



Montana Department of LABOR & INDUSTRY

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative – PY2023

Montana submits its WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for PY2023 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 PY2023, Montana had four 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 funding for WIOA Title I programs by local area. Each local area allocates funds to counties utilizing local unemployment and poverty data to ensure funds are distributed equitably to maximize service delivery. County-elected officials sit on the State Workforce Innovation Board (SWIB) and can provide local input into activities throughout Montana.

2) Waiver to operate one comprehensive One-Stop Center, maximizing funds for direct service delivery to individuals and businesses and unifying Montana’s approach to workforce development.

3) 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.

4) Waiver to allow WIOA individual training accounts (ITAs) for ISY – Under this waiver, 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 Employer Penetration Rate. When recording business contacts and their activities, the Montana Department of Labor & Industry (MTDLI) gathered performance indicator data, 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.

In January 2023, MTDLI launched a focused Business Engagement Team to provide customized business services across Montana. This team recorded 1597 employer contacts during the PY2023. These services ranged from developing and deploying employer-focused training to helping communities raise awareness of local opportunities for employment and training. The Business Engagement Team helped deliver short-term training programs, including but not limited to Certified Nurse Assistant, Certified Welder, Construction, Dental Assistant, and Child Care Pre-Apprenticeship for credentialing CDA-B. The team also assisted with developing hands-on experiential workforce expos in communities and continues to expand that effort across Montana.

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 completed several in-depth reports on workforce programs in the state. Every year, MTDLI updates its analysis of Montana Registered Apprenticeship Program (MRAP) participation trends and apprentice outcomes. The report identifies positive program outcomes, demonstrating the value of apprenticeship and providing information that can be used for continuous improvement within MTDLI. The program reached record highs for active apprenticeships and the number of businesses utilizing apprenticeships to train their workforce.

MTDLI also conducted research exploring how WIOA Title I programs help Montanans overcome employment barriers, exploring program trends and outcome differences across various dimensions. The report analyzed program implementation across subcontracted providers, spending levels, service types, and training programs, i.e., an increasing share of funds is spent directly on behalf of participants over time and less on overhead—a goal of program operation. The report also explores enrollments and outcomes by worker demographics, improving MTDLI’s understanding of how program success varies between participants from different backgrounds across race, age, education, disability, and veteran status. The findings in this report will be leveraged to improve program policy and guidelines in future iterations.

MTDLI published a set of employment projections for occupational job growth from 2022-2032 in the state. The employment projections are based on historical employment data, produced as part of a contract with the US Department of Labor’s (USDOL) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) using the nationally recommended methodology for employment forecasts and the programs provided by the Projections Managing Partnership. The report and accompanying dashboard break down projections by educational requirements and earnings levels, allowing workers and workforce providers to identify potential high-growth occupations for different groups. This includes the top-growing occupations with apprenticeships in Montana, helping workers identify which field in MRAP may be right for them.

MTDLI also produced information on topical issues in the labor market. This included a report on the nursing workforce in Montana, 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 primarily utilized the National Council of State Boards of Nursing’s national survey of nurses to produce estimates of the nursing workforce in Montana. Similarly, MTDLI produced a report on childcare supply and demand, combining data on licensed childcare providers and county populations to identify areas classified as childcare deserts. This report also discussed the impact of childcare issues on workforce supply 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.

From March 2023 to February 2024, MTDLI implemented a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) evaluation of new service delivery strategies in the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. The RCT provided an impact analysis of an online reemployment course that delivers information and strategies to job seekers. The RCT studied over 3,000 participants for one year, with over 1,400 participating in the course. MTDLI partnered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (FRB Minneapolis) to measure the impact of the new services on unemployment duration, wages, and employment outcomes, as well as continued participation in WIOA activities, such as further Wagner-Peyser program participation or enrollment in the WIOA Dislocated Worker program. A complete outcomes analysis will come later as more wage and employment data becomes available for the entire cohort. Still, MTDLI began working with the FRB Minneapolis to produce an intermediate analysis while total outcomes are in progress.

