MAINE PYS 2022-2023 (MOD)

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I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

This is a unified plan

B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following pages outline Maine's four-year strategic and operational plan for enhancing its workforce. Maine, like the rest of the nation, is experiencing a healthy, thriving economy and historically low unemployment. This plan is developed with the intent of continuing the success of Maine's businesses and helping people whose employment barriers have kept them from thriving in this economy.

This is a Unified Plan developed in accordance with the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and to establish the long-term agenda for Maine's workforce development system. This plan covers the following programs authorized by the WIOA:

- Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth programs
- Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program
- Title III Wagner-Peyser Employment Services
- Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Under the direction of the State Workforce Board (SWB), the aforementioned programs and other stakeholders participated in facilitated sessions to develop the vision and priorities for the Unified Plan and to collaborate on the development of an integrated, performance-based employment and training system. This Unified Plan will result in: quality jobs for Mainers, employers matched with skilled workers, and a more efficient workforce development system (WDS).

In late 2019, Governor Mills published a 10-year economic development strategy for the State of Maine. The strategy has two key components, increasing talent and spurring innovation. Maine's workforce is talented, skilled, and needs more participation. There are approximately 100,000 people in Maine who are of working age and not working. Many individuals have barriers to employment that they struggle to overcome. It is the State's goal to build bridges over these barriers, enabling all who wish to work to do so. We firmly believe that everyone has a place in Maine's economy.

Maine has numerous resources that contribute to its workforce development system. In order for that system to meet the needs of employers and workers alike, these resources must be better aligned and integrated across all sectors – public, private, non-profit and philanthropy. A high-quality workforce will enable Maine to better retain existing businesses, draw new ones that bring high quality and good paying jobs, and attract new workers to meet the goal set forth in Governor Janet Mills' economic development plan to add at least 75,000 people to our work-force over the next ten years.

The Unified Plan (Plan) starts with a clear vision:

Maine's residents and businesses will have economic opportunity and contribute to the growth of the state through a responsive, networked, and coordinated workforce development system across public and private sectors. The system will integrate all services into a seamless continuum resulting in increased educational and employment attainment for residents with a focus on careers and support Maine's business sectors with skilled and qualified workers. To realize its vision Maine will:

- Partner and respond to the talent needs of Maine employers
- Create a system of lifelong learning and employment connection for Maine residents
- Build an integrated workforce development infrastructure accountable to residents and businesses

Throughout the strategic planning process Maine's workforce system partners demonstrated a willingness to engage in the development of solutions and strategies that will meet the needs of employers, workers, and Maine's economy. These actions will result in quality jobs for Maine residents, employers matched with skilled workers, and a more efficient workforce development system.

Maine's State Workforce Development Board (hereafter referred to as the State Workforce Board or SWB) directed the creation of this Unified Plan with the intent that the plan should reflect the state's unique workforce and economic development characteristics and challenges, as well as the ideas and solutions of the myriad stakeholders that comprise Maine's workforce development system.

Beginning in September 2016, the SWB formed a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) implementation steering committee that included the directors of Maine's local workforce investment boards and the directors of the authorized core programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Adult and Basic Education, and Vocational Rehabilitation (see Appendix B for members of the WIOA implementation steering committee). The Steering Committee's role was to monitor the implementation of the State's workforce plan.

Maine used a collaborative process to establish the vision, goals, and strategies represented in this plan. During October, November, and December the SWB held sessions across the state where stakeholders including the administrators of core programs, local workforce board directors and members, secondary and higher education representatives, policy makers, advocates and employers participated in the visioning work represented in this Plan (see Appendix C for a list of sessions and participants).

II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

a) Economic and Workforce and Workforce Development Activities Analysis

II.(a.1) Economic and Workforce Analysis

II.(a.1.A) Economic Analysis

Economic conditions in much of Maine are positive going into 2020. In the last several years, growth has created new jobs and driven unemployment and other measures of the labor market to near record lows. These tight labor market conditions, with high numbers of job openings and rising wages, provide a positive environment for individuals but are a challenge for many employers seeking to attract and retain the staff they need.

While we are currently in a positive, expansionary environment, economic cycles still exist; we need to be prepared for the next downturn. In addition, the aging of our population presents a significant challenge to maintaining the size of our labor force in the years to come.

Recent Trends and Current Conditions

Total output of the economy increased at accelerating rates in recent years with gross domestic product reaching $67 billion in 2019. The average of 633,000 nonfarm payroll jobs was up more

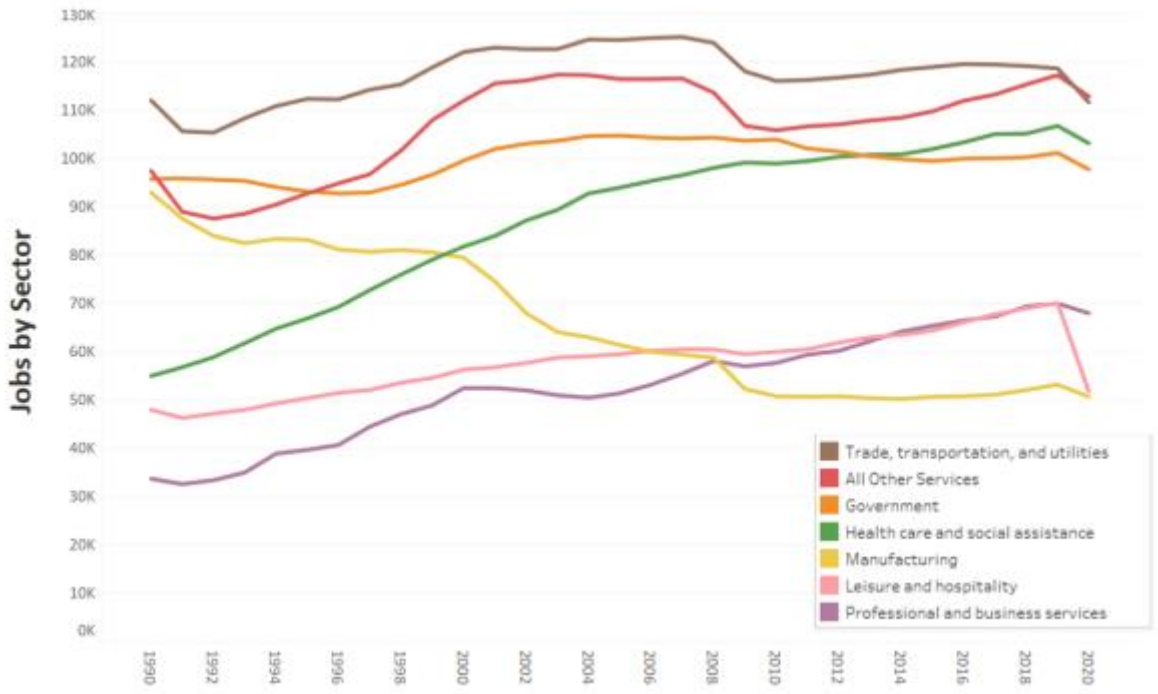
than 4,000 from 2018, marking the ninth straight year of job growth. Though the recovery from the very deep recession of 2008 and 2009 was initially quite slow, conditions today are better by nearly every measure than before the decade-ago downturn.

Economic analysis

Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations

Over the last three decades, the industry structure of jobs changed significantly. The most prominent trends were the near doubling of jobs in the healthcare and social assistance and the professional and business services sectors, as well as a sharp decline in manufacturing jobs. The types of jobs in sectors that are growing have different education, skill, and performance requirements than the types of jobs in sectors that are declining.

Jobs by Sector



Regarding occupations, the ten highest occupational groupings employ almost three-quarters of those working Maine. 2018 data available through the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the top three occupational groups for the state are Office and Administrative Support with 92,250 employees, Sales and Related Occupations with 57,760 employees, and Food Preparation and Serving-Related Occupations with 56,960 employees. These three groups, along with the others that round out the top ten, include approximately 451,000 employees and about 75 percent of Maine workers. The top ten categories and number of workers in each are provided in the following table. Standard Occupational Codes are also provided for reference. The top category, Office and Administrative Support, is comprised of such occupations as customer service representatives, administrative assistants, and stock clerks.

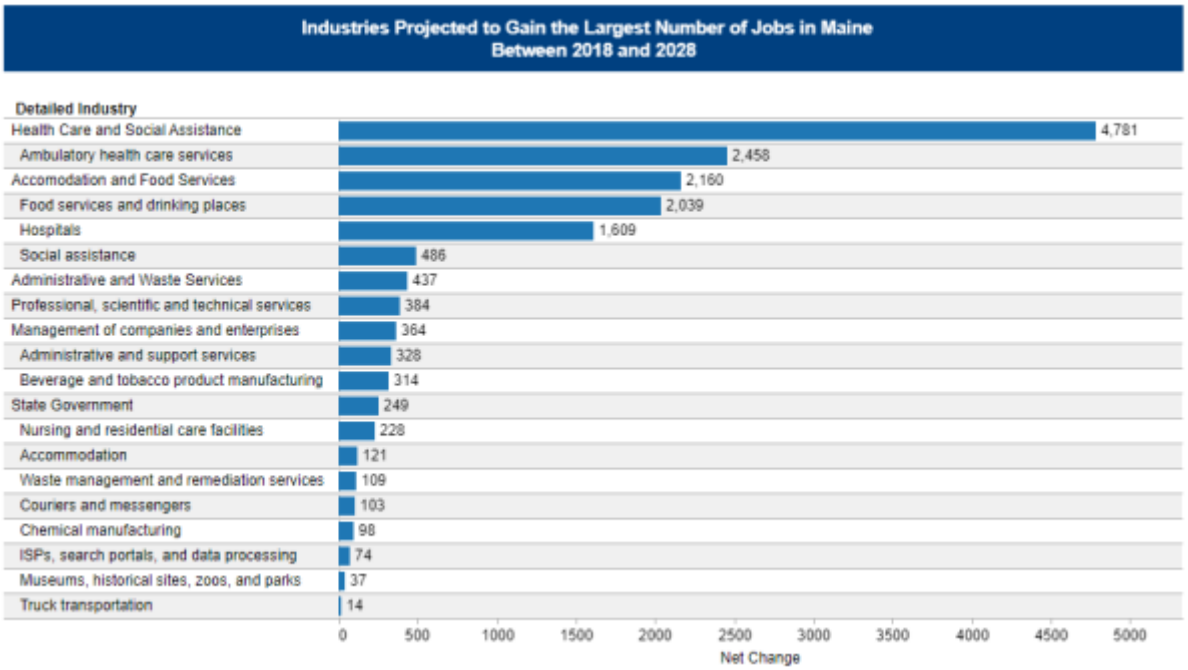
Rank	Occupational Major Group	# Employed

Rank	Occupational Major Group	# Employed
1	Office and Administrative Support	76,840
2	Sales and Related	50,980
3	Food Preparation and Serving-Related	46,760
4	Transportation and Material Moving	46,720
5	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	41,040
6	Education, Training and Library	38,640
7	Personal Care and Service	34,540
8	Production	34,150
9	Management	33,860
10	Construction and Extraction	27,690

Table 1: In-Demand occupations

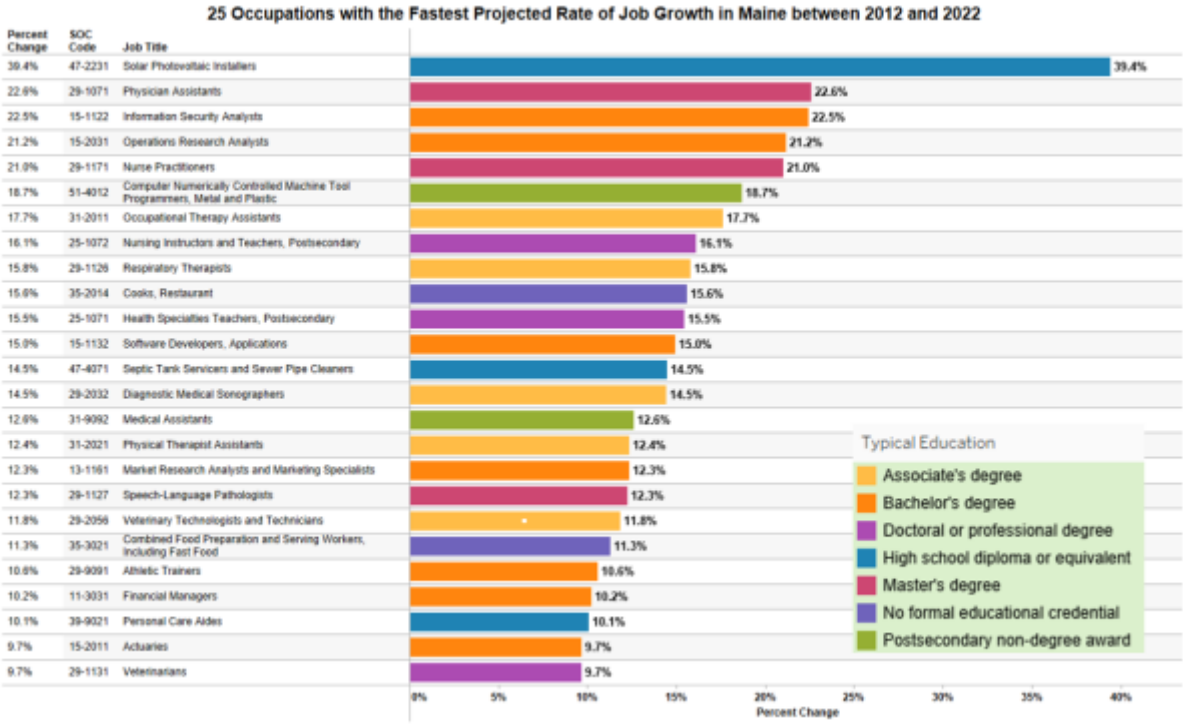
Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations

Job openings and growth in the decade through 2026 are concentrated in two areas: human capital-intensive occupations that generally require postsecondary education and offer above average earnings and in labor-intensive functions that generally do not require high levels of education and offer lower than average earnings. Middle-income jobs that traditionally have had limited education or skill demands are either declining or rapidly changing, requiring increasingly higher levels of technology competency.



1: Industries Projected to gain the Largest Number of Jobs in Maine between 2018-2028

Healthcare is the largest sector in Maine, accounting for nearly 17 percent of jobs. As the chart below shows, Maine will see the largest growth in healthcare-related sectors over the next several years.



