



REPUBLIC OF PALAU

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT TITLE I

## **Annual Statewide Performance Report**

For the Period: *July 01, 2023 to June 30, 2024*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Each state that receives an allotment under WIOA section 127 (Youth), or section 132 (Adult and Dislocated Worker) must prepare and submit a WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative of performance progress to the Secretary of Labor in accordance with the "WIOA Common Performance Reporting - OMB Control No. 1205-0526." The WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative serves as a complement to the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report (ETA 9169) requirements defined in OMB Control No. 1205-0526 and in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 10-16, Change 1. States were previously required to submit annual report narratives under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) through PY 2015, but were not required to submit an Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for PY 2016 as they transitioned to the new performance reporting requirements under WIOA.

The following is the Palau WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative for the Program Year 2023-2024 covering July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

## **STRATEGIC VISION**

Surangel Whipps, Jr. became the 10<sup>th</sup> President of the Republic of Palau after the November 2020 election, and was sworn in to the Office of the President in January of 2021. President Whipps, Jr.'s platform envisions Palauans to have improved quality of life through incentives and opportunities that would enable them to pursue their rights to a happy and comfortable life. The people of Palau are the force that drives the progress of our island nation; hence, his slogan, "*A Kot a Rehad er Belau*" (Palauan People First). It is not discriminatory to enforce the Palauan workforce or livelihood. It is in fact a response to unfair treatment of the Palauans in the workplace, the lack of career opportunities for Palauans, and to also challenge the young Palauan entrepreneurs, and the unchecked exploitation of Palau's natural resources. The slogan represents the conviction that Palauans must secure the opportunities Palau has to offer, and the commitment to push for the improved welfare of the Palauans to be foremost in their country by their government. The Republic of Palau's strategic vision for the workforce system is to create a skilled and competitive workforce that meets the needs of the economy and supports the well-being of all Palauans.

The state's goals are to:

- 1) Increase employment opportunities;
- 2) Increase the number of Palauans with postsecondary and/or industry specific credentials;
- 3) Improve the quality of jobs held by Palauans;
- 4) Close equity gaps in workforce outcomes.

Palau Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Office is integral to President Surangel Whipps, Jr.'s vision in focusing on providing Palauans with the necessary education, training, and employment that would improve their quality of life in Palau. Providing services through the WIOA Title I programs will assist the people of Palau to move forward in acquiring employment opportunities, especially after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Palau WIOA Office supports this vision by facilitating the creation and maintenance of a sustainable work force.

Surangel Whipps, Jr. was elected for a second term as the President of the Republic of Palau during the November 2024 election. His vision and goals for the Republic remain the same and are enforced by the public and the private sectors. Palau WIOA will continue to work towards the endeavor of creating a stronger workforce for the people of Palau through the WIOA programs.

## **WIOA Formula Funded Programs**

Palau receives Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds based on a formula established by the Act. These funds are commonly referred to as WIOA “State Formula Funds”. The Palau Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Office/American Job Center is the designated administrative entity for WIOA State Formula Funds of Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth. Palau WIOA does not receive Wagner-Peyser and Vocational Rehabilitation funding.

On June 22, 2021, the President of the Republic of Palau, Surangel Whipps, Jr., closed the Palau WIOA Office, and through his Executive Order (EO) No. 453, the President re-appointed new members for the State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) and the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB). The SWDB was made up of nine (9) members. The members consisted of the President/his designee representing the Office of the President, a representative of President of the Senate, a representative of House of Delegates, the President and the Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce, the Chair of the Palau National Scholarship Board, the Chair of the Foreign Investment Board, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism, and Development. The purpose of the SWDB was to effectuate the requirements of U.S Public Law 113-128 and supervise the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) in its efforts to facilitate job creation and training programs and promote the hiring and retention of Palauan citizens in coordination with national and state entities. The Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) consisted of eleven (11) members who represented community stakeholders from the private and public sectors of the Republic of Palau. The members represented the following private and public agencies: Palau Livestock Association (PLA), Palau Taiwan Farmers Association (PTFA), Palau Aquaculture Alliance (PAA), Palau Chamber of Commerce (PCC), Palau Community Action Agency (PCAA), Division of Youth and Career Development (DYCD) through the Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism, & Development (MHRCTD), Palau Tourism and Hospitality School of Excellence (PHTSE) through Palau Community College (PCC), Division of Finance and Accounting through Ministry of Finance (MOF), Belau Boater’s Association (BOA), Bureau of Human Resources through the Ministry of Human Resource, Culture, Tourism & Development (MHRCTD), and the Ministry of Finance (MOF). The purpose for the LWDB was to manage the program staff and ensure sufficient training to implement the requirements of U.S Public Law 113-128; to keep records that are sufficient to permit the preparation of reports under U.S Federal law and permit the tracing of funds to a level of expenditure adequate to ensure that the funds have not been spent unlawfully; to maintain records and reports of general performance; and to maintain standardized records that can be reviewed for consistency and compliance with U.S Federal Law.