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

- MT Apprenticeship Report: https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/2023_ApprenticeshipReport_Final.pdf
- Employment Projections: https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Labor-Market-Publications/2024_MTEmploymentProjectionsPub.pdf
- Nursing Workforce: https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Labor-Market-Publications/2023_NursingSurvey.pdf
- Childcare Deserts: <https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Special-Reports-and-Studies/ChildCareDesertsWhitePaper-FINAL.pdf>
- Labor Day Report:
- https://lmi.mt.gov/docs/Publications/LMI-Pubs/Labor-Market-Publications/LDR24_Final.pdf

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

In PY2023, Montana conducted remote and on-site visits to evaluate participant records, validate data, and provide reports to service providers. All service providers were monitored during the program year. MTDLI’s PY2022 reorganization continued into PY2023, including creating a new role—Workforce Performance Manager. This role focused on monitoring and improving performance for MTDLI’s workforce programs, particularly WIOA programs. Working in partnership with the performance analyst and program managers, this individual assures contracted providers meet both internal and federally negotiated performance expectations. They lead technical assistance efforts and keep program managers, agency leadership, and Montana’s SWIB informed of any performance challenges or areas of risk.

MTDLI has also expanded its use of our training repository within Moodle's learning management platform to incorporate additional training on WIOA programs and performance metrics. In PY2023, trainings were developed for Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, measurable skills gains, and credential attainment metrics to further support Montana's ability to implement WIOA programs effectively and provide accurate data on participant outcomes. Trainings were all delivered live, with a follow-up question-and-answer session one week later. Each was also recorded and can be accessed by staff within MTDLI's training repository.

e) Continuous improvement strategies utilizing results from studies and evidence-based research

This year MTDLI continued to expand staff access to program-related data across multiple formats. Data and economist teams distributed the research and reports to the WIOA core program teams, providing presentations and question-and-answer opportunities for program managers and service providers so that the information could be understood and applied effectively. MTDLI also continued to maintain data dashboards and data visualization tools to support the use and accessibility of the information created in this research. These tools provided visual analytics of labor market information and program activities to inform managers, workforce consultants, and other staff for decision-making. Easy access to downloadable data on program activities improved monitoring and auditing, information sharing, and management decisions. The agency also maintained a set of dashboards tailored to the needs of Montana's SWIB, assuring the board had easily accessible information about both local and statewide labor market information to inform their strategic work.

Results from the RCT analysis of the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program provided key information about the ability to utilize virtual tools more broadly across all WIOA programs, and strategies learned from those results will be applied to service delivery as the data continues to be analyzed. By evaluating wage and employment outcomes and the medium for which assistance is provided, MTDLI is gaining valuable knowledge about potential barriers such as how internet access and computer literacy may impede widespread adoption of new online services.

Finally, MTDLI has applied the knowledge gained from childcare, nursing, and apprenticeship research to improve service delivery to businesses and job seekers. For example, recognizing the positive benefits of the apprenticeship training model and the need for increased access to childcare across the state, MTDLI is increasing utilization of apprenticeship training in the childcare sector. In addition, the National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) for layoffs in the timber industry allowed Montana to incorporate short-term and apprenticeship training to assist individuals impacted by layoffs in getting back to work quickly while obtaining valuable skills.

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 continues to administer customer experience surveys to gain a comprehensive understanding of Wagner-Peyser customer satisfaction. From July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, the survey reached 3552 individuals statewide. Responses were rated on a scale of 1-5, with 5 indicating the highest satisfaction. The top-rated response, "I felt comfortable discussing my questions and concerns with the Workforce Consultant," received an average score of 4.60. Following closely was the response, "I am more aware of the resources offered by Job Service and other agencies in the area," with a score of 4.49.

Positive comments included: "Honestly, they were great all the way around", "Very helpful! I've been hired by USPS and will be starting soon," and "I just want to say the online meeting I had with your Helena agent was so informative and helpful. I was not aware of all the resources Job Service had to offer and really see the effort you are making to help individuals find employment and learning resources. Great work!".

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

MTDLI used customer feedback to improve statewide collaboration and service delivery to individuals with disabilities. Full details are included in the Serving Individuals with Employment Barriers section below. Other improvements included changes to RESEA, support for justice-impacted individuals, organizational changes to support tribal relations, and focused stakeholder engagement for development of Montana's 2024 state plan.

After receiving positive feedback from RESEA customers about the mandated reemployment training in Moodle, MTDLI made this training available to all RESEA customers instead of just the control group. Based on feedback that accessing training was challenging for justice-impacted individuals in pre-release facilities, MTDLI coordinated with the facilities to remove this barrier.