2: 20 Occupations with the Fastest Projected Rate of Job Growth Between 2018-2028

From an occupational standpoint, large numbers of physicians, nurses, laboratory, and diagnostic technicians will be required. Healthcare practitioner and technician occupations require postsecondary education ranging from certifications to highly advanced degrees.

Information technology (IT) is expected to continue to increase in importance across every sector of the economy with IT-related occupations continuing to be among the fastest growing. Many IT jobs not only require certification in certain applications but the types of applications, systems, and platforms are changing quickly, and require a flexible, adaptable workforce that is regularly pursuing additional education. Technology competency will increasingly pervade most occupations often in ways that cannot yet be anticipated.

Other areas of projected job growth include hospitality industries including food service and other associated occupations with mostly limited education and skill demands.

Manufacturing was the backbone that built many cities in Maine in the 19th and 20th centuries. Textile mills, shoe shops, paper and saw mills, and others provided middle income jobs for tens of thousands of workers without postsecondary education. The number of manufacturing jobs peaked in the late 1970s but declined sharply until about 2010 before stabilizing.

The forecast through 2026 is for fewer manufacturing jobs as automation continues to be adopted in an even wider range of processes. This will mostly impact the number of jobs in production occupations. This will also continue to be the case for jobs in administrative support occupations as office technology continues to advance which will allow people in professional and technical occupations to perform those functions digitally.

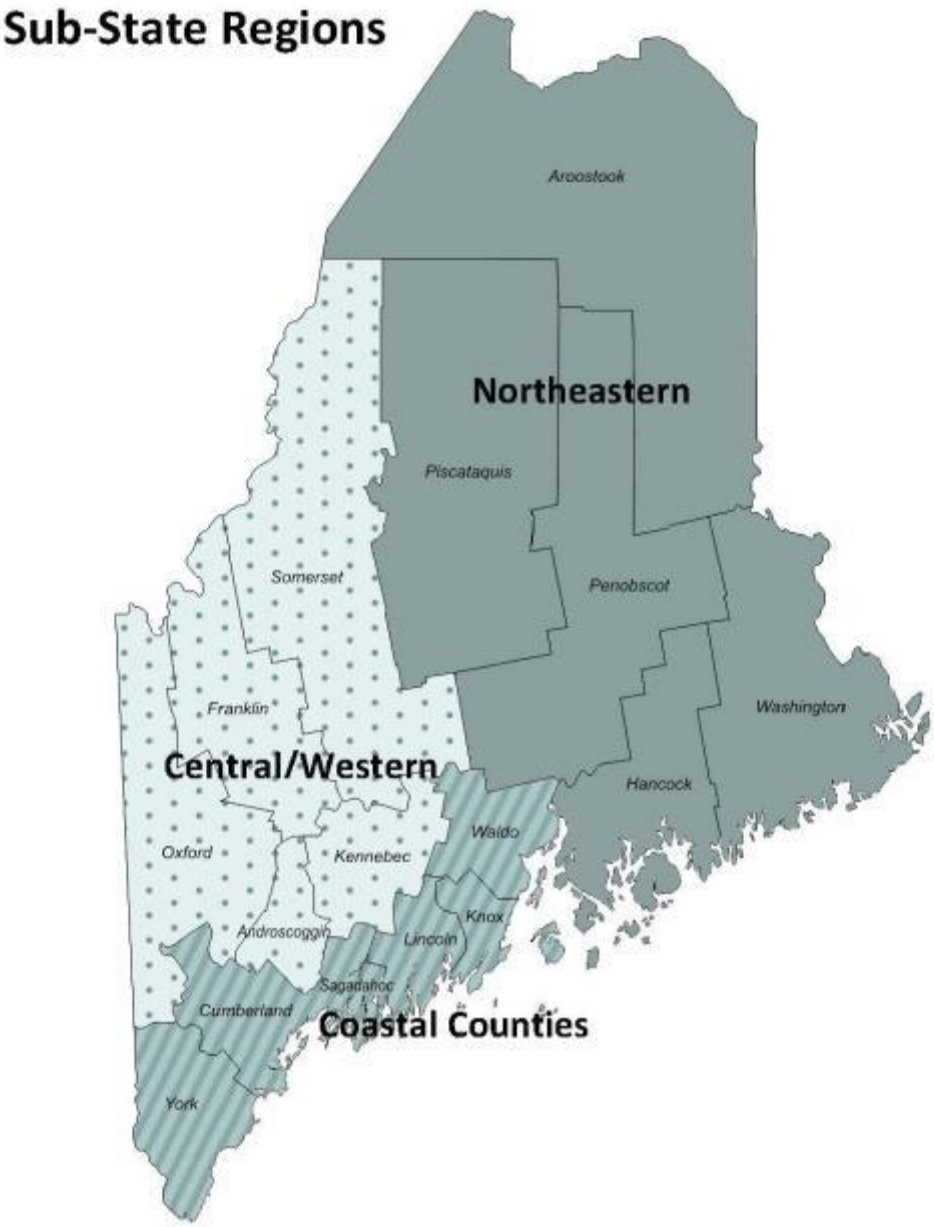
Regional Trends

Economic performance across the state has been uneven. Maine's economy is strongest in the south especially along the Interstate 95 and 295 corridors. The economy has been more limited in the central and mid-coast regions, while some counties along the northern rim of the state continue to lose residents and jobs.

There are a wide range of factors involved in the differing performance of regions. The economic structure of northern Maine is highly concentrated in forest products and agriculture. Advances in mechanization of harvesting of timber and crops, as well as other factors, have displaced thousands of workers from those industries over the years. Much of the region has not found the economic development solutions to replace those industries. This has caused stagnation or decline in many communities as a large share of young people leave for southern Maine or other states in search of better job opportunities, leaving a generally older population behind. Several counties in Maine are among the oldest in the nation by median age.

Jobs are increasingly concentrated in and around cities primarily because stable and growing industries tend to be in densely populated areas. Healthcare, the strongest growing industry in Maine, is mostly concentrated in and around hospitals which are only found in places of population density. Law and accounting firms and other types of professional services, colleges, and some other industries that comprise a rising share of jobs also are primarily found in cities.

Maine has identified three regions for the purpose of aligning workforce development resources to regional economies as shown in the map on the following page. These regions are referred to as Northeastern, Central/Western and Coastal Counties. State and Local Boards considered factors such as alignment with economic development districts and postsecondary institutions, inclusion of major urban hubs and distribution of employment by industry. It is also very important to support partnerships already in place for community planning and development and appropriate distribution of financial resources for workforce development.



3: Sub-State Regions

Several factors set the workforce board regions apart. The Coastal Counties region contains 49 percent of the population and 52 percent of jobs on just 12 percent of the land area, making by far the most densely populated of the regions. This region has high concentration of jobs in the financial services and hospitality sectors. Coastal Counties is the only region that has had population growth in the last decade. Some of that growth is from people moving from northern Maine in search of better job prospects.

The Central/Western region has 25 percent of the jobs and 28 percent of the population on 29 percent of the state's land area. The region has the state's highest concentration of jobs in manufacturing and education and--as home to the state capital--a large share of jobs in government. Farming and food production are burgeoning growth industries. Demographics and population declines are the region's most pressing issues; the outlying counties are projected to experience a decline in the working age population over the next two decades.

The expansive but sparsely populated Northeastern region represents nearly 60 percent of the state's land and 24 percent of the population. The region has 22 percent of the jobs in the state with relatively high concentrations in natural resources, government and retail. The Northeastern region also has the lowest share of manufacturing jobs. Many companies in this sector downsized or ceased operations, displacing thousands of workers over the years.

A more detailed discussion for each region follows below.

The Coastal Counties Region is comprised of six counties and is the most demographically and economically diverse of Maine's three regions. Six of the ten largest municipalities in the state are in this region: Portland, South Portland, Brunswick, and Scarborough in Cumberland County and Biddeford and Saco in York County.

Given the size of the area, the region is generally classified into four distinct hubs for service delivery purposes.

York County, located in the southern area of the region, is the gateway to Maine. Its coastal plain contains Maine's most visited beaches and supports a large tourism base. Beyond tourism, York has several defined economic clusters related to defense-dependent industries, healthcare, retail, and manufacturing. Interstate 95, which runs north to south through York and Cumberland Counties, creates an east to west demarcation that separates the seasonal tourist industry of the beaches and larger commerce centers from the rural, agricultural, bedroom communities and, for the most part, small business and retail-centered communities. Commerce in extreme southwestern county towns is focused on New Hampshire where there is no sales tax.

Just up the coast, Cumberland County, is the most populated county, and home to Portland, the most significant commerce hub and the largest city in the state. Portland capitalizes on its strategic location. The city's port has had a resurgence of shipping and bulk cargo transfers and it is a major port of call for cruise ships. The city hosts the state's major airport and it is a hub for healthcare, banking, insurance, IT, bio tech, retail, and education. West of Interstate 95 is characterized by growing bedroom communities and retail expansion. The lakes and mountain regions focus on tourism and seasonal, recreational-based economies.

Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo counties, commonly identified as the mid coast, comprise the northern segment of the region. These counties are historically steeped in farming, dairy, and the traditions of the sea including boat building and fishing. Similar to York County, the mid coast attracts and is supported by a significant influx of seasonal tourists. The three cluster communities of Brunswick, Topsham, and Bath form one of the major economic regions of the four-county mid coast. Shipbuilder Bath Iron Works is the largest manufacturer in the state. The nearby Brunswick Landing, which is the redevelopment of a former Naval Air Station, is one of the most significant commerce parks in the state. Healthcare, retail and colleges offer opportunities for growth on the southern end of the mid coast hub.

The closure of Brunswick Naval Air Station in 2011 presented a challenge for economic and workforce development in the region, potentially removing millions of dollars of economic activity from the region and reducing demand for a wide range of products and services. Redevelopment of the former base locations in Brunswick and Topsham is well underway and

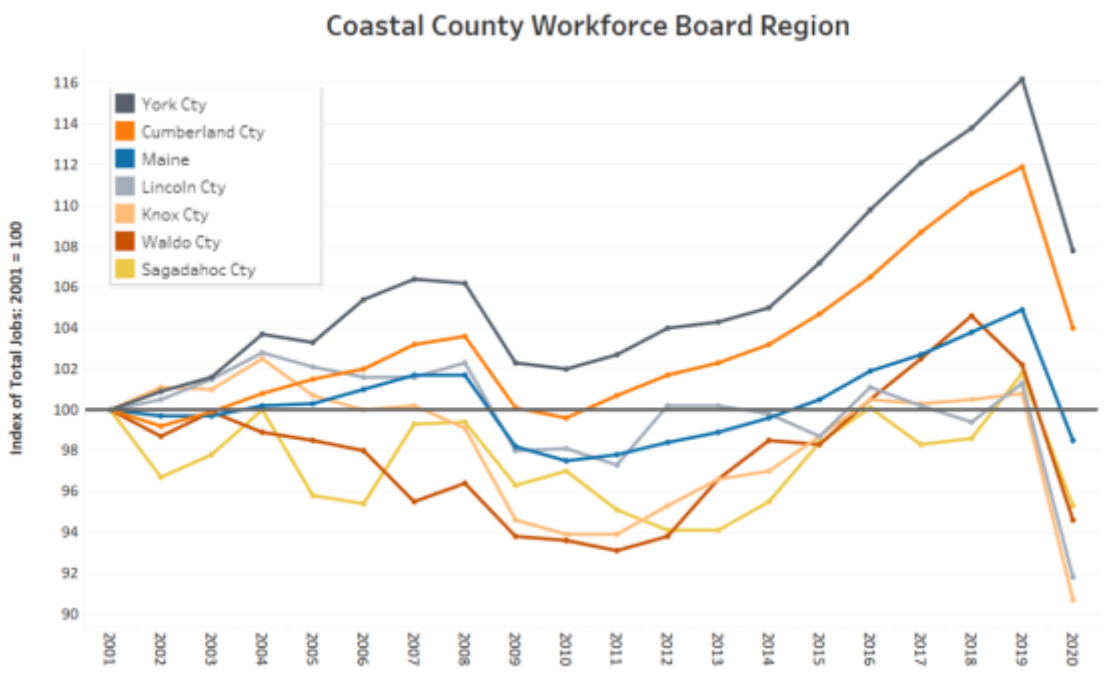
having a positive economic impact. To date, the project has attracted $400 million in capital investment. Over 135 public and private entities employ more than 2,000 people in six target sectors: aerospace, composites, IT, bio tech, renewable energy, and education as well as other complementary industries.

The Boothbay/Damariscotta hub features a strong tourist industry, hosts Renys retail and distribution operations and Mölnlycke Medical, as well as two substantial boat builders, Washburn and Doughty and Hodgdon Yachts. The north end of this hub features the retail commerce cluster of Thomaston, Rockland, Rockport, and Camden. Major employers include Fisher Engineering, Dragon Cement, Penbay Medical Center and those associated with the tourist industry. Rockland, Rockport, and Camden are home to working waterfronts, both commercial and seasonal recreational. The one area of commonality among all four counties in this hub is the fact that tourism is a critical industry either on a transient or destination basis. Route 1 (the coastal route) hugs the coast, providing access points to the hundreds of miles of coast line and peninsular amenities found along the way.

Biggest Challenges:

- The tightening labor market--unemployment is at a historic low--has challenged many employers in their efforts to attract and retain the staff they need.
- Population demographics are impacting growth as mid coast counties, with a large share of retirees, are among the oldest in the nation.

Population and workforce trends in this region are more favorable than in the other two regions due to higher birth rates and in-migration, both from around the state and from outside it. Still, the region will be challenged by a rapidly aging population. Between 2016 and 2031, the Coastal Counties population is projected to rise by 3.5 percent, though the working-age population is projected to decline somewhat.



4: Coastal Counties Index of Total Jobs

Because the region comprises such a large share of jobs in Maine, its industry composition is not significantly different from the state's as a whole. The region has a slightly smaller share of

government jobs than the statewide average. The distribution of other industries is nearly the same as the state.

The 2018 annual average unemployment rate of 2.9 percent in the region was well below the statewide average rate of 3.4 percent. Within the region, unemployment rates ranged from a low of 2.7 percent in Cumberland County to a high of 3.3 percent in Lincoln County.

Incomes are higher in the southern counties of York, Cumberland and Sagadahoc compared to the state and to the mid-coast counties of Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo. From 2013 through 2017, median household income ranged from a high of $65,700 in Cumberland County to a low of $50,200 in Waldo County. The state median household income is $53,000[1].