After two years and analysis of the effectiveness of EO.453, President Surangel Whipps, Jr., amended the EO reconstituting the board membership of the State and Local Workforce Boards to comply with U.S Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. On September 29, 2023, the President signed the amended EO, EO NO. 485. The amended EO added a new member to the SWDB, the Minister of Education (MOE) to meet the WIOA requirement of having a member representing Title II. SWDB now has 10 members. The EO also amended the membership of the Local Board to include the Youth, Media, and Communications Coordinator from the Division of Youth and Career Development from MHRCTD, the Dean of Continuing Education of the Palau Community College (PCC), the Director of the Bureau of National Treasury from MOF, the Director of the Bureau of Development from MHRCTD, the Director of Palau Visitors Authority, the Executive Director/designee from Northern Reef Fisheries Cooperative, a representative from the Bealu Offshore Fisher Incorporated, and the Director of the Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction from MOE. EO NO.485 removed the following from the LWDB: Director of Human Resource – MHRCTD, the Chief of the Division of Youth and Career Development, and the Director of Palau Tourism and Hospitality School of Excellence from PCC. LWDB now has 15 members, which includes the Director of Palau WIOA Office.

EO NO. 485 outlines the duties and responsibilities of the SWDB as the following:

- 1) to meet regularly and review the activities of Local Board and employees to ensure the proper disbursement of and accounting for U.S. Federal funds;
- 2) to turn over financial reports of all programs/activities to the President, Public Auditor, and Minister of Finance and comply with any requests for further info;
- 3) to retain an accountant or accounting firm to institute generally accepted accounting principles for all WIOA programs; and to retain an independent auditing agency to review programs/expenditures report to the President every two years;
- 4) to ensure that the Local Workforce Development Board operates in compliance with the WIOA Act and maximizes all funds for the benefit of its programs and services.

EO NO. 485 outlines the duties and responsibilities of the LWDB as the following:

- 1) to manage the program staff and ensure sufficient training to implement the requirements of U.S. Public Law 113-128;
- 2) to keep records that are sufficient to permit the preparation of reports required under U.S. Federal law and to permit the tracing of funds to a level of expenditure adequate to ensure that the funds have not been spent unlawfully;
- 3) to maintain records and reports of general performance; and
- 4) to maintain standardized records that can be reviewed for consistency and compliance with U.S. Federal law.