Feedback also indicated a need for improved WIOA-tribal partner relations. MTDLI's Tribal Liaison set up several forums to discuss challenges in service delivery to tribal businesses and individuals. Improvements in the referral process, creation of training opportunities (including MRAP), program services for tribal youth, and better broadband access continue to be priorities.

MTDLI also conducted focused stakeholder engagement sessions across the state to help inform the development of the state's 2024 WIOA state plan. These sessions engaged different groups including state, county, and local officials, industry representatives, subcontracted providers, our WIOA core partners from other state agencies, tribal leaders and tribal youth, and clients/former clients. Topics varied based on the stakeholder group being engaged. Some questions included:

- Where are we (WIOA core partners) doing well in meeting local community needs for employers and workers?
- Where can WIOA programs be more involved with statewide or local workforce development activities?
- The intent of WIOA is to strengthen workforce service quality, provide for universal access to its career services, and provide seamless delivery across many programs. How can the state ensure that various groups engaged in workforce development efforts are coordinated and not duplicative?
- Which type of workers should be targeted by WIOA programs? What would each look like?
 - Unemployed?
 - Underemployed?
 - Currently employed?

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

During PY2023, MTDLI continued efforts to improve negotiated performance rates for measurable skill gains (MSGs) by meeting with providers to assess individual performance results every quarter and providing technical assistance as needed. Additionally, MTDLI worked to improve overall data collection for Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) reporting while developing the new EmployMT case management system for the Title I and III programs. This new system streamlines data collection processes and enforces requirements that reflect current PIRL guidelines. These improvements in data collection and primary performance indicators will expand future research and evaluation opportunities.

Performance deficiencies on the primary indicators of performance:

MTDLI placed a high priority on improving WIOA reporting and performance outcomes. Both systems and practices were improved to support program performance. Montana’s new case management system EmployMT was designed to assist MTDLI while monitoring enrollment of participants and case manager documentation of MSGs and credential attainment. With the rollout of EmployMT, MTDLI technical support staff and WIOA program managers provided case managers with technical assistance on how to track and enter MSGs, credential attainment, and training and education activities. This, in along with the new online MSG and credential attainment trainings allowed Montana to more effectively prioritize performance improvement.

MTDLI also added a Workforce Performance Manager to the Data and Operations team, a position focused on WIOA and other performance metrics. This staff collaborates closely with workforce program managers to support the Workforce Services Division’s (WSD) process improvement including development of policy and operational guidance to improve program implementation and the analysis of performance indicators to determine areas of risk and training needs.

Common exit policy:

Montana utilizes common exit when a participant enrolled in multiple partner programs has not received services from any USDOL-administered program in which the common exit applies. Montana’s common exit applies to the following programs:

- Wagner Peyser Employment Services;
- WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth;
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA); and
- Any NDWG.

The exit date is the date after which ninety days have elapsed 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 PY2023, MTDLI monitoring staff conducted outreach to providers, which included exit calls the week after monitoring. These sessions allowed monitoring staff 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:
 - NDWG
 - Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)
 - Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)
 - Monitor Advocate System – all requirements for Wagner-Peyser Employment Services apply to this system.

MTDLI's procedures also included the following:

- Record retention time frames based on the primary indicator of performance exit date, not the date that the participant stops receiving Veteran, Wagner-Peyser, and WIOA services.
- The monitoring team provided a written report of identified errors or missing data and a request to correct the inaccuracies to each service provider and to MTDLI program managers.
- Program managers and the reporting analyst provided technical assistance, refined policies, and clarified operational guidance to support data entry and data integrity.
- Service providers responded in writing and provided additional documentation to correct all inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

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

Program data, including USDOL's required elements, was reviewed, 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:

Workforce Integration Specialist

MRAP's Workforce Integration Specialist worked with MTDLI staff, registered apprenticeship sponsors, and community partners to identify and increase service to underserved populations in registered apprenticeship programs. The specialist conducted outreach, delivered public presentations, and participated on boards to increase awareness of program availability to underserved groups.

Instrument Shop

Instrument Shop is a hands-on educational program empowering teens through musical instrument building. Participants learn to build the instruments in a workshop setting alongside qualified instructors in a small student/teacher ratio. Instrument Shop is a social and creative environment offering plenty of room for independent work and supports youth to develop soft skills including problem-solving and communication.

