



Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative – PY 2020

Montana submits its WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for PY 2020 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 PY2020, 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:

1. Montana focused on all three performance indicators: Retention with the Same Employer; Repeat Business Customers; and the Employer Penetration Rate. Job Service Montana (JSM) staff recorded business contacts in the Montana Department of Labor & Industry (MDLI) database. MDLI also partnered with Adult Education (AE) and Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) to report combined data from all three partners. To report their services, AE and VRBS have access to the MDLI database.

2. To improve WIOA performance indicators related to effectively serving employers, JSM revamped marketing materials aimed at businesses and improved training for business engagement field staff. JSM focused on value proposition—the benefits (not the features) business customers will receive from MDLI services and programs; moving from a general discussion with employers to one that is specific to their immediate and future workforce development needs.

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 implemented research projects on the state of Montana’s labor market to gain a better understanding of the labor market environment and provide information for strategic decision-making. MDLI partnered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis to conduct a survey of Montana businesses to examine their perspective on childcare as a barrier to hiring workers and use as a recruitment and retention tool. The partnership with the Minneapolis Fed also included a survey of JSM workforce consultants to gain understanding of the barriers facing workers engaged with the labor market and the difficulties employers are having recruiting and retaining workers.

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 demonstrate the value of apprenticeship, while also providing information that can be used for continuous improvement within MDLI.

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

MDLI completed an in-depth report on one of the state’s workforce programs, providing descriptive information on participants and basic outcomes for MRAP. This annual report offers information on participant demographics as well as program participation trends that are valuable for program planning. The report is available publicly online.

Apprenticeship Report: <http://lmi.mt.gov/Portals/193/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special%20Reports%20and%20Studies/Apprenticeship-Data-Report-2020.pdf>

Childcare Business Survey: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/ChildcareReport2020.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 back to service providers. In addition, unit managers met regularly to improve the alignment of service delivery elements, including the use of data gathered through this monitoring process. Last program year’s monitoring schedule was disrupted by the Covid pandemic. For this program year, each provider was monitored.

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 via dashboards and data accessibility tools. These tools provide 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 provides improvement in monitoring and auditing, information sharing, and management decisions.

Montana was quick to respond to the COVID pandemic by standing up new dashboards, providing up-to-date economic information on jobless claims, unemployment, payroll jobs, and job postings. These dashboards provide statewide and local information and are valuable in planning and operations. These dashboards can be found at: <http://lmi.mt.gov/home/job-tracking>. MDLI continued to improve data availability for case managers and program managers with new dashboards on program participation trends and outcomes. These are only available internally for MDLI staff and are valuable when managing caseloads and identifying areas of improvement.

MDLI continued to improve the dissemination of the information learned from labor market research to JSM workforce consultants. Economists at MDLI shared research in monthly webinars so that workforce consultants remain up to date on changing economic conditions. This information-sharing was especially important as the labor market faced major changes as a result of the COVID pandemic.

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 recognized that a customer- and human-centered approach offers more favorable outcomes. After JSM staff received training, they began working on the development and implementation of services based on customer needs and wants.

The One-Stop Operator, MDLI economists, and the SWIB Director worked together to develop the initial steps in gathering customer satisfaction feedback from all Title 1B Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth participants who exited services each month. During PY2020, processes were refined and survey results were shared more widely.

Service providers regularly elicited feedback from business partners and Wagner-Peyser customers related to hiring events, career and resource fairs, workshops, and virtual trainings.

The Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) grant-funding process included a grantee post-evaluation of projected outcomes versus actual outcomes. The intent of the evaluations is to measure the grant's return on investment and learn more about the impact of Covid on the program's participants and their training.

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

A seven-person JSM team created a survey for customers served by JSM workforce consultants. The survey, approved by MDLI’s administrative staff and created in Microsoft Forms, can be emailed, printed, or provided in-person to customers. The next step is a three-week trial in five JSM offices to collect data about the following: rate of returns for emails; personal visits versus virtual visits; and best practices. The team also updated the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker participants’ survey, seeking an increase in both the response rate and amount of information.