The range of incomes and unemployment rates across the six counties is due in large part to internal variations in economic structure. Southernmost York and Cumberland counties have the highest density of population and jobs. Together, these two counties account for 82 percent of the region's jobs, with an above-average share of jobs in growth industries (healthcare and social assistance, professional and business services, private education, and leisure and hospitality). The mid coast counties of Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo are less populated and more reliant on seasonal tourism, agriculture, and fishing. These counties have a below-average share of jobs in growing industries.

EMPLOYERS

In 2019 the largest private employers were primarily in the healthcare and social assistance, retail trade, and manufacturing sectors. The three southernmost counties have a concentration of jobs associated with national defense which includes the federal Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Pratt and Whitney Aircraft Group, General Dynamics Armament Systems, and Bath Iron Works.

Rank	**Employer**	**Number of Jobs (Range)**
1	BATH IRON WORKS CORP GEN DYNAMICS	4,501 to 5,000
2	MAINEHEALTH	4,001 to 4,500
3	HANNAFORD BROS CO LLC	3,501 to 4,000
4	L.L.BEAN, INC.	2,001 to 2,500
5	UNUM GROUP	1,501 to 2,000
6	CULLENBERG INC, CARL	1,001 to 1,500
7	WAL MART	1,001 to 1,500
8	PRATT & WHITNEY AIRCRAFT GROUP	1,501 to 2,000
9	UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND	1,001 to 1,500
10	SHAW'S MILLCREEK	1,001 to 1,500
11	ALERE SCARBOROUGH INC	1,001 to 1,500
12	YORK HOSPITAL	1,001 to 1,500
13	MERCY HOSPITAL	501 to 1,000

Rank	Employer	Number of Jobs (Range)
14	MARTINS POINT HEALTH CARE CENTER	501 to 1,000
15	WEX LLC	501 to 1,000
16	IDEXX LABORATORIES INC	501 to 1,000
17	T D BANK N A	501 to 1,000
18	INTERMED P.A.	501 to 1,000
19	BOWDOIN COLLEGE	501 to 1,000
20	THE HOME DEPOT	501 to 1,000
21	MILLCREEK RETAIL STORE	501 to 1,000
22	TYLER TECHNOLOGIES INC	501 to 1,000
23	IDEXX DISTRIBUTION INC	501 to 1,000
24	LOWE S HOME CENTERS LLC	501 to 1,000
25	IDEXX OPERATIONS INC	501 to 1,000
26	ATHENAHEALTH INC	501 to 1,000
27	MARKET BASKET	501 to 1,000
28	SPURWINK SERVICES INCORPORATED	501 to 1,000
29	BANK OF AMERICA NA	501 to 1,000

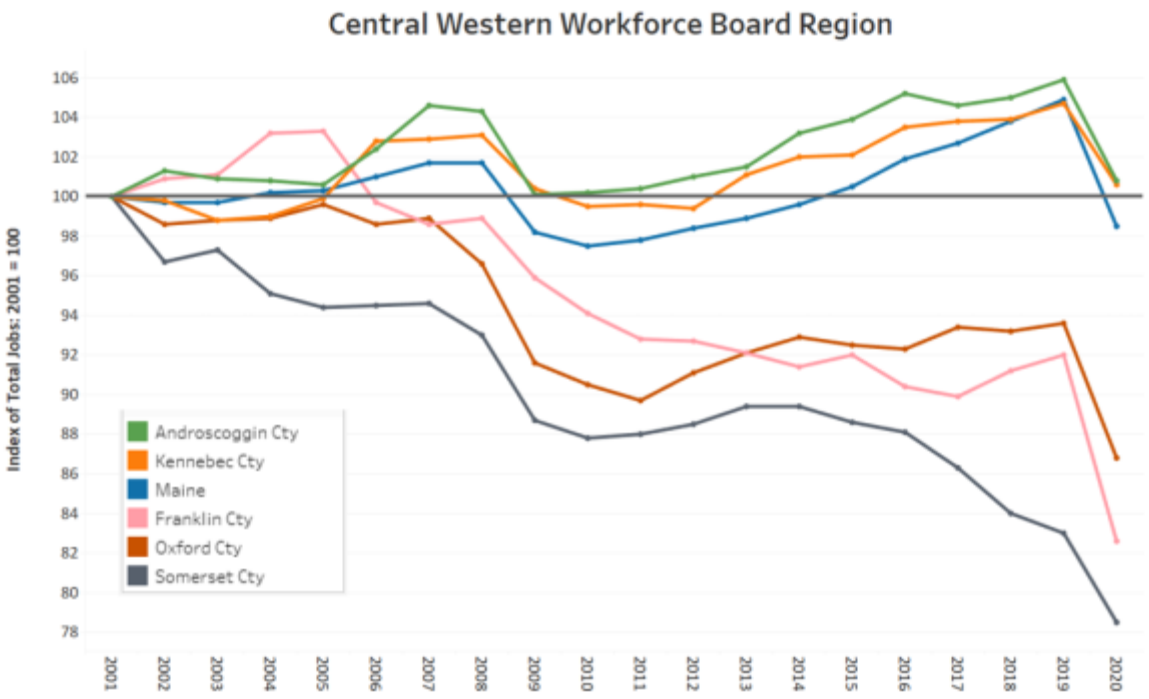
2: Private Employers with More than 500 Jobs in the Coastal Counties Region, Third Quarter 2021

The latest available statistics reveal that the majority of the region's workforce--280,300 primary job holders--lives and works within the area. About 56,600 resident workers commute to jobs outside the region, offset by 52,700 non-resident workers commuting into the region[2].

The Central/Western Region encompasses 29 percent of Maine's land area. It is home to 28 percent of the state's population and 25 percent of private sector jobs. The largest population centers in the region are the cities of Lewiston and Auburn in Androscoggin County, and Augusta and Waterville in Kennebec County.

Similar to the state, the region will be challenged by a rapidly aging population. Between 2016 and 2031, the Central/Western Region is projected to lose two percent of its population, with a sharper decline in the working-age population.

In 2018, the annual average unemployment rate of 3.6 percent in the Central/Western region was close to the 3.4 percent statewide average. Unemployment rates ranged from lows of 3.2 and 3.3 percent in Kennebec and Androscoggin counties to a high of 4.8 percent in Somerset County.



5: Central Western Index of Total Jobs

The disparity of unemployment rates across the five counties is due in large part to variations in the economic structure within the region. The central more populous counties of Androscoggin and Kennebec—have more job opportunities than the more sparsely-populated rim counties of Franklin, Oxford and Somerset.

The economic base in Androscoggin and Kennebec counties is diversified across a broad spectrum of industries, with higher concentrations of jobs in professional and business services, transportation and warehousing, and healthcare than the region or the state. In addition, Kennebec County is home to Augusta, Maine's capital city, and has a significant concentration of jobs in state government. Kennebec and Androscoggin counties are home to 72 percent of jobs in the region.

In the rim counties, the economy is less diverse and more concentrated in forestry-related industries, seasonal agriculture and hospitality, including major ski resorts.

Within the region, incomes are higher in the central counties of Androscoggin and Kennebec compared than the western counties of Franklin, Oxford, and Somerset. From 2013 through 2017, the median household income ranged from a high of $50,100 in Kennebec County to a low of $41,500 in Somerset County. Median household income was lower in each county in the region than the state median income of $53,000[3].

EMPLOYERS

In 2019, the largest private employers were primarily in the healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, and retail trade sectors.

Rank	**Employer**	**Number of Jobs (Range)**
1	MAINEGENERAL HEALTH	3,001 to 3,500
2	WAL MART SUPERCENTER	2,001 to 2,500
3	CENTRAL MAINE COMMUNITY	1,501 to 2,000

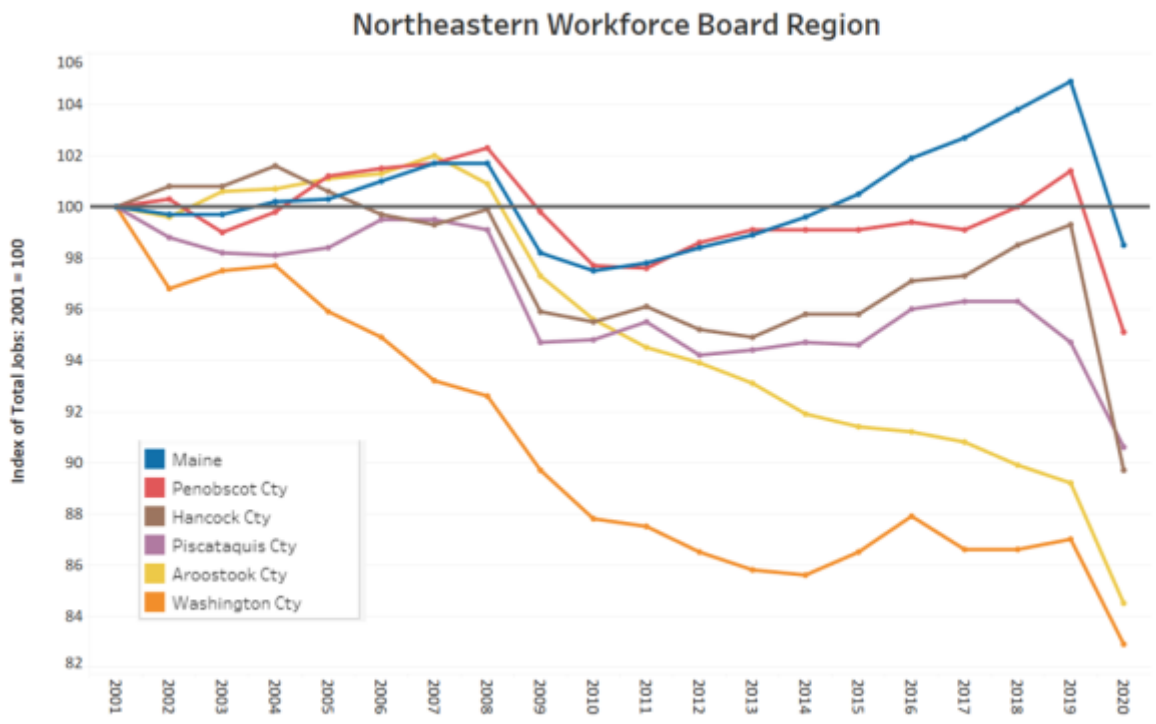
Rank	Employer	Number of Jobs (Range)
	HEALTH CORP	
4	HANNAFORD BROS CO LLC	1,501 to 2,000
5	ST MARY'S REGIONAL MEDICAL CTR	1,001 to 1,500
6	T D BANK N A	1,001 to 1,500
7	MAINEHEALTH	1,001 to 1,500
8	S D WARREN	501 to 1,000
9	COLBY COLLEGE	501 to 1,000
10	REDINGTON MEDICAL PRIMARY CARE	501 to 1,000
11	BATES COLLEGE	501 to 1,000
12	CENTRAL MAINE POWER CO	501 to 1,000
13	SUNDAY RIVER SKIWAY	501 to 1,000
14	T MOBILE USA INC	501 to 1,000
15	JOHN F MURPHY HOMES INC	501 to 1,000
16	NEW BALANCE ATHLETIC SHOE INC	501 to 1,000

3: Private Employers With More Than 500 Jobs in Central Western Region, Third Quarter 2021

Statistics describing worker flow into and out of the Central/Western region reveal that 71 percent of the region's 145,000 resident primary jobholders lived and worked within the area. In 2017, about 46,000 resident workers commuted to jobs outside the region, partially offset by 36,700 nonresident workers commuting into the region to work, for a net outflow of 9,300 commuters[4].

The five counties comprising Northeastern Region encompass 59 percent of Maine's land area. They are home to 25 percent of the state's population and 23 percent of private sector jobs. The largest population centers in the region are the cities of Bangor, Orono, and Brewer in Penobscot County and Presque Isle and Caribou in Aroostook County.

Like the state, the region will be challenged by a rapidly aging population. Between 2016 and 2031 the region is projected to lose 1.3 percent of its population, with a sharper decline in the working-age population.



6: Northeastern Index of Total Jobs

The 2018 annual average unemployment rate of 4.1 percent was higher than the 3.4 percent statewide average. Within the region, unemployment rates ranged from a low of 3.8 percent in Penobscot County to a high of 4.9 percent in Washington County.

The disparity of unemployment rates across the five counties is due in large part to the diverse makeup of the region's economic structure. The more densely populated Hancock and Penobscot Counties offer better job prospects than the sparsely populated northern and eastern counties of Piscataquis, Aroostook, and Washington.

There are three distinct economies within the region: coastal Hancock and Washington counties, regional service centers in Bangor and Presque Isle/Caribou, and Piscataquis, interior Hancock, Washington, and rural Penobscot and Aroostook counties.

The economic base in coastal Hancock and Washington counties is dependent on seasonal, tourism-related commerce and maritime trades, with concentrations of jobs in hospitality, retail, and construction industries.

The economic base in the Bangor metropolitan area and Presque Isle/Caribou is diversified across a broad spectrum of industries with relatively large shares of private jobs in retail, wholesale trade, health care and social assistance. These areas are commercial and regional centers for government administration and educational services.

Away from the coast and outside of its service areas, the region is rural. The economic base is heavily dependent on natural resource-based industries (farming and logging), woods-based manufacturing and seasonal tourism. Relatively high concentrations of private jobs occur in natural resources, retail and manufacturing industries.

The industry structure of the Northeastern Region features higher concentrations of jobs in government, healthcare and social assistance, and retail trade. Five percent of the region's jobs are in natural resources and mining compared to one percent statewide.

Within the region, incomes were higher in the central Hancock and Penobscot counties than the northern and eastern counties of Aroostook, Piscataquis, and Washington. From 2013 through 2017, the median household income ranged from a high of $51,400 in Hancock County to a low of $38,800 in Piscataquis County. Median household income was lower in each county in the region than the state median wage of $53,000[5].

EMPLOYERS

In 2019, the largest private employers were primarily in the healthcare and social assistance, retail, and manufacturing sectors.