In February 2023, the WIOA FPO to Palau, Violet Jackson, requested to review Palau WIOA's policies regarding Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth program. It was found that Palau WIOA's policies were fifteen (15) years out dated, which meant that Palau WIOA Director and Staff were not well versed on how to run the WIOA programs effectively & efficiently. Through US DOL, FPO Jackson connected Palau WIOA Office to SAFAL Partners – Next Level Now (NLN) for training and revision of policies. Beginning July 2023, Palau WIOA began receiving intensive WIOA training from NLN. Between July and December 2023, Palau WIOA staff & Director trained in the following: WIOA 101, 201, & 301. Beginning January 2024, training in policy adaption from US DOL to Palau was implemented. However, in March 2024, during a discussion of policy adaption, revisions, and requiring the State Board to review and approve before Palau WIOA could implement the programs, it was then found that Palau's State and Local Board did not meet the US DOL board regulations requiring 51% private and 49% public sector board members. Through EO 485, membership for both boards are predominantly government officials. Concurrently, it was also found that Palau did not need two boards because Palau does not have local areas. In April 2024, FPO Jackson, and NLN were then connected to the legal counsel for the Office of the President to work on a new EO to amend EO 485 in order to meet the percentage regulation for US DOL as well as consolidate to a singular State Board. The EO has been a work in progress. The new EO to amend the previous EO should be complete by the end of December 2024. At this time, Palau WIOA does not have a sufficient State Board to review, revise, and approve the policies the WIOA Director has completed with NLN's guidance. Therefore, the Adult and Dislocated Workers programs are on hold until the new State Board is instated. Once the new State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) has been instated, the new SWDB will review the Adult and Dislocated Workers policies. When SWDB approves the policies, then Palau WIOA can implement the Adult & Dislocated Workers programs & activities by February 2025.

## **WIOA Four Year Unified State Plan**

For Program Years 2018, 2019, and 2020, programs were carried out in accordance with the strategies outlined in the Republic of Palau Four Year Workforce Strategic Plan for Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act for Program Years 2016-2020. The 2020-2023 State Plan was revised in 2022; however, the Republic of Palau and Palau WIOA Office was unable to update it properly because of the overwhelming effects of COVID-19, the improper implementation of the CARES Act program & activities by previous WIOA administrators, as well as the closure of the office in June 2021, and termination of the Director, the Fiscal Officer, and two other WIOA staff members.

On June 22, 2021, the President of Palau closed Palau WIOA Office due to allegations of misappropriation by the former Director, the former Fiscal Officer, and two other staff members of Palau WIOA Office. Immediately after the closure, these four individuals were terminated by the newly instated LWDB. This left Palau WIOA Office without a Director, and a Fiscal Officer. At the same time, neither the Director nor the Fiscal Officer had a succession plan left behind for anyone to take on the helm should they no longer be employed by Palau WIOA Office. An Interim-Director was appointed by the President's Office, Mr. Omdasu Ueki, while they searched for a new Director and Fiscal Officer. The Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) then hired a new Director, Ms. Glendalynn N. Ngirmeriil, and she took office on August 30, 2021. Director Ngirmeriil then took on the task to search for a Fiscal Officer amidst learning the role of Palau WIOA Director. The new Fiscal Officer, Ms. Tessmarie U. Kodep, was hired and began on December 20, 2021. With the assistance of U.S Department of Labor E&T and Unemployment Insurance Division, Ms. Ngirmeriil and Ms. Kodep began training for WIOA Title I programs and CARES Act PUA and FPUC. However, because of the backlog from CARES Act and a profound number of administrative errors by the previous Director and Fiscal Officer, WIOA Title I programs were halted so that CARES Act programs could be corrected by the deadline of June 30, 2022. Concurrently, the SWDB and the LWDB were not familiar with the State Plan, therefore, they depended on the new Director to complete the task. However, the CARES Act training and amount of workload to complete did not give the Director sufficient time to focus and compile the revisions for the 2020-2023 State Plan. Because of all the administrative errors in the CARES Act programs, one hundred percent of the Director Ngirmeriil and WIOA staff's attention was diverted into CARES Act. Between December 2021 and March 2022, Palau WIOA Office was tasked in reviewing claimant cases that were inappropriately processed 2021. After the review, WIOA retroactively paid 688 CARES Act claimants who had been wrongly denied PUA and FPUC in 2021. Because of the amount of work, the Office of the President enlisted a writing team to assist in updating the State Plan on February 2022. An updated plan was completed and sent to US DOL in April of 2022. Between April 2022 and August 2022, Palau WIOA began disbursement to the 688 claimants for benefits from the year 2021. Immediately after the disbursement for the 688, US DOL Federal Project Officer (FPO) informed Director Ngirmeriil that the revised State Plan that was submitted in April had compliance issues and must be revised. The revisions were made to the best of the Director's knowledge because CARES Act was still overwhelming Palau WIOA Office and the SWDB & LWDB could not assist. In August 2022, US DOL UI then tasked Palau WIOA to refund claimants who's PUA and FPUC benefits were wrongly deducted as Tax, Medical Savings Account, and National Health Insurance. The review and refund ended in December 2022. In the same month of December 2022, US DOL UI gave Palau WIOA a Review Tool to use to review all claimants who had received PUA & FPUC. Beginning December 2022, Palau WIOA reviewed 1,449 PUA and FPUC claimants' files in order to correct administrative errors, such as missing Monetary Determinations, missing identification documents, and benefit processing that resulted in over and under payment to claimants. The review of the 1,449 cases ended in August 2023. However, in to the 4<sup>th</sup> month of the review, March 2023, US DOL UI performed an on-site monitoring review at the Palau WIOA Office. Further program & fiscal findings were found under CAA-ARPA. Palau WIOA Office Staff & Director were again tasked with new directives to correct these new findings. Director Ngirmeriil appealed to the WIOA FPO, Violet Jackson, for assistance regarding