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

During PY2020, MDLI responded to performance deficiencies in measurable skills gain (MSG) indicators for the Youth program. MDLI developed a series of one-on-one technical assistance sessions with all youth program providers to review provider performance; discuss gaps or potential reasons for the low numbers; clarify MSGs; and identify strategies to improve. The immediate results of technical assistance sessions showed a 14% increase in the Youth MSG performance indicator for the 2020 Annual Report.

Performance deficiencies on the primary indicators of performance:

MDLI continues to improve WIOA reporting, striving for consistency in required performance data entry. The changes and improvements in WIOA federal reporting are frequent, demanding staff time and funding. With its available resources, MDLI endeavors to adapt to the required changes and safeguard participant data.

MDLI was close to meeting all performance indicators for WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker, and Wagner-Peyser programs. MDLI continued to focus its efforts on to improving Youth 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. Once ninety days have lapsed since the participant last received a countable service with no additional services planned, a date of exit can be determined. 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 PY2020, MDLI revamped and rewrote the Data Validation policy to ensure that it complies with TEGL 7-18 and TEGL 23-19 guidance. In addition, during the data validation process, monitoring staff conducted more outreach with providers which included entrance and exit interviews. These sessions provided monitoring staff an opportunity to share and discuss the updated Data Validation policy and

procedures to safeguard service providers' comprehensive understanding of data validation requirements and expectations.

The data validation requirements apply to:

- WIOA Core Programs and the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program; 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.

Montana's Data Validation process consists of two main components - report validation (RV) and data element validation (DEV):

- RV - Report validation is accomplished by processing an entire file of participant records to check the accuracy of the state calculations used to generate the USDOL quarterly and annual performance reports submitted through the Workforce Integrated Performance System. In addition, the state conducts quarterly queries of the MIS database to report and correct errors or missing data found in participant records to ensure all applicable records are reported on accurately in quarterly and annual performance reports.
- DEV - The data element validation process is conducted annually using samples of Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) data to assess accuracy against source documentation for program exiters' files to ensure compliance with federal definitions.

MDLI's procedures also include 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, WIOA, or TAA services.
- Monitoring team provides service providers and program managers with a written summary of identified errors or missing data and a request to correct the inaccuracies.
- Monitoring team and Reporting Analyst provide technical assistance.
- Service providers respond in writing when all inaccuracies and/or inconsistencies have been corrected.

MDLI's monitoring staff will attend data validation training annually. 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 that includes the United States Department of Labor's (USDOL) required elements will be conducted on an annual basis and the data validation process will be assessed annually for effectiveness.

Information on activities provided by state funds:

Become An Alum

The Become an Alum program typically offers employed workers an opportunity to improve their skill set or finish a credential. During PY2020, \$75,365 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 eleven statewide higher education campuses and multiple businesses to identify skills or credentials in high demand regionally. The team made 3,183 outbound calls to former students with unfinished credentials to ask what kind of support they needed to complete their degree or improve their skills. In addition, they sent 8,133 emails. As a result of these efforts, 112 individuals enrolled. The team also assisted another 100+ individuals to find employment based on their current skills or connected them with other resources to support their success.

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 Tribal Communities and Registered Apprenticeship Program (MRAP)

MDLI continued to encourage and empower students interested in pursuing professions that require specialized skills. Plumbers, carpenters, electricians, machinists, and pipefitters are essential to the health of Montana's communities and economy. Because a four-year college degree is not an ideal path for every young person, MDLI ensured student access to opportunities that offer both education and training in a workplace setting.

MRAP worked with sponsors to develop defined, yet flexible, training programs. Montana apprenticeship programs, sponsored by employers, employer associations, and labor management groups, hired and trained eighty-nine Native American students. MRAP hired an Equity & Diversity Coordinator to assist both apprenticeship sponsors and Native American communities to increase the apprenticeship opportunities for tribal members. It also collaborated with the following tribes to create opportunities for individuals to meet the qualifications to become journey workers:

Crow Tribe

A partnership between Little Big Horn College (LBHC) and Montana State University - Northern (MSUN) resulted in nine students completing the equivalent of the Year 1 level of electrical or plumbing apprenticeship coursework and moving on to Year 2 in the current academic year. Efforts are underway to offer a one-year Building Maintenance Certificate through MSUN. This program will ultimately support tribal housing rehabilitation and new construction housing projects on the Crow Reservation.