Rank	Employer	Number of Jobs (Range)
1	EASTERN MAINE MEDICAL CENTER	3,001 to 3,500
2	HANNAFORD BROS CO LLC	1,001 to 1,500
3	WAL MART	1,001 to 1,500
4	NORTHERN LIGHT HEALTH	1,001 to 1,500
5	THE JACKSON LABORATORY	1,001 to 1,500
6	HARDWOOD PRODUCTS CO	501 to 1,000
7	PENOBSCOT COMMUNITY HEALTH CARE	501 to 1,000
8	ST JOSEPH HOSPITAL INC	501 to 1,000
9	AROOSTOOK MEDICAL CENTER, THE	501 to 1,000
10	BANGOR SAVINGS BANK	501 to 1,000
11	BEECH GROVE	501 to 1,000
12	NORTHERN MAINE MEDICAL CENTER	501 to 1,000

4: Private Employers With More Than 500 Jobs in Northeastern Region, Second Quarter 2019

Statistics describing worker flows into and out of Northeastern region reveal that most of the region's 116,600 primary job-holders lived and worked within the area. In 2017, about 7,400 resident workers commuted to jobs outside of Aroostook-Washington counties, partially offset by 4,400 non-resident workers who commuted in. About 20,100 resident workers commuted to jobs outside of the Penobscot, Piscataquis, Hancock counties, offset by 20,100 non-resident workers who commuted into the three counties[6].

Employers' Labor Force Needs

Employment has shifted towards industries with a greater share of educated workers. Over the last two decades, industries recording employment gains had a higher share of workers with a bachelor's degree than industries that shed jobs. The education, health, business, and professional services industries have a higher than average share of workers with a bachelor's degree. Conversely, manufacturing and construction, which have shed thousands of jobs, have a lower than average share of workers with a bachelor's degree.

- An increase in higher level jobs and a decline in traditional manual occupations
- Movement from skills associated with manual dexterity toward skills associated with understanding and monitoring complex systems
- A shift away from routine processes toward coordination and collaboration
- An increase of general work skills required in many jobs such as the ability to use computers
- Expanded need for communication skills
- Jobs that include a broader range of responsibilities

Even among production workers, the demand for highly educated workers has grown. Since 1990 the share of production workers with some college or an associate degree and a bachelors' degree rose by 15 percentage points and two percentage points, respectively, even as the number of workers fell by 52 percent.

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 ACS

[2] 2017, *OnTheMap*, U.S. Census Bureau

[3] U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 ACS

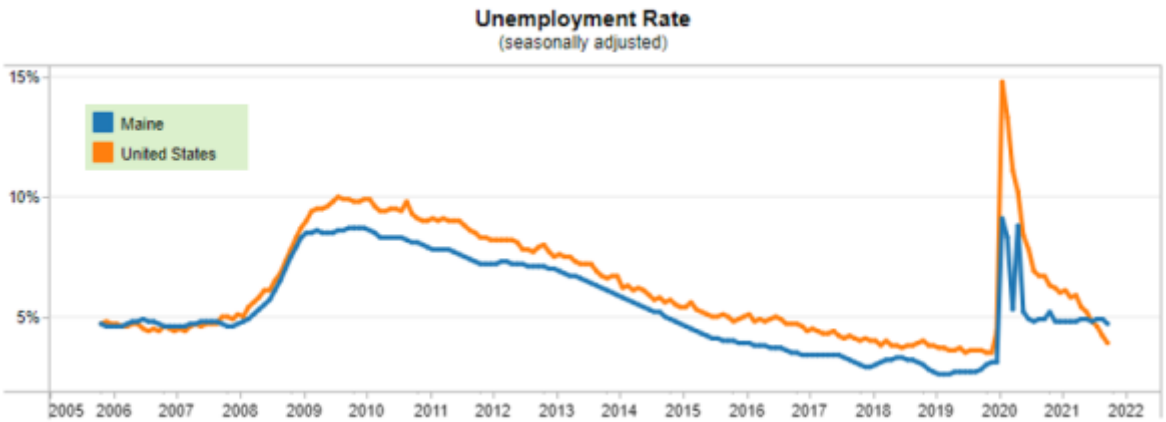
[4] 2017, *OnTheMap*, U.S. Census Bureau

[5] U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 ACS

[6] 2017, *OnTheMap*, U.S. Census Bureau

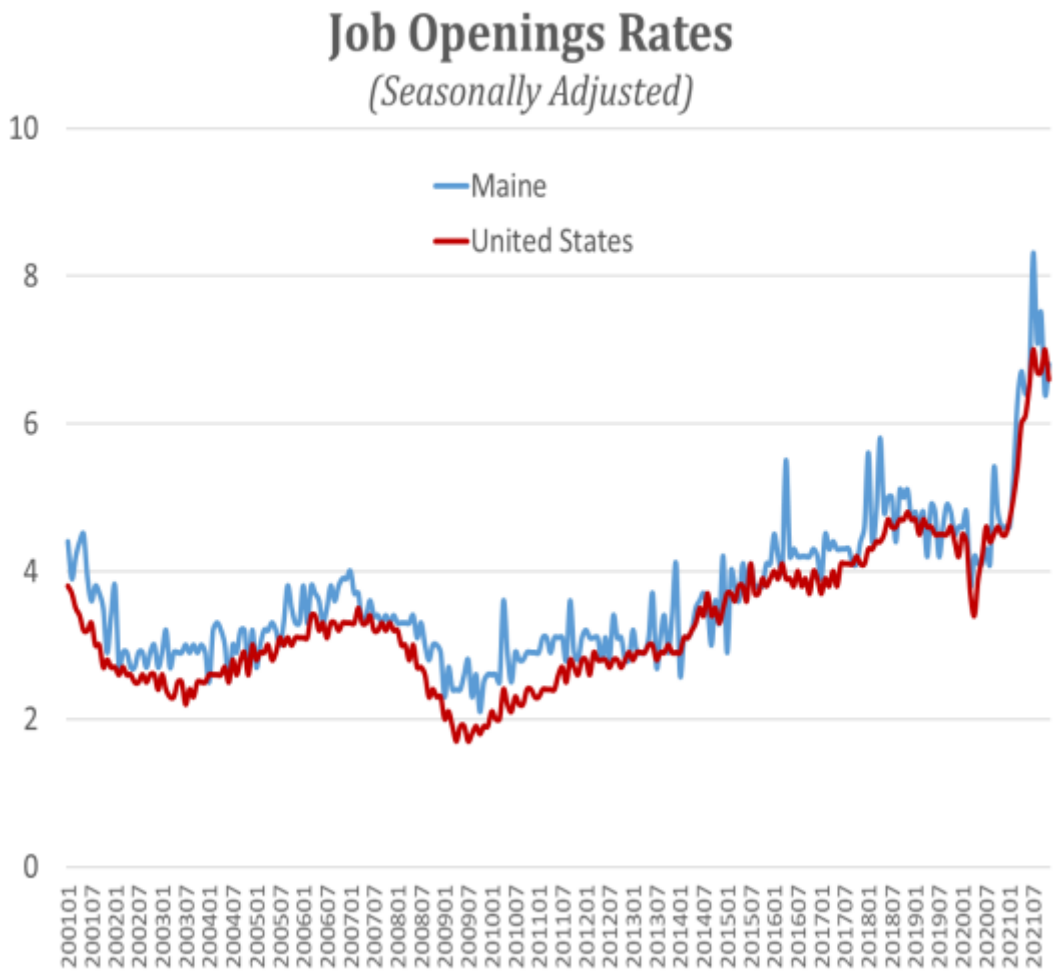
Employment and Unemployment

The statewide seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was near three percent throughout 2019, and as the year closes, it has been below four percent for 48 consecutive months—more than twice the previous record. The graph below shows that Maine's unemployment rate since the recession has been below the national average.



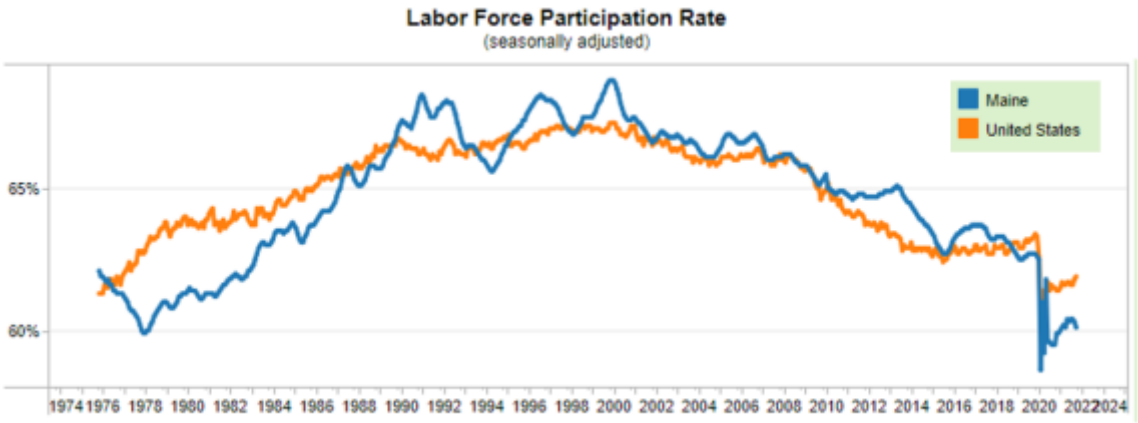
7: Unemployment Rate

These positive conditions pushed the job openings rate to new highs in 2019. The job openings rate in Maine was not markedly different than for the nation. Due to the large influx of summer tourists, however, there is much more seasonality to openings in Maine than in most of the nation. Hospitality businesses that cater to tourists, especially in communities along the coast, have been particularly challenged to attract the staff they need during the peak season in the summer and early fall. This situation has been exacerbated by a reduction in seasonal H2B visa workers that previously had been an important source of labor during those peak months of the year. There have been more job openings than unemployed people in the United States for the last two years; in Maine that has been the case for three years.

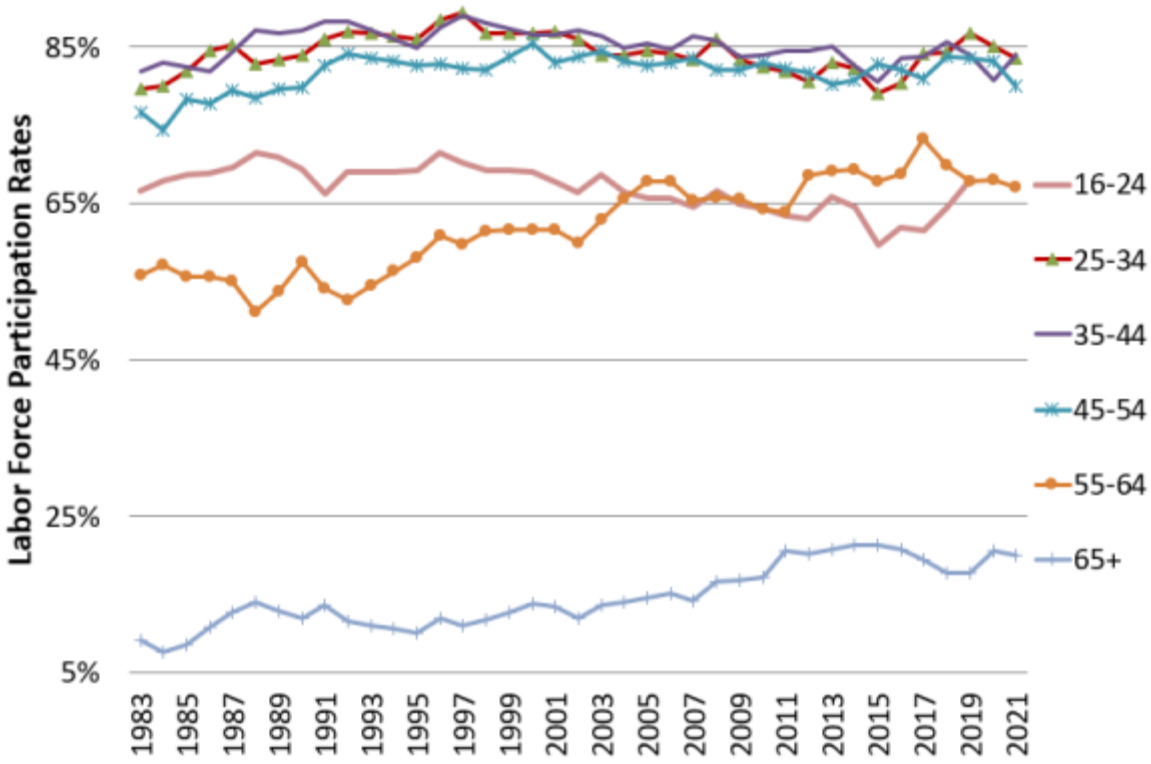


8: Job Openings rate

The Labor Force Participation Rate measures the share of the population age 16 and over that is employed or actively seeking employment. The graph below shows that the labor force participation rate in Maine and across the country has declined over the last two decades. This follows a pronounced rise in participation in the previous three decades. Maine's current labor force participation rate of 62 percent is the lowest since 1983, but it is higher than at any point before that.