WIOA programs & State Plan. FPO Jackson advocated for Palau WIOA Office and was able to acquire a third party, SAFAL Partners - Next Level Now (NLN), to assist in the training of the Director and the WIOA staff, which included the State Plan training. Through training from NLN, Director Ngirmeriil was able to complete the 2024-2027 State Plan. It is currently conditionally approved. Changes must be made after the new State Board is instated through an amendment of EO 485 by the Office of the President.

### **WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs**

As a small and single service delivery area, services to adults and dislocated workers are offered through Palau Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Office (Palau WIOA Office)/American Job Center (AJC). Programs and services to adults focus on eligible customers ages 18 and above that must receive at least one career service in the three categories of Basic Career Services, Individualized Career Services, and Follow-Up Services.

- A. The Adult Program serves individuals and helps employers meet their workforce needs. It enables workers to obtain good jobs by providing them with job search assistance and training opportunities. WIOA establishes a priority requirement with respect to funds allocated to a local area for adult employment and training activities. When using WIOA Adult funds to provide individualized career services and training services, priority must be given to recipients of low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. Under WIOA, priority must be implemented regardless of the amount of funds available to provide services in the local area. In addition, veterans receive priority of service in all Department of Labor (DOL )-funded employment programs.
  - 1) The program improves the quality of the adult workforce, reduces government aid dependency, and enhances the productivity and competitiveness of Palau's workforce.
  - 2) The program provides adults with workforce preparation, career services, training services and job placement assistance needed to increase occupational skill attainment, obtain industry recognized credentials, and secure a good job that provides earnings that lead to self-sufficiency.
  - 3) The program performance is measured by participant entry into unsubsidized employment, retention in unsubsidized employment, earnings received in unsubsidized employment and the rate of industry recognized credentials earned by participants.
  
- B. The Dislocated Worker program is designed to help workers get back to work as quickly as possible and overcome barriers to employment. When individuals become dislocated workers as a result of job loss, mass layoffs, global trade dynamics, or transitions in economic sectors, the Dislocated Worker program provides services to assist them in re-entering the workforce. One service funded under the Dislocated Worker Program is Rapid Response.
  - 1) The program provides services to workers who have been impacted by closures of plant/facilities/enterprise, workforce layoffs/reductions, and natural disasters that lead to job loss.
  - 2) The program goal is to provide dislocated workers with the tools and support needed to obtain credentials and occupational skills leading to jobs in high growth industries and high demand occupations.
  - 3) The program enhances the quality, productivity and competitiveness of Palau's workforce while meeting the needs of Palau's

- employers.
- 4) The program performance is measured by participant entry into unsubsidized employment, retention in unsubsidized employment, earnings received in unsubsidized employment and the rate of industry recognized credentials earned by participants.