Northern Cheyenne Tribe

The executive director of Colstrip's Montana Development Corporation (SEMDC) hosted a meeting and Glendive/Miles City's JSM manager attended with the Northern Cheyenne Planning Director and Tribal Employment Rights Office Director. The meeting's agenda focused on current projects and imparted an understanding of how workforce development programs can assist with the tribe's goals: to develop a

CDL program; partner with a structural insulated panel manufacturer to employ an estimated 150 workers; develop a travel center and potential training opportunities at the Ashland Divide; and develop a meat processing center, a food bank, and a childcare center.

In addition, the president of Chief Dull Knife College (CDKC) continued his discussion with MSUN about skilled trades training and education.

Montana's Department of Corrections (DOC), JSM, and MRAP

Montana's DOC and MDLI collaborated to provide intensive case management and support to individuals prior to their release from prison, continuing until the individual is employed. Because DOC does not have an adequate number of case managers to help individuals navigate the many barriers they may experience, JSM assisted with employment. MRAP worked with the Montana State Prison to develop pre-apprenticeship and employment pathways.

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 continued to have one of the highest per capita rates of veterans served by grant-funded and non-grant-funded staff.

The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) partnered with the Malmstrom's Airman and Family Readiness Center and offered the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to service members within one year of separating or two years from retirement. The DVOP worked with the TAP Program to provide knowledge on educational and employment services available at the JSM Great Falls and statewide. MDLI's DVOP specialist taught the Military Crosswalk guidelines to transitioning service members.

The DVOP also served as a liaison between JSM Great Falls and the Eighth Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court program. The Veterans Treatment Court Team is an interdisciplinary team of community partners including, but not limited to, the Great Falls Police Department, the Cascade County Sheriff's Office, the Cascade County Attorney's Office, 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, the Great Falls Pre-Release Center, Great Falls VETS Center, and the Veterans Administration. Through this collaborative effort, the Court promotes public safety by establishing individualized treatment plans and providing the tools necessary for successful reengagement. The DVOP assisted veterans with employment and education opportunities.

The DVOP also collaborated with the local transition center, Great Falls Pre-Release Services, Justice-Involved Veteran's Program, and the on-site Jobs Developer to provide job readiness training and employment opportunities and address stabilization needs for other justice-involved veterans such as those struggling while on probation or parole or in Veteran's Justice Court.

The DVOP partnered with Grace Home Veterans Center. This Great Falls homeless veterans' shelter assisted homeless veterans with job readiness training, employment counseling services, and career opportunities. The DVOP identified gaps in competitive employment services for homeless veterans. The DVOP briefed the shelter managers about the numerous programs available through JSM Great Falls.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW)

MSFW training occurred at a virtual conference and during technical assistance on an as-needed basis. Training included a variety of topics designed to benefit the MSFW population and target their specific barriers to employment. Additionally, the WIOA Adult Program Manager and JSM staff collaborated with National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantee and Rural Employment Opportunities (REO) to co-enroll job seekers who met eligibility for each program. This effort reduced redundancy and holistically served the needs of the MSFW population.

Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG)

Because of the COVID pandemic, most JMG activities were conducted via ZOOM or Microsoft Teams to nurture relationships built the previous year and develop a few new opportunities.

The JMG model is offered across the state and includes nine 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. It 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
- 89% graduation rate for those in JMG
- 89% full-time employment

During PY2020, 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.

Because of the COVID pandemic, JMG had a lower participation rate and therefore, the ability to offer work-based learning opportunities. JMG explored an apprenticeship with an automotive repair shop to support a participant whose interests and strengths dovetailed with that occupation. The employer agreed to sponsor the participant and collaborate with the WIOA Youth program to explore the apprenticeship opportunity.

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 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.