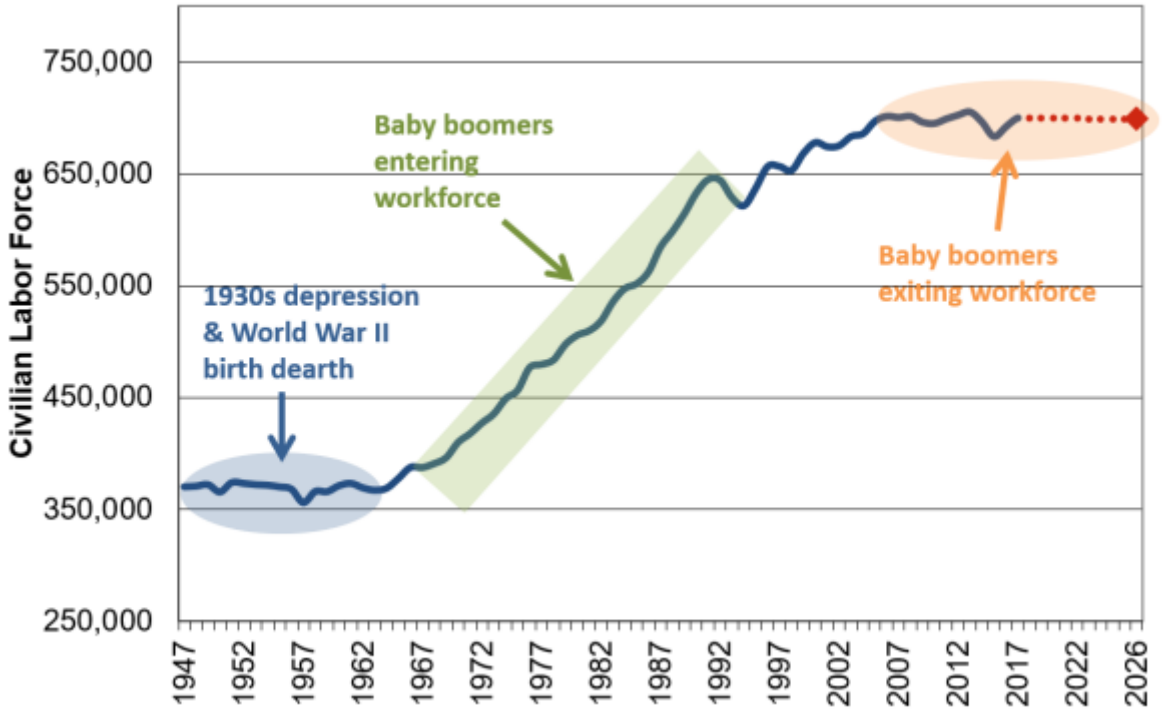
9: Labor Force Participation Rate



10: Labor Participation Rates By Age

The decline in participation over the last two decades is due to the advancing age of the large baby boom generation, the same reason it increased in the previous three decades. In the 1970s and 1980s, many baby boomers entered the labor force. In the 2000s, boomers began to move beyond the 25 to 54 peak age of participation. As the graph on the following page shows, participation rates have not changed much over the years in the three age cohorts that include people aged 25 to 54. However, participation is up in older cohorts as people now tend to work well into their 60s, and down among those under 25 years of age as more are enrolled in school than in the past.

Close to 425,000 people age 16 and over in Maine are not employed, while just 22,000 of those are classified as "unemployed." Those who are unemployed are people who are able and available to work and are actively looking for work. While they are between jobs, unemployed people are considered to be in the labor force. The rest of those who are not employed are not in the labor force for a variety of reasons. They may be retirees, full-time students, homemakers raising children. They may have a disability or some other barrier that prevents them from working.



11: Civilian Labor Force

Taking a longer view of the labor force, the growth that was the norm in the three decades before the turn of the 21st century has not been present for the last two decades. This is because of a decline in the number of births over the last five decades especially since the 1990s. As baby boomers born in the two decades after World War II advance in age to retirement, fewer young people are aging into the labor force to replace them. Succession planning for employees and business owners will be critical as these individuals move to retirement. The State projects a relatively flat trend in its labor force over the next decade.

A look at employment rates (the share of the population that is employed) of the working age population is illustrative of the very different outcomes those with limited education face compared to those with higher educational attainment. Data from the American Community Survey 2018[1] one-year estimates, includes outcomes for Maine people aged 25-64. The data shows that 53 percent of those with less than a high school diploma are in the workforce compared to 74 percent of those with a high school diploma and 87 percent of those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Further, unemployment decreases as education levels increase even in this current period of low unemployment. Unemployment is eight percent for those without a high school diploma and decreases to four percent for those with a high school diploma and two percent for those with some level of post-secondary education.

Educate Maine's report on Education Indicators for Maine 2018 states that approximately 87 percent of Maine students graduate from high school in four years, placing Maine above the

national average for high school completion. However, only 55 percent of the state's high school graduates enroll in some form of postsecondary education. Of those who begin college, only 46 percent return for a second year and 30 percent receive a two- or four-year degree. The rates of enrollment and completion are substantially different based on the economic standing of the student. Only 16 percent of students who are economically disadvantaged receive their two- or four-year degree.

Occupational projections to 2022 indicate that 60 percent of net job growth is expected to occur in occupations requiring some form of postsecondary training or credential, including 35 of the 50 fastest growing occupations. Workers entering or returning to the job market with lower levels of education find a much more challenging environment to prosper in than was the case not many years ago.

There has been a great deal of discussion about a rising skills gap as the recovery has advanced and unemployment rates have reached very low levels. Many businesses and trade associations assert that the available labor force lacks the knowledge and skills they need. This has been widely reported in the media.

It is challenging to quantify the gaps between the skills that employers seek and those that job seekers possess. Skills are attributes of performance requirements, ranging from basic functions such as hand-eye coordination, repetitive machine feeding, and instruction following, to advanced functions such as deductive reasoning, analytical thinking, and complex problem solving. At present, there is no way to catalog or inventory skills to determine who possesses what skills and at what level. Additionally, employer requirements for certain functions vary.

Though we cannot broadly define or measure skill gaps, we can see indications of a mismatch between employer needs and the available workforce in job trends over the last decade. There are declining numbers of jobs in production, administrative support, and other functions that value physical labor, routine tasks, and direction following. There are rising numbers of jobs in managerial, professional, and technical occupations that require skills in critical thinking, problem solving, reading comprehension, social perceptiveness, communication, and other more cognitively-oriented functions. The transition from operating a production machine in a manufacturing environment to operating a diagnostic imaging machine in a hospital, for example, is complicated. This transition and many others involve learning entirely new technical skills and different ways of interacting with customers and coworkers.

UPDATED LABOR MARKET INFORMATION BASED ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented disruptions in the labor market with widespread job losses and dramatically changed how and where jobs are performed. These disruptions were spread throughout the labor market, though persistent job losses have been concentrated in a few sectors. Workers in certain occupations were able to transition to telework while workers in others were not. This section uses a variety of data sources to examine the pandemic's impact on the labor market in Maine, first by putting it in the context of past recessions, then by assessing telework suitability across occupations, and finally by exploring the differential job losses that occurred during the pandemic by sector and by gender and educational attainment. Taken together, these data sources shed light on the uneven impact of, and ongoing recovery from, the COVID-19 pandemic on workers and employers.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Recession in the Context of Past Recessions

The unique circumstance of the pandemic-induced recession differentiates it from past recessions in terms of severity, sectors affected, and pace of recovery. Job losses during the Great Recession that began in 2007 were severe, and the recovery from those losses was protracted; it took nearly nine years for total nonfarm jobs to return to prerecession levels. In contrast, the recession that began in February 2020 resulted in sharper initial job losses than any of the past seven recessions, but a recovery that began at a much quicker pace. At the height of the Great Recession, approximately 5 percent of nonfarm jobs were lost. Approximately 15 percent of jobs were lost at the early onset of the pandemic, and jobs remain 4.3 percent below pre-pandemic levels as of April 2021 (Figure 12).

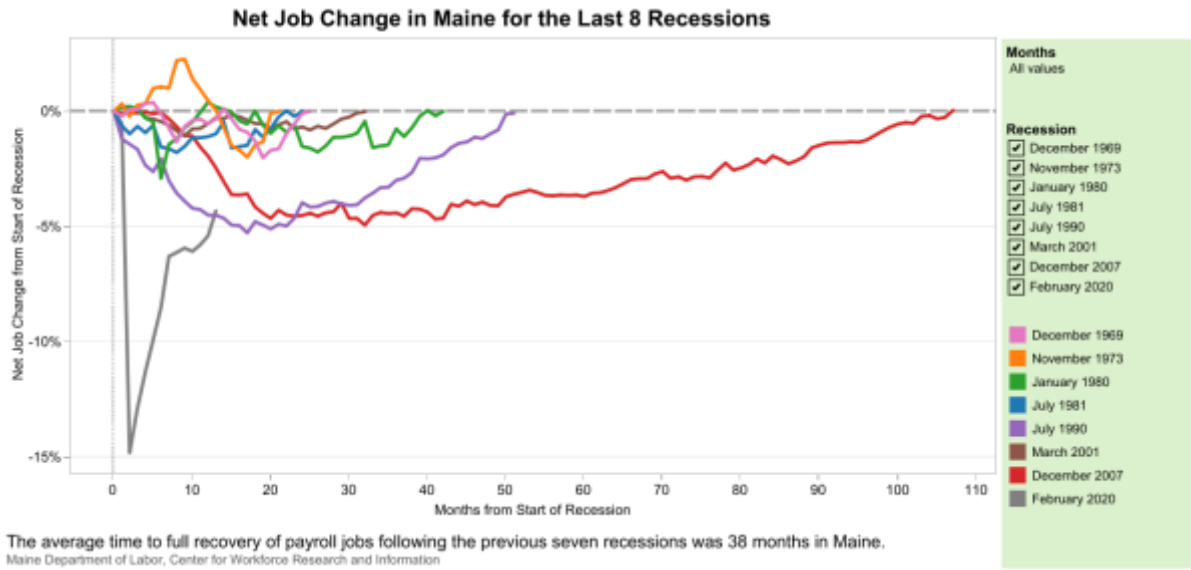


Figure 12: Job Change in Maine over the Last Eight Recessions

During the Great Recession, the construction and manufacturing sectors experienced the most substantial job losses as demand for housing and goods decreased. The total number of manufacturing jobs never fully recovered to levels seen before the Great Recession. While the construction sector did shed jobs in the spring of 2020, it has since rebounded with total jobs above pre-pandemic levels. The manufacturing sector too has recovered quickly with total staffing levels near, though slightly below, pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2). The sudden switch to remote work for many has decoupled place of work from place of residence, leading some to seek housing away from densely populated urban areas. This has led to increased demand for new residential construction in Maine. Demand for construction also increased because of renovation projects as people spent more time at home. During the COVID-19 recession, job losses have been concentrated in leisure and hospitality, retail trade, educational services (public and private, K–12, and higher education) and health care and social assistance.[i]

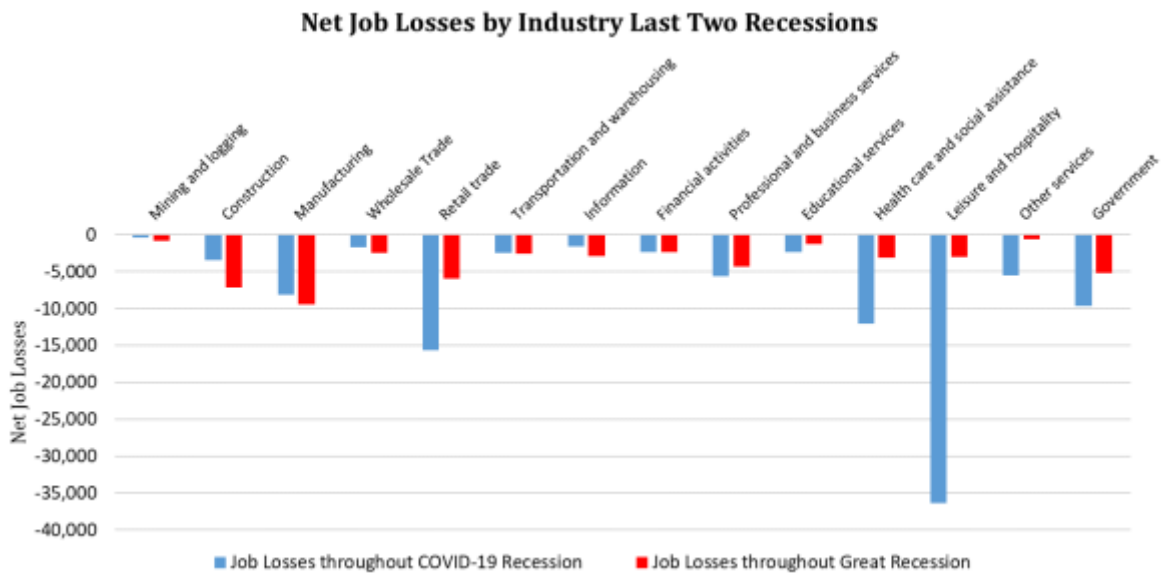


Figure 13: Net Job Losses by Sector in Maine in Last Two Recessions

Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Current Employment Statistics. https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ces.html

Notes: Net job losses calculated using the minimum monthly job total by sector during the recession and subtracting the maximum monthly job total by sector for the time period prior to the recession.

The impact of the pandemic on employment differs from other periods of economic disruption not only in the pace of job loss and recovery, but also in the way it transformed how workers perform their jobs. Public safety measures associated with the pandemic, such as social distancing, led to the rapid implementation of telework across many, but not all, occupations. Telework flexibility may have prevented some pandemic-related job loss, but access to telework was unequal across occupations.

Using an occupational classification method created by Jonathan I. Dingel and Brent Neiman (2020) and Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics data, we identified over 172,000 Maine jobs for which telework may be substituted for in-person work; however, telework likely is not possible for over 400,000 additional Maine jobs (Table 1). Telework-suited jobs appear in management, business and financial, architecture and engineering, sales, office and administrative support, and education- and training-related occupations. Occupations in which goods or services are produced or delivered in person, including in production, construction, installation and repair, direct-service health care, and food service-related occupations were identified as not suited to telework. Many of the occupations identified as suited for telework are performed in an office environment and often require higher levels of educational attainment or skills for entry.

Table 5: Employment suited to Telework

Major Occupation Group	Employment Suited to Telework
11 Management	26,992
13 Business and Financial Operations	16,060
15 Computer and Mathematical	12,380
17 Architecture and Engineering	5,544
19 Life, Physical, and Social Science	1,963
21 Community and Social Service	2,175
23 Legal	3,380
25 Education, Training, and Library	26,830
27 Art, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	5,644
29 Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	1,022
31 Healthcare Support	278
33 Protective Service	185
35 Food Preparation and Serving Related	0
37 Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	0
39 Personal Care and Service	5,010
41 Sales and Related	9,810
43 Office and Administrative Support	55,175
45 Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	45
47 Construction and Extraction	0
49 Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	30
51 Production	136
53 Transportation and Material Moving	0
Total	172,659

Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/oes.html. *Classification of occupations for which telework is possible is from Dingel and Neiman (2020).*

Among the jobs identified as suited to telework, about 59 percent typically require educational attainment beyond a high school diploma, and about 51 percent require a bachelor's degree or higher for entry (Figure 3). There were no jobs in the construction and extraction, food service, buildings and grounds cleaning, and maintenance and transportation occupations identified as suited to telework. The overwhelming majority of jobs in protective service, installation maintenance and repair, and farming, fishing, and forestry occupations were also identified as not suited to telework.

