

Memorandum

TO: Economic Transition, Stabilization & Workforce Development Commission
FROM: Laurie Esau, Commissioner, DLI and Adam Meier, Director, DPHHS
DATE: September 8, 2021
SUBJECT: Individuals with Disabilities Employment Engagement Program

Overview:

The Montana Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) in conjunction with the Montana Department of Health & Human Services (DPHHS) proposes the Individuals with Disabilities Employment Engagement Program.

DPHHS Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) provides services to individuals with disabilities to obtain, regain, maintain, and advance in employment and Montana's workforce. Individuals with disabilities have specifically been negatively impacted by the pandemic as pandemic-related layoffs have disproportionately impacted the disability community. From March to April 2020, the number of employed working-age people with disabilities fell by 20 percent (950,000 people), while the number of employed working-age people without disabilities decreased by 14 percent.

This Program will augment current counseling staff by temporarily adding 10 qualified full-time Rehabilitation Counselors. This will allow the VR program to invite approximately 1,000 additional individuals with disabilities in for services that intend to lead to employment over the next biennium.

There are approximately 1,300 individuals with disabilities currently waiting for such an invitation, the primary barrier being funding to support staff to offer engagement and assistance.

Individuals with disabilities are prioritized via ARPA as an underserved and underrepresented group in the current labor force. This Program seeks to use ARPA funds to hire staff and expand service capacity, thereby engaging more individuals and ultimately fill more jobs with skilled workers.

The Department certifies that this proposal qualifies for funding pursuant to the American Rescue Plan Act and all applicable guidance.

Allocation Request and Deadlines:

- \$2,000,000
 - Eligible use allowed per HB 632 Section 12
 - 10 staff at approximately \$40/hour including base salary, benefits and fringe costs, equals \$832K/year, for two years
 - Anticipated equipment and supply costs are estimated at \$100K/year, for two years

Structure:

- 10 temporary staff will be hired and employed for two years with assignment concluding no later than Dec. 31, 2023.
- Staff are intended to be hired in locations closest to the individuals they will serve with consideration given to existing counselors' locations and underserved communities.

Eligibility:

- Customers served will follow existing federal and state Vocational Rehabilitation program guidelines and criteria.

Application and Verification:

- Funds will be awarded to DPHHS to hire temporary staff.

Equity:

- Individuals with disabilities are a designated underserved and underrepresented labor population.

Performance Metrics:

1. Number customers served: 1000
2. Percentage entering employment or long-term training program: 60%
3. Percent decrease in overall "waiting list": 75%

Recommendation:

DLI recommends the Commission allocate \$2,000,000 for the Individuals with Disabilities Employment Engagement Program to increase DPHHS's capacity to serve more individuals with disabilities, thereby ultimately increasing the overall available labor pool.