Previous ABC Clinics were held in an in-person setting throughout Montana. Because of the COVID pandemic, PY2020 presented a unique opportunity to continue this important effort by using the virtual presentation platform—Zoom.

MDLI offers the ABC Clinics in conjunction with SafetyFestMT. SafetyFestMT is a collaborative effort between MDLI and businesses/entities across the state who donate their time to present various topics. This collaboration allows SafetyFestMT to provide free quality training to employers and their workers throughout Montana.

Because traveling remains limited, the ABC Clinics partnered only with SafetyFestMT to present virtual trainings for PY2020.

Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)

The IWT program manager collaborated with a JMG program specialist on a series of IWT instructional videos. The videos, linked to YouTube, offer 24/7 access to IWT help and support.

The IWT program manager presented grant overviews, via Zoom, to JSM offices, economic development entities, and community development organizations. During those presentations, the program manager shared the video for standard applicants, How Grant Funding Works.

The program manager also created a separate overview for IWT participants enrolled in MRAP.

Non-essential business closures, staff reductions, and training cancelations and postponements resulted in unspent funding at the end of the program year. Training evolved into a “want” not a “need.”

c) Promising Workforce Development Practices:

Due to the COVID pandemic, JSM offices were closed to the public during PY2020. Generally, JSM delivered services virtually. Initially, JSM staff spent much of their time assisting individuals whose employment was affected by the pandemic. JSM staff adapted to frequent Unemployment Insurance (UI) changes and updates to related programs.

As some of the UI demands on JSM offices decreased, plans were developed to re-engage each local office team. JSM leadership sought out training and fresh ideas. This refocus offered new staff, hired after the office closures, an opportunity to learn more about JSM services, best practices, and “normal” activities alongside JSM veterans.

Spokane Workforce Council Training

MDLI contracted with the Spokane Workforce Council to provide virtual career coach training for the JSM staff and non-state adult and youth providers, along with additional MDLI staff from JMG, MRAP, and the Montana Career Lab—225 people in all over a ten-week period. MDLI collaborated with the council because of their successful training record and implementation of career coaching changes. The council demonstrated that their customer satisfaction increased; their performance outcomes improved; and their team’s job satisfaction increased—all outcomes that appealed to MDLI.

The training provided an opportunity to expose our teams to new ways of thinking about customers and service delivery to participants, a shift from traditional approaches. Some of the same principles also apply when working with businesses. At the end of the training, staff divided up into twenty-five Capstone Project teams. Each team explored an idea to move the training concepts forward or promote workforce development strategies that can be implemented statewide. In the process, relationships and knowledge were leveraged throughout Montana.

Reimagining JSM Customer Service Delivery

MDLI found new ways to engage with customers, often meeting several times to complete individual employment plans, assess skills, and complete the documents required for program enrollment and support. When possible, the initial meetings occurred virtually. A parking lot meeting to complete tasks, normally done in the office, was also an option. MDLI served 436 WIOA Adult Program participants, including 226 new enrollments; and invested over \$1.1 million to support their education, and training. In the WIOA Dislocated Worker Program, MDLI served 194 participants, including 74 new enrollees; and invested approximately \$750,000 to support their education and training. MDLI takes pride in these efforts.

Many customers felt lost throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic and/or scared to leave home; or thought they would return to work any day, only to find that day was drawn out to weeks and sometimes months. It was also challenging to find training and education opportunities as many were cancelled, rescheduled, or switched to virtual, presenting a unique set of barriers related to learning style and tech fluency. Because some trainings and college classes went virtual or were canceled altogether, MDLI created other opportunities for utilizing Adult and Dislocated Worker funds. JSM staff doubled down on their search for On-the-Job training (OJT) opportunities with businesses seeking employees. A JSM Bozeman team collaborated with local businesses, Adult Education, and DOC. The team worked with seventeen job seekers in four of DOC’s twenty-two facilities. They also collaborated with the Montana Women’s Prison to identify growing industry sectors that needed trained workers within six- to twelve-month timeframe.