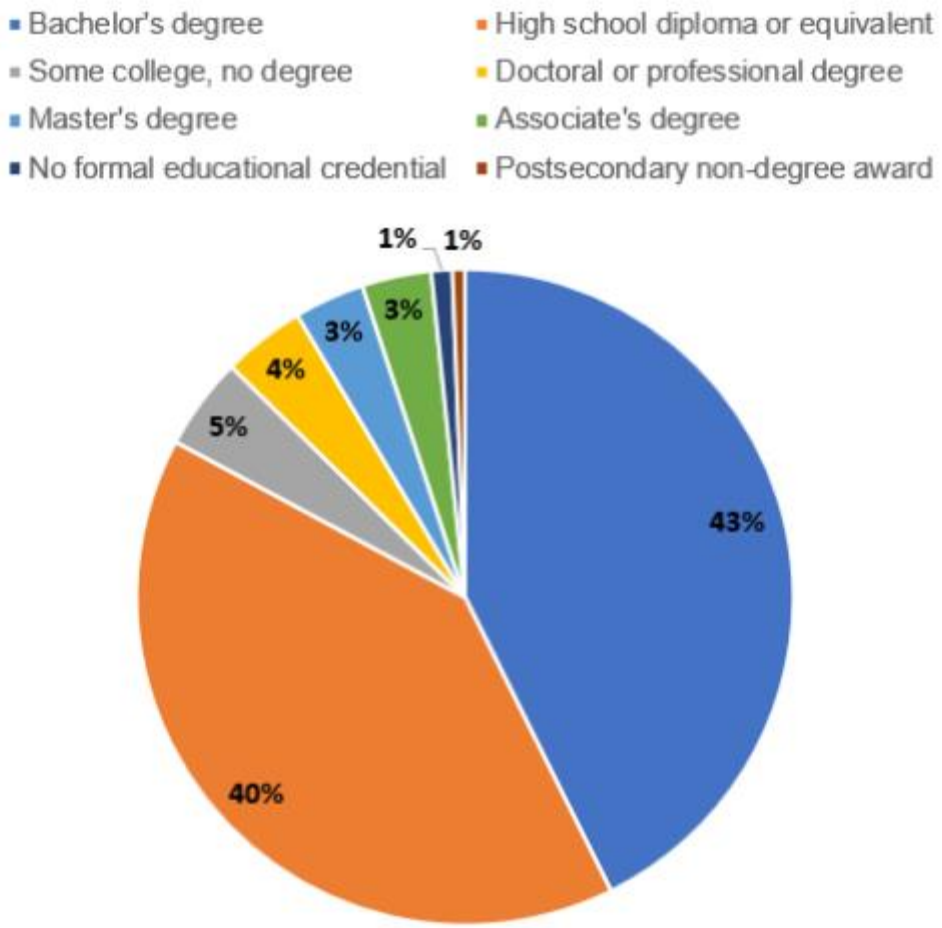


Figure 14: Employment Suited to Telework by Typical Education Needed for Entry

*Source: Typical education needed for entry for detailed occupations data comes from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Projections, Education and Training Assignments by Detailed Occupation (*https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/education-and-training-by-occupation.htm*).*

Between July and September of 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics conducted a national survey of businesses to better understand how their operations were affected by the pandemic. The majority of Maine businesses, 57 percent, reported having no telework arrangements either before or during the pandemic, while about 27 percent of businesses reported that they increased telework during the pandemic, accounting for approximately 263,000 jobs in Maine.[ii] An additional 17 percent of businesses reported having some telework arrangements already in place before the pandemic.

Table 6: Private Sector Establishments and Telework Arrangements During Pandemic

Table 6: Private Sector Establishments and Telework Arrangements During Pandemic -				
Area	*Percentage of establishments*	*Number of establishments*	*Percentage of employment in establishments*	*Employment in establishments*
Increased telework arrangements				
United States	30.9%	2,611,007	54.3%	68,550,503
Maine	27.1%	12,003	50.5%	263,059
No change in existing telework arrangements				
United States	17.6%	1,489,250	9.8%	12,400,849
Maine	16.8%	7,468	10.6%	55,067
No telework at this location both before and after the coronavirus pandemic				
United States	52.3%	4,417,171	36.9%	46,555,019
Maine	56.7%	25,148	39.3%	204,717

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Business Response Survey, State Table 14. https://www.bls.gov/brs/2020-results.htm

Notes: These data were collected from July 20 through September 30, 2020. U.S. BLS notes: The reference period for the survey was from January 1, 2020 (before the pandemic) through the date that the survey was completed. The data were collected from private-sector establishments only; government establishments were not surveyed. As a result, the estimates of establishments and employment refer to private-sector establishments and employment.

The U.S. Census Bureau implemented a new, experimental Household Pulse Survey to quickly collect information about the impact of the pandemic on households.[iii] Data collected between February 17 and March 1, 2021, show that 34 percent of households in Maine reported that at least one adult had substituted some or all of their in-person work for telework, which was similar to the national average of 36 percent. This data points to a dramatic change in work environments that persists one year into the pandemic, with one-third of households with an adult working in a different location, usually their home.

According to the February 17–March 1, 2021 Household Pulse Survey, Maine workers with higher levels of educational attainment were substantially more likely to report that they substituted telework for in-person work (Figure 4). Half of all workers with a bachelor's degree or higher reported teleworking, while less than 15 percent of workers with a high school diploma, GED, or lower level of educational attainment reported teleworking. These responses mirror the occupational suitability to telework findings discussed earlier: occupations that typically require a higher level of educational attainment for entry were more suited for telework.

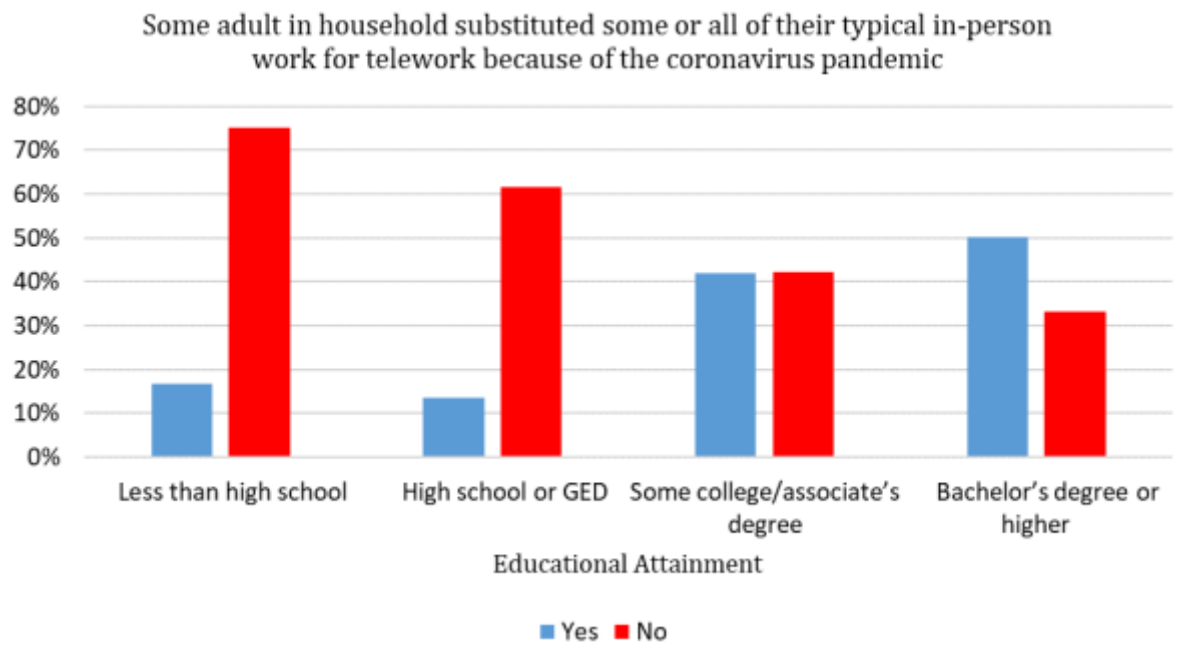


Figure 15: Percentage of Adults Who Substituted Some/All in-Person Work for Telework by Education Level

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, Week 25.
*(*https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html*). Data collected from February 17 through March 1, 2021.*
Note: Percentage Yes and No columns will not sum to 100% due to households that did not report the information.

Many jobs quickly switched to telework in March 2020, but the data presented here show that the majority of private Maine employers did not implement telework before or during the pandemic. Workers in occupations suited to telework were more likely have higher levels of educational attainment and were more likely to be insulated from the severe job losses of spring 2020, which were primarily concentrated within sectors not suited for telework.

Job Losses and Recovery in Maine by Sector, Gender, and Educational Attainment

A total of 94,500 nonfarm jobs were lost in Maine from February to April 2020. The 545,400 nonfarm jobs in April were the lowest reported since October 1996. Because of the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic's restrictions, including social-distancing requirements, these losses were concentrated in sectors of the economy that typically require close contact with customers, clients, students, or coworkers. The leisure and hospitality, health care and social assistance and educational services (public and private, K–12 and higher education) sectors had the greatest net job losses after 14 months.

Nearly 50 percent of Maine's leisure and hospitality jobs were lost from February to April 2020, compared to 5 percent to 20 percent of jobs lost in most other sectors. Healthcare and social assistance providers, including childcare, and offices of dentists, chiropractors, and physical or massage therapists, closed or operated at a reduced capacity during the pandemic. Reductions in state and local government jobs occurred primarily in public schools and colleges due to the suspension or reduction of in-person learning, as was also the case in private educational services. As classes moved to online and hybrid models, the number of support staff at schools

and colleges was reduced. The retail environment has also been affected in many ways, including a shift to online shopping and an increased demand for groceries as more consumption took place at home.

A jobs recovery began in May 2020 and accelerated in June before gradually slowing throughout the fall. The recovery gained momentum again in early 2021 as the state added 9,600 jobs in the first four months of the year. Through April 2021, the total number of nonfarm jobs had increased 65,400 from a year prior, when the pandemic first forced many workplaces to close or reduce operations (Figure 5). The largest gains over the year were in the sectors that had the greatest job losses at the outset of the pandemic: leisure and hospitality, retail trade, health care and social assistance, and manufacturing.

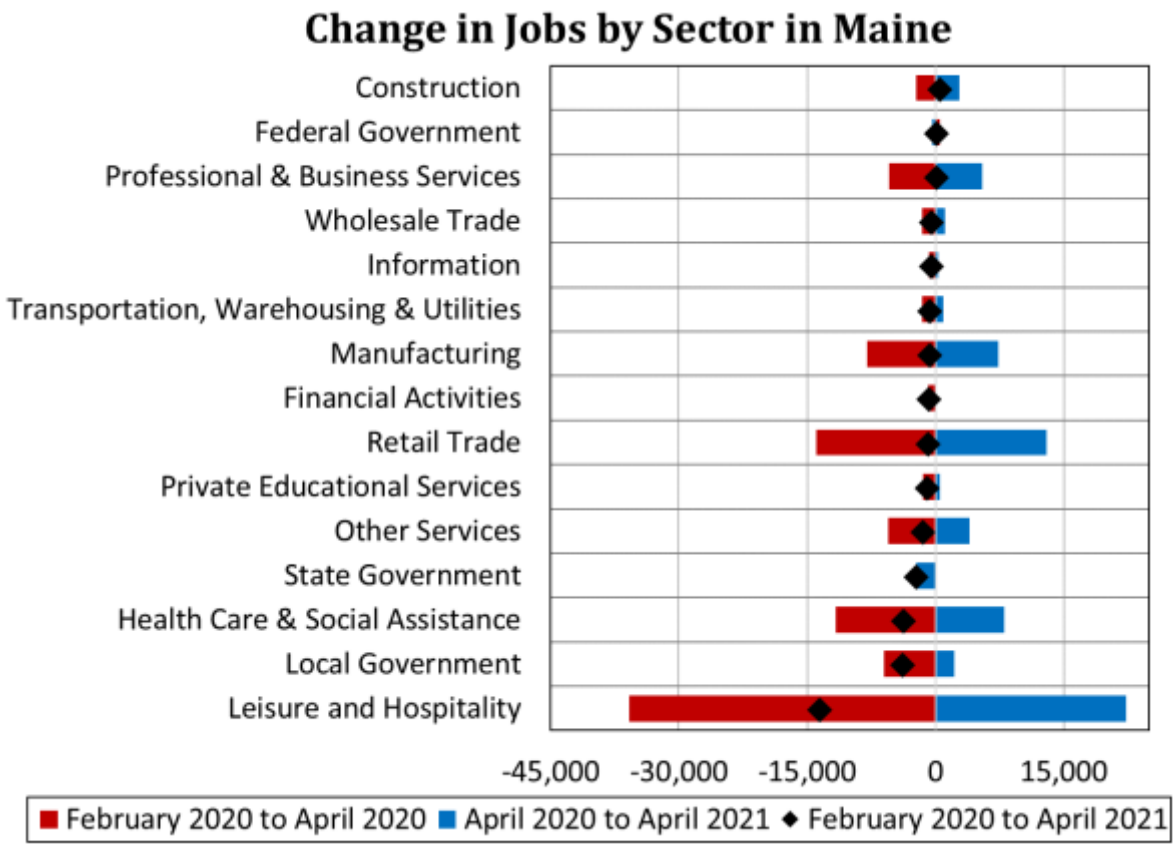


Figure 16: Change in Jobs by Sector in Maine
Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Current Employment Statistics. https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ces.html

Despite these gains, jobs remained down compared to the year prior in the most affected sectors. Overall, there were 4.6 percent fewer jobs than 14 months prior. This was similar to, but slightly lower than, the national net decrease of 5.4 percent of jobs over the same time. Some sectors, including the construction and professional and business services sectors, have fully recovered; retail trade, manufacturing, and a few other sectors have nearly returned to pre-pandemic staffing levels.

Differential Job Loss and Recovery Patterns by Gender and Educational Attainment

Rates of job loss and subsequent recovery differ across demographic groups. Women have experienced higher rates of job loss than men, and job recovery to date is uneven across sectors. Three data sources were employed to better understand these dynamics: Maine's Current Employment Statistics (CES) data, the U.S. Census Bureau's Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI), and continued unemployment insurance claims from the Maine Bureau of Unemployment Compensation.

First, QWI data were used to determine the share of employment by industry and by gender and educational attainment using annual average employment counts from the second quarter of 2019 through the first quarter of 2020. These shares by demographic characteristic were then applied to monthly CES job estimates from February 2020 to April 2021.

Unemployment insurance claims, which include demographic characteristics of claimants such as gender and educational attainment, were also used. For this analysis, we included continued unemployment insurance claims from the regular state unemployment system, state extended benefits (available during periods of high unemployment), and temporary federal unemployment programs established under the CARES Act (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation).