Eligibility of individuals to workforce services funded under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I programs are stated in established state workforce policies that must be reviewed by the newly instated State Board in January 2025. The policies are incorporated to include veterans and their spouses who meet the WIOA eligibility requirement, to fall under the category of priority customers of workforce services. All state workforce policies will be adopted and certified by the new State Board. Priority for services will be given to adults with barriers to employment such as veterans and eligible veteran spouses, disabled individuals, dislocated workers, displaced homemakers, women. Training, and employment will provide opportunities for non-traditional employment and traditional employment to all low-income individuals, and individuals with multiple barriers ~~consistent~~ with US DOL WIOA regulations.

Due to the overwhelming work for the CARES Act program, beginning September 2020 the Adult & Dislocated Workers programs were halted. The programs were to be implemented in October of 2023; however, through the training with the FPO & NLN, it was found that the policies that dictated the programs needed to be revised and that the WIOA staff & Director needed further training before implementing the programs. However, in March 2024, during a discussion of policy adaption, revisions, and requiring the State Board to review and approve before Palau WIOA could implement the programs, it was then found that Palau's State and Local Board did not meet the US DOL board regulations requiring 51% private and 49% public sector board members. Through EO 485, membership for both boards are predominantly government officials. Concurrently, it was also found that Palau did not need two boards because Palau does not have local areas. In April 2024, FPO Jackson, and NLN were then connected to the legal counsel for the Office of the President to work on a new EO to amend EO 485 in order to meet the percentage regulation for US DOL as well as consolidate to a singular State Board. The EO has been a work in progress. The new EO to amend the previous EO should be complete by the end of December 2024. At this time, Palau WIOA does not have a sufficient State Board to review, revise, and approve the policies the WIOA Director completed with NLN's guidance. Therefore, the Adult and Dislocated Workers programs are on hold until the new State Board is instated. Once the new State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) has been instated, the new SWDB will review the Adult and Dislocated Workers policies. When SWDB approves the policies, then Palau WIOA can implement the Adult & Dislocated Workers programs & activities by February 2025.

### **Rapid Response**

Not more than 25% of the dislocated worker funds will be allocated to statewide rapid response activities. The State Board will determine the criteria for awarding funds to rapid response activities, as the needs arise and are identified, through the WIOA Office to provide services that include but not limited to:

- A. Assist and train individuals, whenever applicable, in case of natural disaster; and
- B. In case of mass layoff, do on-site contact with employers for:
  - 1) Layoff plans and schedule of employer
  - 2) Economic development plans to avert layoff

### 3) Identify affected dislocated workers and needs

In a given program year, if there are no rapid response activities, due to absence of massive layoffs of workers for reasons of plant closure or government closeout, the rapid response funds will be used at the end of each program year as additional dislocated worker funds for displaced home-makers workforce activities including the required percentage for statewide activities.

Although Palau's tourism industry and other private industries faced massive layoffs and reduction of hours due to COVID-19 pandemic, Rapid Response funds were not utilized due to CARES Act program being implemented March 2020. Instead, CARES Act PUA and FPUC funds were disbursed to assist the influx of laid off and individuals whose hours had been reduced. Between June 2020 and January 2022, Palau WIOA issued PUA and FPUC benefits to the laid off and individuals whose hours had been reduced. Furthermore, due to the improper implementation and denial of eligible claimants, CARES Act program continued into November 2024 retroactively paying claimants who should have been eligible for PUA & FPUC in the year 2020 & 2021.

## **WIOA Youth Program**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 enacted a comprehensive youth employment program for serving eligible youth, ages 14-24, who face barriers to education, training, and employment. Funds for youth services are allocated to states and local areas based on a formula. The Palau WIOA does not have local areas. Therefore, the funds are allocated to a single WIOA Office that focuses primarily on out-of-school youth requiring to expend a minimum of 75% of WIOA youth funds on them. The program includes 14 program elements that are required to be made available to youth participants. WIOA prioritizes work experience through a 20% minimum expenditure rate for the work experience program element.

### I. ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for the Palau WIOA Youth Program, any participant must:

- 1) Be 14 – 24 years of age at the time of enrollment into WIOA Youth Services
- 2) Be a US Citizen, US National, Citizen of the Freely Associated States (Palau, RMI and FSM)
- 3) Pursuant to Palau's LLSIL income guidelines, be considered coming from a 'low income' household
- 4) Demonstrate barriers to finding and retaining employment such as being deficient in basic skills, etc.