The federal, state, and local response to the pandemic allowed MDLI to begin thinking about offering in-person services at JSM offices. MDLI wondered: How might we take what we learned during the last year and create a hybrid (in-person and virtual) service delivery model? How might we implement some of the great ideas that originated in local communities? How might we use our re-opening date as an opportunity to create new expectations for our statewide team and our customers?

Enhancing customer service and reaching underserved populations and communities matters to MDLI. A delicate balance exists between nurturing relationships with active contributors and connectors in

local communities and statewide subject matter experts. During PY2020, MDLI started to identify subject matter experts and develop consistent resources and information. MDLI also started to identify and develop teams to provide specialized services and activities. In all instances, the location of the subject matter expert; resources and information; or specialized service or activity must not be a barrier to participant access. MDLI is committed to increasing capacity by developing a cohesive system that includes both virtual and in-person delivery of customer service.

ARPA Funding

Authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Montana's Economic Transformation and Stabilization and Workforce Development Programs and Advisory Commission approved funding for current, contracted workforce service providers to facilitate and support short-term training of Montana's citizens, impacted by the Covid pandemic, who seek employment and self-sufficiency. These resources promote and sustain accelerated job-training in high-demand, industry sectors.

Employment Recovery Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG)

Montana continued to utilize the Employment Recovery DWG to assist dislocated workers by providing the resources for training, supportive services, and additional reemployment needs. MDLI experienced slow enrollments due to extension of UI benefits, mirroring similar trends in other states. In addition, dislocated workers were concerned about potential COVID exposure in certain businesses and/or a lack of mask and social distancing requirements and a lack of accessible, affordable childcare.

The MDLI Commissioner's Office updated external social media outlets with information on Employment Recovery DWG services and virtual on-line courses. With the announcement of business closures statewide, MDLI reminded service providers of the basic eligibility requirements for the Employment Recovery DWG.

d) Integration Efforts:

Several statewide JSM teams helped UI claimants access or setup their MontanaWorks online account and assisted claimants with ID.me, an identity verification system. Additionally, a statewide JSM team helped UI review and categorize the very large backlog of email messages from claimants and others needing assistance or information. In less than three weeks, a backlog of more than 8,000 emails was successfully reviewed, categorized, and forwarded to the appropriate UI staff for resolution. With the initial backlog cleared, the team continued to process thousands of email messages and phone calls each week.

e) Using Data to Inform Decisions:

When the UI workload was most intense, JSM and UI staff used data to support UI claimants. JSM groups were trained for specific tasks—with groups and tasks evolving as new programs were introduced and the number of claimants increased or decreased.

JSM utilized UI claimant data to inform their outreach calls to claimants. During the 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.

JSM used occupational data and labor market information to make training decisions. This same type of information was also used to inform businesses of recruitment and retention issues and training and/or funding opportunities for new employees and incumbent workers.

Before purchasing a subscription, MDLI piloted 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. During the coming years, MDLI will continue to refine these services by expanding the use of EconoVue's tools.

The Covid pandemic changed most of what MDLI knew to be true about workforce development. MDLI was deliberate in its efforts to share economic factors, information, trends, and projections, allowing staff to respond more effectively to the current needs of both businesses and individuals.

f) Using Technology to Assist Customers:

The COVID pandemic resulted in the months-long closure JSM offices, requiring JSM to find new ways to serve customers digitally and technologically. Now that JSM offices are open to in-person customers, the lessons learned throughout PY2020 carried over into current practices. JSM expanded service delivery options to include innovative technological tools, enabling JSM to provide customers with access to services and information regardless of geographic location. For example, a customer living in western Montana may be best served by a workforce development professional based in the northcentral town of Havre. Additionally, JSM provided coaching and training, and in some cases purchased technological tools, to provide customers with access to training resources.

Virtual Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)

Montana developed a virtual service delivery concept based on a cross-functional team approach. Owing in part to the Covid pandemic, the RESEA Virtual Team was conceptualized to pivot to remote and virtual service delivery approaches. During the development of this project and service delivery re-design, training was revamped and virtual tools were utilized; including the distance learning platform Moodle. A team of fifteen individuals located in various regions of Montana will now provide RESEA services statewide, using technology as the primary tool to serve these claimants. Members of this team are workforce consultants, DVOP staff, WIOA case managers, and career coaches—all coming together to bring their specialized knowledge base to UI claimants through RESEA appointments.