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:

Collaboration with Department of Corrections and Helena College

MTDLI partnered with JSM, the Department of Corrections (DOC), and Helena College. The partnership offered justice-involved individuals an opportunity to acquire the skills needed to re-enter the workforce through a high-paying occupation. Six individuals from the Helena Prerelease Center completed education and training created by Helena College, utilizing a mobile welding classroom brought directly to the prerelease site. Participants completed the course, earning multiple certificates. Helena College provided lower training costs to DOC, and JSM provided funding for required equipment (helmets, grinders, jackets, etc.).

Partners for Reentry Opportunities in Workforce Development (PROWD) Grant

MTDLI received a PROWD grant for the award program's second phase funded by the US Department of Justice (USDOJ) and USDOL. The award supports Montana's efforts to provide targeted employment services to federally incarcerated individuals as they approach community reentry. Montana's PROWD award connects justice-impacted individuals with opportunities to participate in MRAP, beginning coursework while in a pre-release facility and continuing to participate in training upon release to local communities.

Montana's PROWD Grant serves individuals during two phases of release: while they are in the pre-release phase of their sentence and upon their full return to the community. MTDLI's services to individuals include skills assessments, individualized development plans, training, mentoring, on-the-job training, employment opportunities, individualized case management, access to supportive services, and continued training and education opportunities. The Montana PROWD team consists of Billings and Great Falls JSM case managers and staff from MRAP. The team collaborates with pre-release employee placement specialists and their case managers. The team goals are as follows:

- Assist participants with education and training opportunities, particularly apprenticeship training opportunities that follow a mentorship model that provides consistency through their re-entry experience;
- Provide supportive services to overcome financial, mental health, and other barriers; and
- Assist participants in finding meaningful permanent employment that pays a good wage and sets them up for positive participation in the community.

WIOA Statewide Coordination of ADA Referrals and Training

Montana worked to improve collaboration with WIOA core partners providing Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation services. The agency held quarterly meetings with core partners in Vocational Rehabilitation and Adult Education and conducted cross-training between agencies on programs, services, and referral opportunities. WIOA core partners also met with neighboring state Wyoming to discuss best practices in collaboration, referrals, and continuous improvement in data sharing between partners.

Serving Montana's Tribal Nations

In PY2023, MTDLI focused on building stronger relationships with the state's eight recognized tribal nations. American Indians in the state face comparably higher barriers to employment than other Montanans. To serve this population more effectively, MTDLI's Commissioner established the Office of the Tribal Liaison, which includes both a lead liaison role and support staff. The office trains MTDLI staff on cultural awareness, tribal practices, and best practices in listening and learning from tribes. The office also conducts extensive outreach. This work included meeting with tribal councils when invited, attending listening sessions to learn about how state government can be better partner with tribes on workforce efforts, and, when appropriate, sharing information about ways MTDLI can partner with tribes on related initiatives.

This year, for the first time ever, MTDLI was invited to meet with the Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO), which is comprised of representatives from the eight recognized tribal nations in the state. During the program year, MTDLI was invited to participate in multiple TERO convenings and asked to share information about MTDLI's teams and services. Partnerships, grant support, and collaborations were fostered and will continue to grow.

The Liaison office also connected with the Tribal Colleges and school districts located on tribal reservations. We will build capacity within these areas and provide more opportunities for the young adults 16-24. MTDLI is providing information on careers in the trades, industry, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship. Our tribal communities have expressed interest in career exploration opportunities in these fields, and workers wanting to stay on their lands and make a difference while making good money for themselves and their families benefit as well. Our outreach has expanded into a young adult leadership campaign called, 'Its-i-ney-hey', which means 'Give it Heck' in Aaniiih language.

Collaboration to Improve the WIOA Adult Program Policy

During PY2023, WSD's program and monitoring teams and policy analysts edited MTDLI's Adult Program policy. The policy begins with three sections: requirements for adult participants, adult eligibility, and service priority.