From February 2020 through April 2021, there was a net decrease of 29,200 jobs across sectors. Of that, using QWI employment shares by gender, we estimate that 16,100 jobs were lost by women and 13,100 by men (Figure 6). This 55 to 45 percent disparity is explained by the fact that women held the majority of wage and salary jobs in sectors most affected by the pandemic: leisure and hospitality, educational services (public and private, K–12 and higher education), and health care and social assistance.

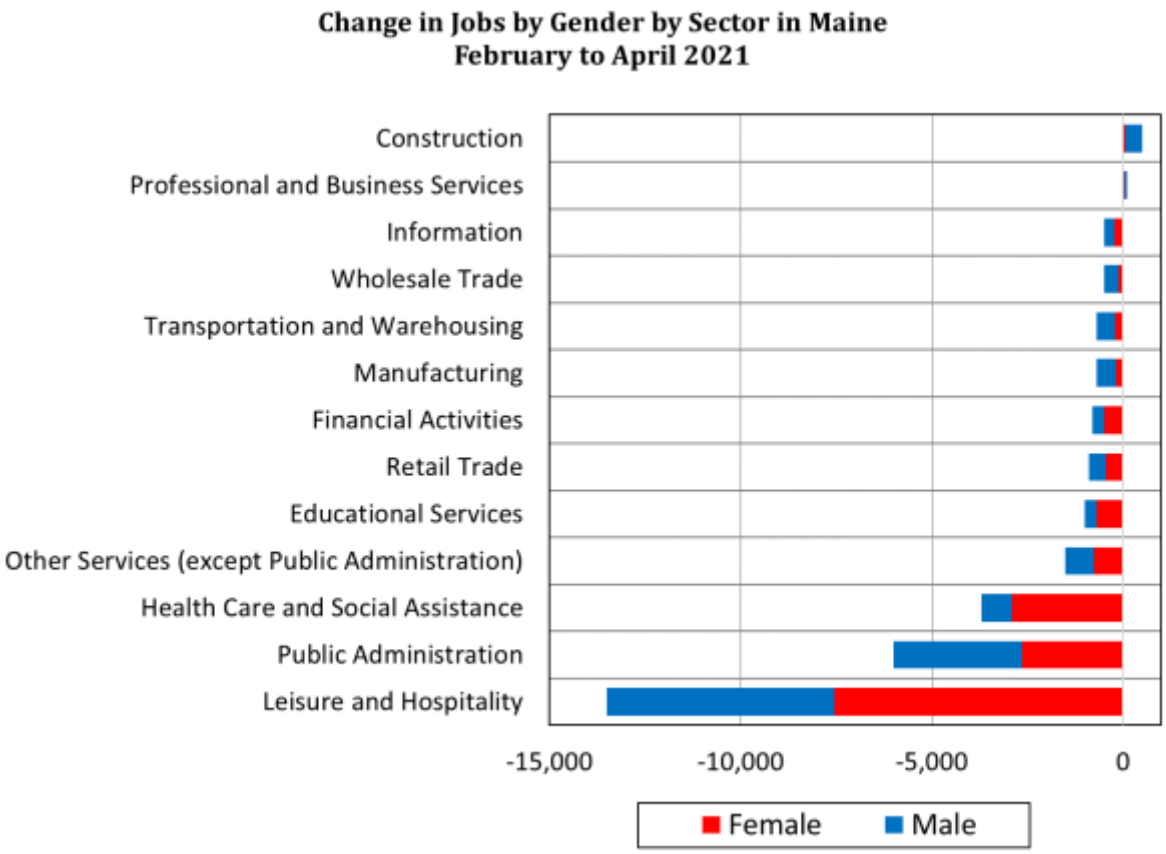


Figure 17: Change in Jobs by Gender by Sector in Maine, February 2020 to April 2021
Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Current

Employment Statistics. https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ces.html
Share of employment by gender obtained from the Census Bureau Quarterly Workforce Indicators

Along with the decrease in jobs largely driven by reduced labor demand, labor supply sharply contrasted during the pandemic. The share of the population age 16 and over in the labor force remains 2.5 percentage points lower than in February 2020, although it has risen 1.5 points from spring 2020 to spring 2021. If labor force participation as of April 2021 matched that of 14 months earlier, 28,300 additional people would be in the labor force. Multiple pandemic-related factors are contributing to the decrease in labor force participation including fewer available job openings, personal safety concerns, school closures and hybrid learning models, and a lack of childcare.[iv]

The QWI data provides information on jobs by educational attainment for workers age 25 and over. It does not provide that information for younger workers because many have not yet completed their high school or college education. At 17.6 percent, workers under 25 experienced the sharpest job reduction in the year between the third quarter of 2019 and the third quarter of 2020. Among those age 25 and over, the number of jobs was down 10 percent for those who had not attained a diploma, 9.5 percent for those with a high school diploma or equivalent, 8.7 percent for those with some college or an associate degree, and 7.4 percent for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. Because young people are not included, the decreases cited for each level of education understate the total. That is especially the case for those whose highest level of attainment was a high school diploma or no diploma.

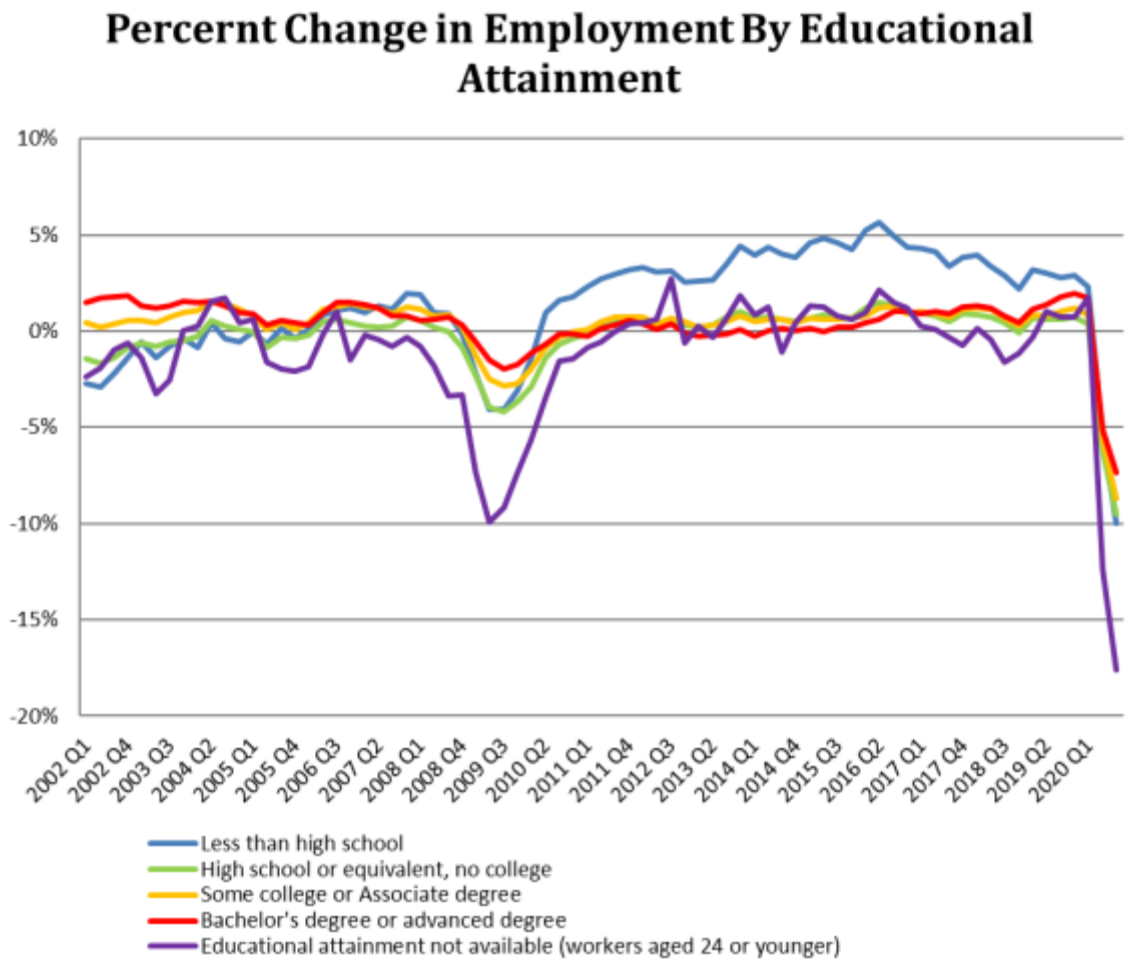


Figure 18: Percentage Change in Employment over the Year by Educational Attainment
Source: Census Bureau Quarterly Workforce Indicators, data from 2001 Q1 through 2020 Q3

More than in other sectors, staffing in the leisure and hospitality and retail trade sectors is more concentrated among young people under 25 and those with a diploma or less. During the 12-month period leading up to the pandemic, more than half of workers in the leisure and hospitality and retail trade sectors were under 25 or had a high school diploma or no diploma. Staffing in health care and social assistance, educational services, and professional and business services is less concentrated among young people and more concentrated among those with some college or a degree.

Despite initial declines across levels of educational attainment, job losses have persisted in greater numbers for younger workers and those with lower levels of educational attainment. Assuming that the staffing of industries by education has not changed from the 12-month period just before the pandemic, there would be about 5,320 (7.3%) fewer jobs among those under 25, 2,300 (5%) fewer among those with no high school diploma, 7,240 (4.5%) fewer among those with a high school diploma, 7,970 (4.6%) fewer among those with some college or associate degree, and 6,080 (4.3%) fewer among those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

The reality, though, is that the staffing composition within industries has changed in ways that we cannot yet measure. Layoffs in educational services were more likely among bus drivers, crossing guards, cafeteria workers, janitorial and maintenance staff, and others who generally have lower levels of educational attainment than teachers and administrators, who were not laid off in large numbers. Similar patterns occurred in other industries: servers and housekeepers were laid off in larger proportions than managers in restaurants and hotels, and daycare workers were laid off in larger numbers than nurses in healthcare and social assistance.

Unemployment Insurance Claims by Gender and Educational Attainment

Claims from Maine's unemployment insurance system depict a similar pattern of job loss as shown in the preceding analysis. Since April 2020, 55 percent of claimants for unemployment insurance across all state and federal programs were women. The gender gap among claimants peaked in June 2020 with women making up 57 percent of total claimants, which gradually decreased to 51 percent in spring of 2021 (Figure 19).

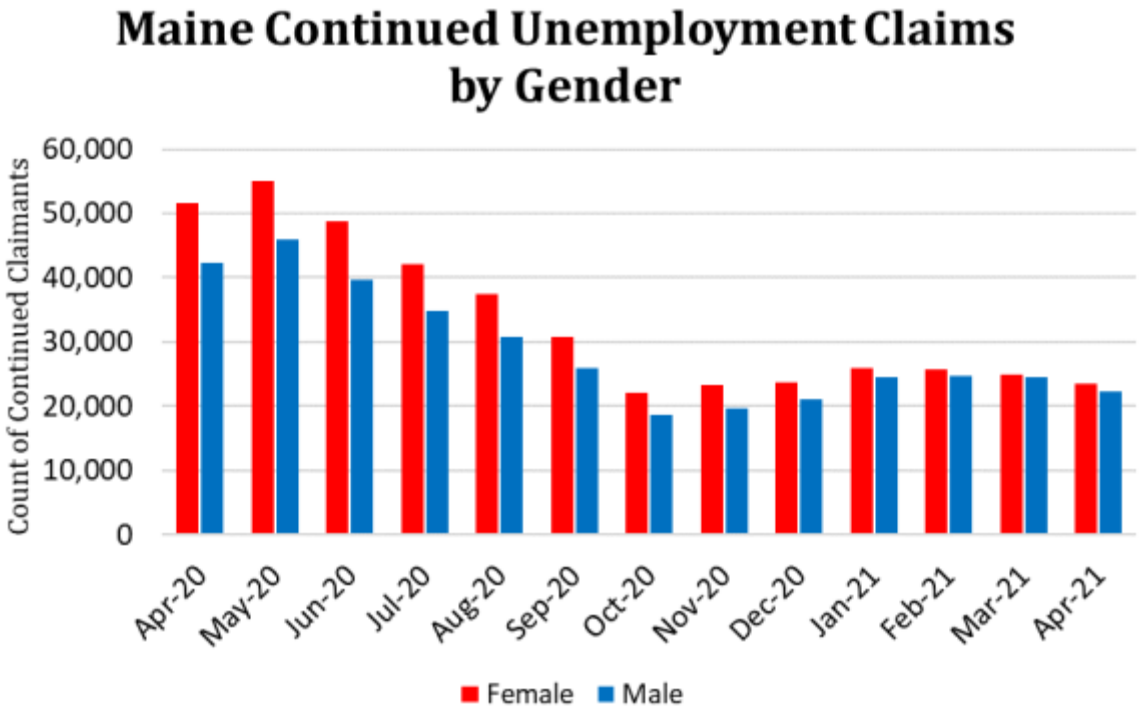


Figure 19: Maine Continued Unemployment Claims by Gender
Source: Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Unemployment Compensation. Program to Measure Insured Unemployed Statistics (PROMIS). https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ui1.html. *These data come from a monthly snapshot of claimants filing a continued claim in any program described above, during the week that includes the 12th day of the month.*

The unemployment claims data align with our earlier analysis with respect to job losses by educational attainment as well. However, unemployment insurance claims data may not capture certain labor market dynamics, for example, young people and those with lower educational attainment may be less likely to have the work history to qualify for benefits and therefore less likely to appear in the data. As such, better-educated people may be overrepresented in claims data relative to those with less education. The number of claimants with four years of college or higher decreased from 24,600 in May to just over 7,000 by October. Over the same period, the number of claimants with a high school diploma or less filing a continued claim decreased from about 34,000 to 15,500 (Figure 20). While the reduction in the number of claimants with lower levels of educational attainment indicates robust labor market recovery, the recovery has not occurred as quickly for this group.[v]