Remote Worker Certification

MDLI partnered with MSU Extension and launched a Remote Worker Certificate program. The program provides rural Montana residents with the tools and skills needed to work successfully from home as a remote employee, freelancer, or entrepreneur. This educational model is unique as it combines online classroom learning, virtual workshops, and an online job search community to support students in meeting their employment goals. The MDLI-MSU Extension partnership demonstrated effective collaboration and leveraged limited resources in rural areas. Each organization utilized their strengths: MSU Extension, community education and MDLI, workforce development. Students benefited from mutual goals shared by thriving communities. JSM enrolled four workforce consultants from the initial cohort and assigned a liaison to work with MSU Extension to ensure consistent communication with

those students. After the course concluded, JSM staff, trained in job coaching, assisted participants to find remote employment.

Workforce Connections Website

Montana continued to enhance, promote, and utilize the Workforce Connections website (<https://svc.mt.gov/dli/wc/>) while working with business and/or students. The Workforce Connections site is designed to connect students to unique opportunities that incorporate education and/or training with compensation. These opportunities could be pre-apprenticeship, an internship, on-the-job training, etc. The site is not a traditional “job posting” website, but rather a mechanism to connect students with businesses willing to offer these training opportunities, so that students earn while they learn.

g) Successes:

Teaching UI Claimants to Fish

MDLI used the UI filing process to incentivize individuals to stretch outside their comfort zone by developing their tech fluency: setting up and using e-mail; accessing and interacting with a website, such as MontanaWorks; accessing an e-mail account and completing their bi-weekly filing on their cell phone; and looking for work and filling out on-line applications. In addition to the claim filing process, a new identity verification step was introduced and required that claimants provide documentation using a smart phone or computer. JSM staff spent up to two hours guiding claimants through both processes—step by step, page by page. This experience resulted in a boost to claimant independence and morale.

OJT

The following success stories illustrate the power of the OJT program administered by JSM. Unemployed job seekers secured and completed paid training and local businesses found, trained, and retained excellent employees—resulting in a positive impact on multiple facets of Montana’s economy. Many JSM participants benefited from the supportive environment which offered a shared case management relationship with the participant and employer, addressing issues that arose and regarding them as valuable learning experiences. Through these partnerships, MDLI gained a more intimate knowledge of business cultures and their specific skill requirements.

John, a WIOA Dislocated Worker participant, completed his OJT hours at a Bozeman investigation firm. He is permanently employed there full-time. He continues to train as a legal analyst and investigative reporter, developing other skills in marketing and presentation. The business owner wrote: “Understanding what resources are available to businesses can be a daunting task. Job Service opened a door to so many other outlets. It is a great feeling knowing we have resources like Job Services to navigate and assist us through processes such as hiring and training. We look forward to working with Job Service in the future.”

Ron, an unemployed worker, completed a RESEA. During summer 2020, Ron worked temporarily for a company. He also interviewed for a position that he applied for previously, feeling that he wasn't hired since he did not have construction experience or a CDL. By completing specific training and/or a CDL, Ron hoped he'd improve his employment outcome. His WIOA Dislocated Worker program case manager reached out to the employer and together they wrote an OJT contract for a Crusher Operator/CDL. Ron

started the OJT earning a wage of \$17 per hour. At the time of completion, he'd received two \$1 per hour raises.

Additional Success Stories:

Laid off from his job driving a truck in Texas, a married father of five decided to risk a move to Miles City and pursue a lifelong dream of becoming a nurse. Supported by DWG and WIOA Dislocated Worker program funding, the dean's list student advanced his education from general studies to acceptance into a nursing program. DWG provided \$2,665 worth of books; tuition; supplies, such as a computer; and transportation expenses for travel and clinicals. Described by his case manager as "very humble," the participant is reluctant to ask for financial assistance, even while he and his family squeak by on his student loans. A native of Ghana, the participant has been easy to support. "He's very organized and keeps in touch with me every step of the way."