The service priority section of policy is anchored by a brief statement about the qualification for individual career and training services: definitions of Veterans, Veteran-eligible spouses, and WIOA priority groups (public assistance recipients, low-income individuals, and individuals with significant barriers to employment) were included. The relationship between those individuals and a comprehensive assessment and individual employment plan (IEP) was clarified. In addition, the ties that bind policy operational guidance and technical assistance were strengthened to deliver the best possible services to our participants and improve performance measures and reporting.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

The ARPA Rapid Retraining Program assisted Montanans from underserved and underrepresented labor pools by enrolling them in trainings of less than six months and connecting them to industries that demanded technical skills as a pathway to stable career opportunities and self-sustaining wages. By June 2024 MTDLI had served 1,159 participants and concluded services for 91% of those served. MTDLI supported participants through ARPA funding in the following ways:

- \$2,125,651 in direct (non-OJT) training;
- \$22,500 of incentives paid directly to employers;
- \$85,650 incentives paid directly to participants;
- \$314,539 invested in on-the-job training costs paid to employers; and
- \$497,094 expended for supportive services.

b) Services to Businesses:

ABC Clinics

Ten in-person Assistance for Business (ABC) Clinics were offered across Montana in large and small communities, with 309 businesses attending. Subject matter experts from a variety of agencies presented on the following state services and programs: MTDLI for JSM, local labor market information, MRAP, unemployment insurance contributions and benefits, human rights, safety, and wage and hour; Department of Revenue for withholdings and e-services; Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) for child support, new hire reporting, and VRBS; Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve; workers compensation, and Montana Correctional Enterprises.

Incumbent Worker Training

During the 2023 session, the Montana Legislature revised the number of businesses eligible for the Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) program. In the past, only organizations with 50 or fewer employees were eligible for training grants that allowed them to expand their workforce, retain valuable employees, and offer opportunities to acquire new skills. The revision opened the program to larger businesses and awarded approximately \$80,000 during the third and fourth quarters of PY2023.

More than \$434,228 was awarded to Montana businesses of all sizes in PY2023. Nearly half of that amount went to businesses in the manufacturing industry. Funds also went to help a construction crew learn Spanish, for LEAN and SMART training to streamline operations, electrical and plumbing apprenticeships, and fundraising and bookkeeping for non-profits.

c) Promising Workforce Development Practices:

SWIB Reinvigoration

This year Montana's State Workforce Innovation Board (SWIB) underwent strategic changes to engage the board's expertise more effectively. Efforts included positioning the board to be more policy-leading and actively coordinating workforce entities, including WIOA partners. This shift is assuring a more cohesive workforce system for Montana and is expanding MTDLI's connection to private sector workforce efforts and opportunities.

MTDLI – Tribal Collaboration

MTDLI established a JSM office on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation and began efforts for JSM to co-locate in other tribal offices to expand access to programs and services and increase co-enrollment with WIOA partners. In collaboration with the MTDLI Tribal Liaison, several meetings were held across Montana to develop relationships and gain a greater understanding of barriers that tribal entities and

members face in the labor market. The collaboration improved communication between MTDLI and tribal entities. It also honored local tribal customs and traditions of inclusion and respect, i.e., holding a traditional prayer and blessing meeting rooms. Ultimately, referrals and co-enrollments increased.

Growth of RESEA Program

MTDLI hired a full-time RESEA Program Manager to improve program implementation and employment outcomes. The program manager worked directly with the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Division and JSM to ensure individuals met eligibility requirements and reduced the duration of their unemployment benefits. The program manager also provided expanded technical assistance to RESEA agents who help UI claimants gain valuable skills and knowledge to improve marketability to employers, find suitable employment, and return to work faster.

Collaboration with Infrastructure Investment Activities

MTDLI engaged with various federal funding recipients to advise and collaborate on workforce development aspects of federal infrastructure investments. The collaboration included analyzing related occupations with supply shortages, identifying skill requirements and complementary training programs for addressing skill gap issues, and connecting individuals eligible for Title I and III services to potential opportunities. Areas of collaboration include funding allocated to expanding broadband infrastructure and access, Montana's regional remote sensing and photonics tech hub (Headwaters Tech Hub), and the Training for Residential Energy Contractor (TREC) programs.

d) Integration Efforts:

In PY2023, a cross-functional team of MTDLI IT staff and programmatic subject matter experts began an extensive project to build a new client case management system. The new case management system better reflects service delivery to businesses and individuals, creates a more consistent intake process across service providers, provides more streamlined and accurate PIRL reporting, and ultimately allows more data-sharing across WIOA partners for an improved customer experience.