### A. In-School Youth (ISY) Directives - An ISY is an individual who meets the following:

- 1) Not younger than 14 and not older than 21 years;
  - a. If 14 years old, must be entering sophomore year in high school.
- 2) Attending school (as defined by National law);
- 3) Low-income, as defined by WIOA §3(36), or lives in a high poverty area; and
- 4) One or more of the following:
  - a. Basic skills deficient, as defined by WIOA §3(5);
  - b. An English language learner;
  - c. An offender;
  - d. A homeless individual, a homeless child or youth, a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system, a



- e. child eligible for assistance under §477 of the Social Security Act (42 USC §677), or in an out-of-home placement;
- f. Pregnant or parenting;
- g. Having a Disability; or
- g. Requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment (WIOA §3(27) and §129(a) (1) (C)). No more than 5 percent of ISY served in the workforce area may be deemed eligible because of the criteria described here.

B. Out-of-School Youth - An OSY is an individual who meets the following:

- 1) Not younger than 16 and not older than 24 years;
- 2) Not attending school other than an adult education provided under Title II of WIOA, Youth Build programs, and Job Corps programs; and
- 3) One or more of the following:
  - a. A school dropout.
  - b. Within the age of compulsory school attendance (6–18), but has not attended school for at least the most recent complete school year’s calendar quarter;
  - c. A recipient of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent who is a low-income individual and is either:
    - a. basic skills deficient, as defined by WIOA §3(5); or
    - b. an English language learner;
  - d. Subject to the juvenile or adult justice system;
  - e. A homeless individual, a homeless child or youth, a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under §477 of the Social Security Act (42 USC §677), or in an out-of-home placement;
  - f. Pregnant or parenting;
  - g. Having a Disability; or
  - h. A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to obtain or retain employment

Palau has adopted and added on to the criteria. However, the newly adapted criteria must be reviewed and approved by the State Board. Currently the State Board is non-compliant by US DOL regulations. The EO dictating a new SWDB is being revised by the Office of the President and should be completed by the end of December 2024. The Youth Eligibility Policy and Work Experience Policy will then be approved and implemented by the new State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) by late January 2025.

The youth formula program under WIOA focuses resources primarily on OSY (Out of School Youth) and increased the minimum percentage of program funds required to be spent on OSY from 30 to 75 percent. Lastly, it provides the youth with work experience opportunities including the new five program elements of:

- 1) Financial literacy

- 2) Entrepreneurial skills training
- 3) Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local areas
- 4) Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training
- 5) Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific ~~occupation~~ occupational cluster.

*\*Additional youth eligibility criteria established as a youth who:*

- 1) is currently attending an educational program,
- 2) has previously dropped out of educational program or has poor attendance patterns in educational program during the last school year, and has below average grades;
- 3) is not attending an educational program, has no vocational/employment goal, and has a poor work history or no work history or has been fired from a job in the last six months;
- 4) deficient in basic literacy skills and who cannot compute or solve basic mathematic problems, read, write, or speak English, at or below grade level 6.

The standard office operation begins with **Intake** and after all required documents have been submitted to the Intake Staff shall then it be certified of the trainee's eligibility to workforce activities by the Executive Director. The eligibility determination and certification that follows is inclusive to identified barriers and family \*income level.

- 1) Providing an objective assessment of their academic skill levels, skill levels, and service needs, which include a review of basic skills, occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, interests, aptitudes, supportive service needs, and developmental needs, if they have not already received this service from partner agencies;
- 2) Developing an Individual Service Strategy that shall identify an employment goal, which may not be required if a recent similar document has already been developed by partner agency under another education or training program; and
- 3) Providing preparation for postsecondary educational opportunities, linkages between academic and occupational learning, preparation for employment, and effective connections to intermediary organizations that provide strong links to the job market and employers.

\* Palau follows the HHS Poverty Guidelines for the State of Hawaii. Income level is according to the 2023 Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL). Palau is listed under the area of South - Non Metro.

