



PROMISING PRACTICES

State Strategies for Advancing Apprenticeship

Expanding Apprenticeship by Aligning State Systems and Partnerships

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY

ApprenticeshipMT Expansion

To support their apprenticeship expansion efforts, Montana made key staffing, management, and partnership decisions that catalyzed cross-agency and cross-program collaboration. Efforts included creating a jointly-funded position across state agencies to act as an advocate for apprenticeship, embedding state apprenticeship staff in local areas, and expanding the role of community colleges in apprenticeship.

In response to a looming skills shortage in Montana, the governor created the Main Street Montana Project in 2013. The effort brings together business, education, government, and community leaders from across the state to identify ways to grow Montana's industries. Creating sector-driven public-private partnerships and expanding apprenticeship and other work-based learning strategies are key pillars of this effort.

The Main Street Project charged the commissioners of the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (MTDLI) and the Montana University System (MUS) with bold goals, including strengthening partnerships between 2-year colleges and the business community, expanding the Montana Registered Apprenticeship program, and providing opportunities for students to earn college credit for prior experience. With the governor and top business executives leading the Main Street Project, there was an urgency at the state level to bring all available resources to the table to support innovative approaches to workforce development and apprenticeship expansion.

As the commissioners of MUS and MTDLI expanded their shared work, they knew they needed to tap into the resources and staff of both agencies in new ways. To address this need, the commissioners pursued an innovative solution. They created a new staff position, the Montana Director of Industry Driven Workforce Development Partnerships, and made it a dual-funded, joint appointment of MUS and the MTDLI. The position is held by Kirk Lacy, a 20-year veteran of both the higher education and workforce development fields. With a background in both worlds, Kirk links together the higher education

and workforce development communities to create strong solutions for industry workforce needs.

In his first two years in the role, Kirk has pursued a series of inter-agency partnership projects that advanced the state's workforce development goals while improving alignment, integration, and coordination of programs, services, and resources offered by both the MUS and MTDLI. This improved partnership has impacted and continues to significantly impact strategic apprenticeship expansion in the state. The agencies have helped make collaboration between community colleges, tribal colleges, and business and industry more open and responsive, facilitated apprenticeship

Systems development must be driven from the very top levels of leadership, starting with the governor. Led by the governor's office, going through each of the commissioner's offices, all of the departments are working together to support these initiatives. Top level support is critical.

- Kirk Lacy, Director
Industry Driven Workforce Development Partnerships

expansion in Montana's 2-year colleges, and helped create a new prior learning credit policy in the university system that significantly increases the number of credits apprentices can earn.

Over 20 pilot projects are currently in development where employers are partnering with twelve 2-year community colleges and with MTDLI. One important pilot is an inclusion and equity initiative in which MTDLI is working with tribal colleges to develop pre-apprenticeship training models that will strengthen and grow

apprenticeship opportunities. For all pilots, the goal is to create new apprenticeship models that integrate college curriculum with on-the-job training to provide student apprentices with “earn-while-you-learn” career development pathways in six priority industries: manufacturing, energy, healthcare, skilled trades, finance, and information technology. At the end of a 2-year program, students will have both the requisite work experience and a college credential, and the opportunity to go on to 4-year degree programs for future career advancement.

Inspired by the successes of their state alignment efforts, Montana continued to use innovative staffing approaches to align apprenticeship with broader workforce efforts. When the state needed to expand its apprenticeship team this year, they rejected the traditional approach of hiring more staff to work at state offices. Instead, they worked with the Montana Job Service – the statewide one-stop network of local community-level job centers – to recruit and hire from the existing Job Service staff in offices across the state. This approach allowed the state apprenticeship team to embed staff in local communities. The new recruits have hit the ground running with their deep understanding of workforce development, connections with community colleges and other partner programs, and trusted relationships with the local

business community. The state provided robust apprenticeship training to round out the new staff’s skill sets. They have additionally realigned job responsibilities. In the past, staff focused most of their time on managing existing programs, but now 20% of their job is focused on existing programs, with 80% focused on development. Additionally, all 15 staff members are being cross-trained over the next eight months and will be able to work across industry sectors.

As Valerie Piet, Statewide Apprenticeship and Healthcare Program Supervisor with MTDLI, says, “The lightbulb was, we need to hire these folks – what would it look like to hire them from their existing Job Services positions? It’s expanded our capacity in offices around the state where we didn’t have a field representative. This has been a mind shift in how we look at delivering apprenticeship across the state and administering that program.”

Montana’s state leadership and the businesses driving Main Street Montana are pleased with the impact these organizational approaches are having on apprenticeship expansion in the state. Currently, there are over 1,400 apprentices working in over 60 occupational fields through the Montana Registered Apprenticeship program, with over 700 business sponsors across the state.

ADVICE TO OTHER STATES

- **Bring all the Partners to the Table.** There is no better way to learn about the needs of business than to talk with business owners themselves. As Mark Lillrose, Apprenticeship Supervisor, explains, “At a state level, we are taking government leadership and business owners and putting them in the same room together. We’re doing town hall meetings with everyone (education partners, DOL leadership, business owners, etc.) and having business owners talk about their needs, their workforce shortages, and offering up solutions to mesh all of this together. We’ve had a lot of success and momentum coming out of those meetings, which has been transitioning into apprenticeships.”
- **Follow the Pain-Points.** States often start with big organizations – large hospitals and associations. In Montana, early conversations revealed that rural communities were experiencing tremendous recruiting challenges. Rural areas don’t have a pipeline of recent graduates, and they’re focused on training local individuals who are interested in staying in the community. Where larger hospitals had pipelines in place, rural areas were looking for solutions, and apprenticeships were a good fit. Rural areas became the early adopters of apprenticeships in healthcare, which has since spread to a more diverse set of communities and garnered support of professional organizations.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REPLICATION

- **Look for the Right Skills.** Undertaking a collaboration between two state agencies takes a seasoned change management leader at the helm with a passion for innovation and comprehensive statewide change. When recruiting for a champion to lead the effort, consider a dual-funded, joint appointment that is accountable to both workforce and education agencies. Look for someone with a background in both camps who has garnered respect and credibility, understands the cultures, and can foster synergy between the two.
- **Show, Don't Tell.** Montana initially had funding set aside for a campaign to spread awareness about apprenticeship, but the state realized that the best way to market apprenticeship was to highlight successful programs that were solving real business needs in new industry sectors. They focused efforts on getting innovative, effective projects up and running and facilitating peer-to-peer sharing among businesses. These early wins gave their apprenticeship team real-life examples of success they use when engaging new business partners.
- **Build for Sustainability.** Long-term systems change requires thoughtful planning. Don't get stuck focusing on the shorter-term set of deliverables for one individual grant. Keep the bigger picture in focus, and search for ways to integrate the effort and align it to meet the mission and goals of multiple partners. Leverage – or “braid” – funding from multiple sources at the outset so a solid base of financial support is established early on and sustainable beyond the grant cycle.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

- Montana has launched 20 new apprenticeship programs including 14 in health care fields such as certified nurse assistant, computerized tomography, emergency medical technician, paramedicine, pharmacy tech, medical coding and billing, and practical nurse. An additional 20 apprenticeship programs are under design and development and are expected to launch in the fall of 2017.
- New funding sources have hired three additional field representatives for apprenticeship from three Job Service locations. This will continue to expand apprenticeship opportunities, especially in rural areas and the tribal communities in the state.

To learn more about Montana Registered Apprenticeship visit: <http://apprenticeship.mt.gov/>

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