Additionally, beginning in PY2023, WIOA program managers, the WSD monitoring team, and the WSD policy analyst began focused continuous improvement efforts to discuss successes and revisit opportunities to learn more and improve WSD policy, process, technical assistance, service delivery, and data collection and validation. These meetings were particularly helpful to new and seasoned staff alike, offering ongoing training and reminders about the details and nuances of WSD work and the need for mutual understanding and support during EmployMT development.

e) Using Data to Inform Decisions:

During PY2023, MTDLI continued reorganization within its workforce services team to better align business and technical teams and added a position focused on using performance data to improve WIOA service delivery.

The agency also successfully moved its data to Snowflake, a cloud-based data storage solution that Montana is now using to support data sharing between state agencies. With the shift to Snowflake, MTDLI's ability to conduct analysis and create user-friendly dashboards has expanded. A workgroup of

technical staff and providers was also started to build and test dashboards for use at the provider level that track key metrics for the agency.

Along with the transition to Snowflake, MTDLI participated in a workgroup with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Montana Office of Public Instruction to prepare for data linkage efforts across the three agencies as informed by legislation from the 2023 Montana legislative session. This effort includes development of joint governance, a shared research agenda, an aligned data dictionary, and data architecture within Snowflake to allow for more efficient and comprehensive data sharing. In PY2023, significant progress was made on governance materials, and the research agenda and data dictionary were completed.

MTDLI also worked through the PY2023 year to develop a new workforce case management system- EmployMT, as described throughout this report. This system replaced a 20+ year old system (MWorks), which was out of data and created significant challenges in recording and reporting service delivery. The new system has more robust data collection capabilities and built-in quality assurance checks to improve data accuracy.

f) Using Technology to Assist Customers:

Dislocated Worker Skills Matching Tool

This year, MTDLI produced a new skills-matching dashboard to help laid-off workers explore other occupations that build on their experience. The dashboard allows users to select an occupation from the Standard Occupation Classification system that matches their own and displays other occupations ranked by the closeness of a match between work activities. Once a potential match is selected, the dashboard displays further information about the overlapping work activities and shares sample tasks and typical wages when available. The dashboard was produced as a tool for workers affected by a pair of significant layoffs in Montana's wood products industry who were assisted by Rapid Response activities and an NDWG grant. This dashboard was utilized again for similar purposes when the largest mine in Montana, the Sibanye-Stillwater mine in Nye, MT, announced reductions of nearly 700 workers. <https://dli.mt.gov/data-dashboards/Skills-Matching-Tool-Forest>.

New Local Area Profiles

New local area profile dashboards were created for all 56 Montana counties. This new tool for accessing local data allows workforce consultants, WIOA case managers, business engagement specialists, and other staff assisting customers to quickly familiarize themselves with the workforce and economic landscape of specific Montana counties. The data displayed includes information on the labor force and unemployment rate, job and wage growth trends by industry, and top employers. A data search tool on the website provides access to statistics covering many areas of Montana's economy and its labor market.

<https://lmi.mt.gov/LocalAreaProfiles>

MUSE Rollout

MTDLI's Unemployment Division released a new claims processing system, MUSE. Recognizing the new UI system would be a challenge for our customers to navigate due to the upgrade in technology and significant change from the old program, UI and JSM collaborated and created a virtual training site. JSM staff was adequately trained and prepared to assist clients in navigating the new system with little frustration. After the initial rollout, an internal Microsoft Teams channel was created for continuous feedback. UI and JSM addressed issues in the system, responded to customer questions, and communicated significant MUSE changes or improvements. Subject matter experts were also trained to assist JSM coworkers with any difficulties related to testing and training.

Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)

Montana's virtual service delivery model for conducting RESEA continued with success despite the lower number of appointments due to the low unemployment rate. The RESEA team provided services statewide, using Zoom as the primary platform for virtual RESEA appointments.

RESEA team members are workforce consultants, WIOA case managers, and career coaches who collaborate to offer their expertise to UI claimants. The RESEA team expanded its service availability to mitigate potential coverage gaps and accommodate the team's growth. This strategic approach provided the flexibility to accommodate claimant needs by adding more days and times to the weekly schedule.

MTDLI and FRB Minneapolis completed their evaluation of Montana's RESEA program in February 2024 to assess the comparative effectiveness of online and in-person RESEA appointments. While a complete analysis of the data is pending, MTDLI and FRB Minneapolis have begun to work on an intermediate analysis. Wage and employment data for clients two quarters after their appointment will be available for the entire cohort in early 2025.