The implementation of CARES Act grants, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), and continuous efforts to complete the programs has overwhelmed Palau WIOA Office since April 2020 to present time. Although Palau WIOA Office had to halt the Adult and Dislocated Workers programs due to CARES Act, Palau WIOA was able to implement the Youth Program with the collaboration of the Ministry of Human Resource, Culture, Tourism, and Development (MHRCTD) in the Summer of 2021, and the Summer of 2022. Although COVID-OMICRON found its way into Palau via travelers in early January of 2022, the Republic has slowly adjusted to the pandemic. As of June 2023, Palau WIOA and MHRCTD collaborated in implementing a newly revised Youth Program that would span a program year. The Youth Program begins June 1<sup>st</sup> and ends the following year on April 30. However, due to the amount of funding for the Youth Program, Palau WIOA could only enroll a total of 25 youths (OSY and ISY) for PY2023-2024. These youths were enrolled into a Work Experience program, "On the Job Training". During each WIOA quarter, these youths were placed in employment in the industry he/she has an interest in

pursuing. They were paid a stipend through the work program as an incentive while gaining experience in these industries. Palau WIOA is unable to provide the remaining 13 component services to the youth due to out dated policies for PY2023-2024.

In June 2023, WIOA FPO Jackson informed the Director that the Youth policies currently utilized by Palau WIOA Office were out of date and must be updated. Through US DOL, FPO Jackson advocated for a third party, SAFAL Partners - Next Level Now (NLN) to train Palau WIOA Office in revising the policies. After NLN revised the policies and returned to Palau WIOA, Palau WIOA will present to the SWDB for review. When the policies are reviewed and approved, Palau WIOA will be able to proceed program activities. The Youth policies were reviewed by NLN in April 2024, and were approved. However, without a compliant board, the policies have not been reviewed and approved by a compliant SWDB. During the interim, Palau WIOA implemented a youth program for the PY2024-2025 following US DOL regulations, while waiting for a compliant board to approve the revised Youth policies.

### Performance Measurement Goals for the Republic of Palau

No.	WIOA Indicators Description	Performance Measure	Benchmark / Target	2023
1	<b>Adult</b>	Employment 2nd Quarter After Exit	52%	0%
		Employment 4th Quarter After Exit	50%	0%
		Median Earnings in the 2nd Quarter		
		after Exit	\$ 2,100	\$ 2,100
		Credential Attainment Rate	50%	0%
		Measurable Skill Gains	50%	0%
2	<b>Dislocated Worker</b>	Employment 2nd Quarter After Exit	52%	0%
		Employment 4th Quarter After Exit	50%	0%
		Median Earnings in the 2nd Quarter		
		after Exit	\$ 2,100	\$ 2,100
		Credential Attainment Rate	50%	0%
		Measurable Skill Gains	50%	0%
3	<b>Youth</b>	Education and Employment Rate 2 <sup>nd</sup>	53%	0%
		Quarter after Exit		
		Education and Employment Rate 4 <sup>th</sup>	60%	0%
		Quarter after Exit		
		Median Earnings 2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter After Exit	\$1,820	\$1,820
		Credential Attainment Rate	50%	0%
		Measurable Skill Gains	50%	0%

## **CONCLUSION**

Although Palau WIOA Office has faced so many challenges in the past three (3) years due to COVID-19 and administrative mismanagement by previous WIOA employees, Palau WIOA Title I programs are being revised with the assistance and guidance of the new FPO, Karen Ware, and the continuous training and assistance from SAFAL Partners – Next Level Now. Hence, the Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth program should be fully functioning by February 2025.

*\*\*Palau requested for Youth Program Waiver for Program Year 2020 which was conditionally approved pending actual program activities report.*

*\*\*Palau does not receive NEG or Trade grants. WIOA participants are tracked using the Hire Palau Virtual One-Stop System (VOS) and submits its quarterly performance report through the WIPS (Workforce Integrated Performance System).*

*\*\*Palau does not receive Vocational Rehab and Wagner Peyser.*