In September 2017, T.B., an unemployed veteran, contacted JSM Kalispell. She was in the Dental Assistant program at Salish Kootenai College, without PELL grant assistance. In addition, she was furloughed and received UI benefits. T.B. was enrolled in WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and the state's HELP-Link program with an updated employment goal of Dental Hygienist. First, she completed the Dental Assistant program and worked on prerequisite, dental hygienist courses at Salish Kootenai College. Once accepted into the Dental Hygienist program in Great Falls, she received assistance with training costs; training materials and supplies; housing; and other supportive services. T.B. graduated; obtained a state Dental Hygienist license; and found employment in Billings earning \$36 per hour.

James was referred to JSM Thompson Falls, seeking assistance with CDL training. He was enrolled in WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and the state's HELP Link program. He attained his Class A CDL endorsement. Program funds assisted with tuition, lodging, per diem, and work clothing. He obtained full-time employment with benefits at Mountain Power, earning \$29 per hour. Ultimately, James will be eligible to become a Journeyman Lineman with an earning potential of \$50 per hour.

JSM Wolf Point collaborated with REO and the NFJP to assist a participant with the lifelong dream of becoming a truck driver. Before he could start CDL training, several barriers were addressed: his felony conviction and probation; homelessness; no income or social security card; and at eighteen years old, his lack of awareness about selective service registration. JSM's WIOA Adult program case managers addressed each barrier prior to the participant's first day of truck driving school. He completed CDL training and is currently seeking employment near his hometown of Culbertson, MT and/or in surrounding areas.

Alison, a single parent with three children, worked part-time as a bartender. She contacted JSM Thompson Falls to request tuition funding for a Certified Aesthetic Laser Specialist course at Rocky Mountain Laser College in Lakewood, CO. JSM enrolled into her in the WIOA Adult and the state's HELP-Link programs. With her Permanent Cosmetic Certification and the completed Aesthetic Laser Certification, Alison obtained two jobs as an Aesthetic Laser Technician. Her starting wage is \$25 per hour, an increase of \$16 per hour—an income that will sustain and support her family.

Volunteers of America (VOA) referred Peter in hopes of determining eligibility for the WIOA Adult program. At the time, he was employed part time at Meineke Car Care Center as a lube tech with a wage of \$9 per hour. With VOA assistance, Peter enrolled at Helena College. He requested additional assistance with the \$1,400 cost of required tools not covered by his VA education benefits or VOA. Helena's Career Technical Institute (CTI) assisted with that cost. He received his Associate of Applied Science Degree in Diesel Technology, ending his final semester with 3.92 GPA and Dean's List standing. Peter is employed at Helena's Kolar Tire & Auto.

Challenges:

The Covid pandemic forced changes in workforce development across the country and therefore, MDLI's work was altered as well. Constant change in many aspects of life including employment, in all business sectors and local communities; personal health concerns and illness; isolation; and service to a variety of desperate individuals and employers made PY2020 unique. These challenges continued to increase the amount of time and effort expended to refocus on proactive strategies and solutions.

Conclusion:

Montana's WIOA Annual Statewide Performance PY2020 Report Narrative details progress towards meeting its strategic vision and goals for its workforce system. MDLI conducted a non-experimental analysis, evaluating the effectiveness of the Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program. The analysis identified positive program outcomes that demonstrate the value of apprenticeship and provided information that can be used for continuous improvement within MDLI. In addition, MDLI's partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis analyzed the perspective of Montana businesses on childcare as a barrier to hiring workers and use as a recruitment and retention tool.

Montana's narrative describes PY2020 workforce development responses to pandemic-related loss affecting education, employment, and training in unprecedented ways and demanding remote service delivery and extraordinary integrated effort and perseverance. While MDLI and the SWIB understand that all states likely perceive the challenges faced by their workforce system are equally and distinctly daunting, they share a commitment to be forward-thinking, consider and use data in new ways, provide excellent customer service to career seekers and businesses, focus on continuous improvement, and continue to play an active leadership role in workforce development.