EmployMT Development

EmployMT, MTDLI's workforce development case management system built on the ServiceNow platform, replaced the legacy MWorks system, which was over 24 years old. Where possible, the new system's components use MTDLI's existing enterprise infrastructure.

EmployMT was designed, developed, and implemented to meet the requirements of business processes and functions utilized to administer WIOA Title I and Title III programs. The system also collects data that meets the federally mandated PIRL reporting requirements. It provides more analytics tools to track provider performance (including individual staff performance), client demographics, and case management activities. The system will also streamline Montana's monitoring processes for programmatic, fiscal, and data validation review.

Phase one, which included development of a staff portal, was completed in August 2024. Phase two, which consists of a client self-service portal, will be delivered in May 2025.

g) Successes:

Below are selected success stories across MTDLI's programs:

Helena Prerelease Welding Program

<https://www.ktvh.com/news/helena-prerelease-center-residents-learning-to-weld>

Tribal success story Morning Star Propane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91lmud1Glqo>

Lumber industry Rapid Response efforts and resources

https://missoulian.com/news/local/mill-workers-jobs-montana-forestry-pyramid-roseburg/article_3c5e904e-03e7-11ef-9b51-73cf9b37a86f.html

WIOA clients

In addition to the stories above, Montana collects success stories about clients enrolled in WIOA programs. For PY 2023, a couple examples include:

Mary came into Job Service Polson to look for work, having been unemployed for two months. She had lost her job in November. Staff had a conversation with Mary about her interests and career goals. She had done some diesel technology classes in the past but had not completed her training. During the conversation, staff learned that Mary had always wanted to obtain her Class A CDL. She was referred to a WIOA case managers and was subsequently enrolled in the WIOA DW program to complete CDL Training. This career is a bright outlook and would provide her with a livable wage, while matching her interests. Mary completed training and obtained her CDL. Her WIOA Case Manager assisted her with her job search, and she was recently hired with a local business to be a Truck Driver. The program also assisted Mary with some required work clothes.

John came to his local Job Service office for career assistance. He had worked most of his life in construction but was no longer able to physically do this kind of work. He was homeless, receiving public assistance and was on probation. His goal was to go to school to earn his associate’s degree in chemical dependency counseling from the local tribal college so that he could find employment as a counselor to help others. He was found eligible for the WIOA Adult and Montana HELPLink programs. With hard work and assistance from the WIOA Adult program, HELPLink, MT Vocational Rehabilitation, and other scholarships, he was able to complete his associate’s degree with a 4.0 along with the Student of the Year Award for Chemical Dependency Counseling. He was recently hired as a Case Manager for a recovery center in his community and excited to be back in the workforce in a field he is passionate about.

Incumbent Worker Training Program

In PY2023, a small agriculture business requested training for two employees on production equipment at a cost of about \$3,000. In a post-evaluation, the owner wrote that the investment had substantial impact:

“<The two employees> were able to learn about maintaining and fixing our some of our current equipment. Most of our equipment requires us to fly a tech in but our employees’ ability to troubleshoot and fix the equipment has been a huge help. They also have more confidence to challenge our current practices. Change can be hard to implement but the more knowledge my employees have, the more we can talk through why the changes might be best for our company.

It was great to see the efficiency we have gained the last 6 months. The employees are more empowered to take on new challenges. This has allowed us to remain competitive in our industry and push our employees' wages higher. We really feel to retain our good employees we have to be aggressive with wages and increasing their abilities makes this easier to do.”

Challenges Faced by the State Workforce System

During PY2023, Montana's economy shifted. Wages began to outpace inflation, and Montana's economic growth of 2.2% accelerated from the prior year. However, housing shortages and higher housing costs persisted, and a lack of available and affordable childcare in most communities remained a significant challenge. Large layoffs in the timber industry stressed the workforce system, and individuals who faced significant barriers to employment continued to require intensive support to be job-ready.

Montana's labor shortage also persisted, with nearly two open jobs for every unemployed person. When possible, employers increased wages to remain competitive. Many employers struggled due to a lack of available workforce, competitive wages, and employees' inability to find housing and/or daycare within their budget. MTDLI has supported struggling businesses through the Business Engagement team and local JSM offices by posting jobs, connecting employers to job seekers, and facilitating cohort training to help industries like healthcare, which continue to grow at a pace that exceeds their ability to hire.

