units to improve customer service and provide JSM staff with tools to seamlessly enroll participants in MTDLI's workforce development programs. At JSM - Helena, the Lite Laptops were key when the office hosted an employer's mandatory staff training.

In Kalispell, the laptops' benefits spanned generations of job seekers. High-school students furthered their learning during an eight-hour job readiness seminar. Workers laid-off from a local sawmill participated in a rapid response event facilitated by JSM.

Across the state in Sidney, JSM staff utilized fifteen units to during a Rapid Response event when a large sugar beet processing facility closed. Staff guided former employees through the unemployment filing process and educated them on available resources for job seekers.

JSM also utilized technology to deliver virtual Rapid Response services if job seekers were located in multiple communities and it was not practical for individuals to drive to a single location. JSM arranged virtual access for individuals with the appropriate technology. Individuals without technology could attend the virtual event at any of the JSM locations throughout Montana.

g) Successes:

"The Need is Exponential:" Blackfeet Community College Graduations 22 Certified Nursing Assistants
https://missoulian.com/news/state-regional/blackfeet-community-college-welcomes-new-cnas/article_8c956cda-21ad-11ee-903a-3fcdacc873df.html

New structural welding program spearheaded by MTDLI's Business Engagement Team and located at Great Falls College-Montana State University (GFC-MSU) – a single mother sets a new course to a brighter future: https://www.montanarightnow.com/great-falls/single-mom-reflects-on-new-structural-welding-program-at-gfcmsu/article_02abe3ae-4dd2-11ee-97a2-b795ec937559.html

Challenges Faced by the State Workforce System

Many issues that Montana faced during the previous program year continued. Housing shortages and housing costs continue to be a significant barrier to labor market fluidity, preventing workers from living where they find job opportunities. A lack of available and affordable childcare in most communities also remains a significant challenge.

Job availability is not an issue. There are approximately 3 job openings for every unemployed individual. An unemployment rate of 2.3% in March was Montana's lowest on record since 1976—the advent of

that specific data collection. If they were able, employers increased wages in a competition for job seekers. Many employers closed their doors due to lack of available workforce, wage competition, and employees' inability to find housing and/or daycare or housing and/or daycare within their budget.

Individuals who faced significant barriers to employment and required more intensive support to be workforce-ready also presented a challenge, more so than in previous program years. Coordination and collaboration with community service and resource providers, as a basis for wraparound services, was more necessary than ever to support these individuals.

Montana's large physical footprint and low population makes it more difficult to gain economies of scale compared to those achieved by highly populated and/or smaller states. MTDLI continued to utilize technology to increase opportunities to connect with individuals living in remote locations, but many still do not have adequate access to reliable and affordable technology. Lacking adequate access to technology or adequate internet service means many individuals cannot access online trainings that could help them compete for employment opportunities and they live too far away from training providers to commute to in-person training opportunities.

Another challenge was on-going transition at the MTDLI leadership level. In addition to intentional reorganization of teams within WSD, there was unplanned turnover in the top three tiers of leadership in the department. With these changes, there have been shifts in priorities and a need to focus on change management and supporting staff through the leadership transition. While key priorities have remained consistent, some projects have experienced delays as new leadership worked to get up to speed as quickly as possible.

Conclusion:

Montana's WIOA Annual Statewide Performance PY2022 Report Narrative details progress towards meeting its strategic vision and goals for its workforce system.

MTDLI started a RCT of new service delivery strategies in the RESEA program. MTDLI partnered with the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank on this research and intends to measure the impact of the new services on unemployment duration, wages, and employment outcomes. In addition, the evaluation will examine impacts that the services have on continued participation in WIOA programs.

MTDLI updated its Post-Secondary Workforce Report, highlighting data on Montana's labor market demand with statewide training program graduation information to broaden the assessment of worker supply and demand. The report included graduates from tribal and private colleges, the Montana University System, and MRAP and provided a comprehensive analysis of the state's workforce gaps. MTDLI created a post-secondary outcomes dashboard that allows individuals, including perspective students, to explore labor market outcomes and supply/demand analysis of specific programs. Every program year, MTDLI updates its report on MRAP participants to analyze participation trends and apprentice outcomes. The report consistently identifies positive outcomes, demonstrating the value of apprenticeship and providing information that can be used for continuous improvement.

MTDLI continued to plan future evaluations, including further research into WIOA Title I programs to explore differences in outcomes. One report will explore outcomes by service provider and cost per

participant. This report will establish guidelines for and provide technical assistance to specific service providers in order to increase metrics.

MTDLI's workforce strategies positively impacted lives across generations. Jobs for Montana's Graduates continued to expand working relationships within MTDLI's service area. A new school programs case manager successfully brought awareness of the WIOA youth employment and training programs to In-school youth (ISY) in the schools she serves. Enhanced collaboration between MTDLI's business services engagement team and veteran specialists resulted in improved advocacy for veteran employment in business and industry. Now a year old, Island Mountain Development Group's (IMDG) Technology Apprenticeships already count as alumni middle school students conquering code at summer STEM camps and Montana National Guard members learning to identify and remedy cyber security breaches.

These are a few of the many ways in which MTDLI 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.