MTDLI lost the contract for Pathways—Montana's SNAP/TANF program—which the agency administered in three regions of the state. Transitioning clients to the new provider was unplanned and MTDLI had to quickly determine how to address program staffing levels, how to continue effective client service and support while transitioning to a new provider, and how to most effectively partner with the new provider. While the agency was able to do these things, including establishing co-location with new provider and entering into a small subcontract to provide business services, the change in direction and loss of contract had ripple impacts.

In particular, two non-profits who also lost Pathways contracts in other regions of the state were forced to close their doors. This presented additional challenges for MTDLI, as those providers also held contracts for WIOA Youth and Adult programs. This forced MTDLI to shift service delivery of those programs to alternative providers on short notice to ensure quality services to clients were not disrupted.

As in most years, Montana's large geographical footprint and low population made 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 lack adequate access to reliable and affordable technology. Lacking sufficient access to technology or reliable internet service means many individuals cannot access online training that could help them compete for employment opportunities, and they live too far away from training providers to commute to in-person training opportunities.

Conclusion:

Montana's WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for PY2023 details progress towards meeting the strategic vision and goals for its workforce development system.

MTDLI completed in-depth reports of the state's workforce programs. Every program year, MTDLI updates its report on MRAP participants to analyze participation trends and apprentice outcomes. During PY2023, MRAP's active apprenticeships and the number of businesses utilizing apprenticeships to train their workforce reached record highs. This is just one of the many encouraging outcomes identified in the report that highlights the value of apprenticeship and provides information that can be used for continuous improvement. The agency published employment projections for the state's occupational job growth 2022 -2032. The projections are based on USDOL's recommended methodology for employment forecasts. The report and accompanying dashboard assist workers and workforce service providers in identifying high-growth occupations, including opportunities specific to MRAP. MTDLI produced information on labor market issues, i.e., nursing workforce challenges and childcare supply and demand. MTDLI also updated its annual Labor Day Report with details about labor market trends and topics of interest to workforce developers and professionals.

MTDLI continued to expand the agency's access to program-related data across multiple formats to inform managers, workforce consultants, and other staff for decision-making purposes, i.e., data dashboards and data visualization tools. Easy access to data improved monitoring, information sharing, and management decisions. While developing the new EmployMT case management system, MTDLI worked to improve overall data collection for PIRL reporting. Montana is committed to improvements in data collection and primary performance indicators, seeing both as opportunities for further research, evaluation, and continuous improvement. Adding the Workforce Performance Manager to monitor WIOA quarterly performance metrics and deliver technical assistance for service providers reflects MTDLI's commitment to quality service delivery and fiscal responsibility.

MTDLI's workforce strategies positively impacted lives across generations. Knowing the positive benefits of the apprenticeship training model and the need for increased access to childcare across the state, MTDLI pursued an expansion of apprenticeship training in the childcare sector. Waivers for WIOA youth program activities, such as flexibility in funding and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for in-school youth, allow MTDLI to provide innovative strategies to address barriers, student retention, engagement, transition, and successful outcomes, especially in rural areas. This affords in-school youth the same opportunities as out-of-school youth, including the prospect of earning an industry-recognized credential and/or enrolling in Montana University System's (MUS) One-Two-Free Program which covers tuition costs for two university courses for high school students. These waivers reflect Governor Gianforte's commitment of providing Montana's next generation with access to high-quality education and the skills to thrive in the state's direct-to-industry workforce.

In addition, MTDLI prioritized workforce strategies that offered Montana adults and their communities access to training and employment opportunities. The NDWG allowed Montana to incorporate short-term and apprenticeship training to assist individuals impacted by layoffs in getting back to work quickly while obtaining valuable skills. The agency collaborated with various partners, including but not limited to the Department of Corrections, Helena College, Vocational Rehabilitation service providers, the state's eight tribal nations, and the Headwaters Tech Hub. MTDLI's Business Engagement Team recorded 1500 plus contacts, offering businesses and communities various customized training and employment services. The initial phase of MTDLI partnership with FRB Minneapolis on an RCT to measure the impact

of the RESEA services on unemployment duration, wages, and employment outcomes ended in February 2024 and an intermediate analysis is underway.

The MTDLI is dedicated to innovation in workforce services, using data to shape program delivery and ensure excellent customer service to job seekers and businesses, focusing on continuous improvement, and playing an active leadership role in the state's workforce development.