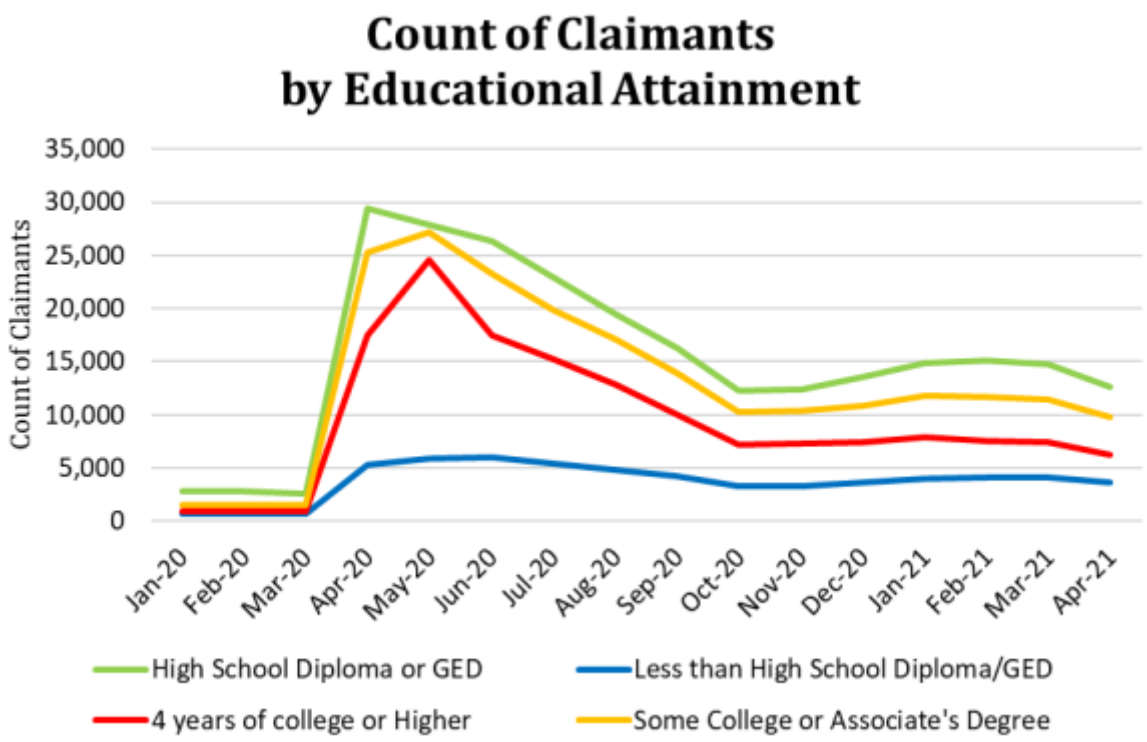


Figure 20: Count of Claimants by Educational Attainment*Source: Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Unemployment Compensation. Program to Measure Insured Unemployed Statistics (PROMIS).* https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ui1.html*. These data come from a monthly snapshot of claimants filing a continued claim in any program described above, during the week that includes the 12th day of the month.*

The share of the total claimant population with four years of college or higher quickly increased from about 15 percent to 25 percent during the early months of the pandemic (Figure 21). Throughout the economic recovery that followed, the share of the total claimant population with four years of college or higher decreased while the share of claimants with a high school diploma or no diploma continued to climb, indicating that joblessness is persisting in this group at a higher rate than those with higher levels of educational attainment.

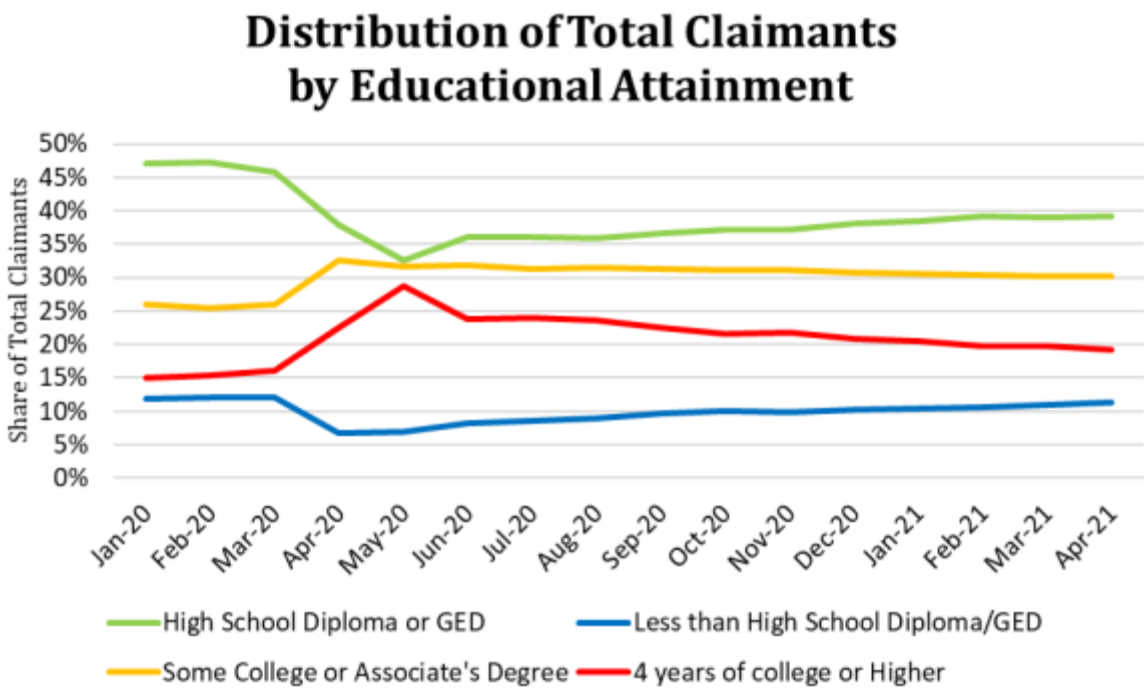


Figure 21: Distribution of Total Claimants by Educational Attainment
Source: Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Unemployment Compensation. Program to Measure Insured Unemployed Statistics (PROMIS). https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/ui1.html
These data come from a monthly snapshot of claimants filing a continued claim in any program described above, during the week that includes the 12th day of the month.

Implications

While the labor market recovery to date has been swift, substantial employment gaps remain compared to the period before the pandemic. Some of these employment gaps may persist in the long run, while other industries may see employment growth. Ice at al. (2021) identified how some potential long-term effects induced by the pandemic could change the landscape of employment in the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 10-year employment projections. These long-term effects would require some workers and employers to reevaluate their position in the economy.

One such example is the extent to which telework becomes a permanent part of the work environment for the types of jobs identified above. The permanent adoption of telework may result in decreased demand for commercial office spaces, as well as for a variety goods and services typically consumed by a commuting workforce near their place of work. This could affect coffee shops and restaurants, dry cleaners, fitness centers, and businesses that supply cleaning, construction, maintenance and repair services, serving clients with commercial workspaces. Workers permanently incorporating telework may reallocate spending away from centralized business districts. These changes in demand for goods and services would lead to longer-term reductions in demand for labor working in the provision of such goods and services. Some of this spending could be reallocated toward home renovations and a similar bundle of goods and services concentrated around the place of residence rather than place of employment for remote workers.

The continued labor market recovery of sectors most affected will depend upon the extent to which consumers and workers reengage in economic activities to the same capacity as before the pandemic. The experience of the public health crisis could lead to other long-term economic

changes if consumers prefer to avoid interpersonal contacts, incorporating a permanent substitution of e-commerce for in-person retail shopping and a reduction in spending on travel, hotels, restaurants and bars, at movie theaters, concerts, museums, sporting events, and casinos. Some workers, particularly those affected by job loss or who feel at risk at their place of work, will permanently alter their labor supply decision and seek to transition away from the sectors affected most. While leisure and business travel have recovered substantially, the continued use of virtual conferences and meetings may lead to long-lasting reductions in demand for business travel and related services. All of these potential changes could lead to longer-term reductions in demand for labor and affected workers may need to find employment in other sectors of the economy and may seek additional training or education to facilitate this transition.

While some industries may see long-term declines in employment due to the pandemic, other industries may experience employment gains. Research and development in the physical, engineering, and life sciences, as well as pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing are industries that may see increases in employment. Continued integration of telework could lead to increased demand for certain skills in the labor market including increased demand for information technology and related occupations (Ice et al. 2021).

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented labor market disruptions in Maine, resulting in severe job losses and changes in how and where work is performed. Many jobs have since been regained, but many people remain jobless. Some workers have returned to the office, while others are permanently incorporating remote work. Many of the long-term effects of the pandemic on the labor market are not yet clear. Across data sources, a few patterns have emerged: sectors that rely on in-person interactions experienced the greatest number of net job losses over the past 14 months. Job losses have not affected men and women equally, and labor force participation has still not returned to its pre-pandemic level. Finally, individuals with higher levels of educational attainment appear to have experienced less economic hardship, either due to having an occupation better suited to telework or more quickly finding re-employment after initial layoffs.

Individuals with barriers to Employment

CONTEXT OF PANDEMIC AND CONTINUING BARRIERS

In July 2021, the Maine Department of Labor circulated a brief survey to better understand the barriers faced in returning to work. This survey was distributed to unemployment insurance claimants as well as active jobseekers on Maine JobLink—in total over 44,000 individuals. Additionally, the survey was translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Vietnamese to broaden accessibility. The survey was shared with worker advocate and other community partners to be distributed within their networks as well. In total, more than 2,600 individuals responded to the anonymous survey (see demographics in Appendix). The following outlines key takeaways and themes from this survey.

Survey respondents noted that there are several barriers preventing them from returning to work. The most cited barriers included a “lack of opportunities that match my skillset” (34%) and “COVID health risks or concerns” (31%).

Additional reasons preventing return to work related to:

- Job quality concerns regarding insufficient wages (29%), lack of benefits (15%), unpredictable schedule (13%) or lack of long-term positions (11%)

- Inaccessibility of relevant opportunities including lack of relevant jobs in the local area (21%)

- Lack of necessary social supports including lack of reliable childcare (15%) and transportation (6%)

Nearly one-third of respondents (30%) cited other barriers via open-ended response. Based on analysis of a random sample, the primary themes focused on age-related discrimination, challenges getting interviews in the competitive market and self-employment challenges related to economic recession (e.g., lack of clients, lower sales, and supply chain challenges).

Top barriers experienced differed by demographic and geographic characteristics of the survey respondent pool:

• COVID health risks were more commonly cited among older adult respondents as compared with younger counterparts—44% of respondents 55+ cited this as a key barrier as compared with 15% of respondents under 24. Additionally, survey respondents over the age of 55 cited ageism and age discrimination as barriers preventing them from returning to work. The theme of ageism accounted for approximately 25% of "other" barriers cited among older adult respondents.

• Women were more likely to cite childcare-related barriers: Among survey respondents, 15% cited lack of reliable childcare as a barrier preventing return to work. This reason was a more significant barrier among female survey respondents (20%) than male respondents (8%).

• Survey respondents outside of southern coastal counties were more likely to cite "no relevant jobs in my area" as a barrier. While only 18% of respondents from Cumberland and York counties cited this as a barrier, respondents from Franklin (32%), Washington (31%) and Piscataquis (35%) were twice as likely to lack of relevant local opportunities as a barrier.

Priority populations

Stakeholders and businesses in Maine grasp the need to prioritize services that will facilitate participation of **all** potential members of the labor force. They will continue to work to implement strategies that alleviate barriers to attaining employment.

SWB advocates on behalf of individuals facing challenges to employment. An official standing committee is charged with examining the barriers specific target populations face and developing recommendations that address such barriers. SWB promotes employment without discrimination based on the basis of gender, race, age, ethnicity, national origin or other barriers.

Individuals with barriers to employment include the following:

- Displaced homemakers
- Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- English language learners and those facing substantial cultural barriers
- Formerly incarcerated
- Foster care youth or youth transitioning out of foster care
- Homeless individuals
- Native American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities
- Individuals with low literacy levels

- Older individuals
- Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility for TANF
- Long-term unemployed individuals
- Low-income individuals
- Single parents

Persons with disabilities

Maine can rightly claim a long standing and abiding concern with the employment issues facing people with disabilities. Addressing these issues and increasing the workforce participation of this population must be a priority to improve the economic wellbeing of individuals with disabilities but also for the state as a whole. Notably, Maine now prohibits the payment of sub-minimum wages to people with disabilities through a state law enacted in 2020.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2015 through 2019, just over 210,000 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16 percent of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This proportion was higher than that of the United States in which an estimated 13 percent of residents had a disability. The age distribution of the civilian noninstitutionalized population with disabilities differs from the general population (with and without disabilities) and has a higher share of persons over 64 and a lower share in cohorts 64 or younger. In Maine, nearly 40 percent of the population with disabilities is over 64 years, more than double the comparable share of the general population (19 percent).

Adults with disabilities in Maine are less likely to be employed than adults without disabilities. Fewer than half work or seek work; the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities is three times that of other working age adults. From 2015 through 2019, 35 percent of working-age Mainers with disabilities were employed compared to 81 percent of those with no disability. Those who do work earn less than workers with no disability. Median earnings of workers with disabilities were $20,185 in a twelve-month period, compared to median earnings of $34,131 among workers with no disability. Adults with a disability are more likely to live in or near poverty regardless of work status and are less likely to have postsecondary education than adults with no disability.[2]

As described in the labor market information reported earlier in this plan, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented disruptions in the labor market and there was a significant impact to workers with disabilities as well, many of whom have underlying medical conditions with greater risk to the virus. Although American Community Survey data for 2020 and 2021 was not available for this modification, there are some promising trends being seen in the Current Population Survey, which is a primary source of monthly labor force statistics used by the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. As reported by the University of New Hampshire's (UNH) Center for Research on Disability at the end of 2021, the labor force participation of people with disabilities across the country has recovered from the pandemic-related slowdown and actually increased to above pre-pandemic levels. As remarked by Dr. Andrew Houtenville, UNH professor of economics and the research director, "These gains suggest that the restructuring resulting from the pandemic may be benefiting people with disabilities. Ironically, it may have taken a pandemic to shake the labor market loose for people with disabilities."

***The Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE*):**

The CDEwas established by the Maine Legislature in 1997. It promotes collaboration with the public and private sectors to increase awareness of and influence policy related to employment for people with disabilities. Its members envision a Maine workforce that includes all people

with disabilities employed in jobs that meet both their economic and personal needs. The CDE issues a formal annual report that includes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

WOMEN

In March 2021, the United States Census Bureau produced an issue brief[5] on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the full-time, year-round workforce. Using 2019 data from the American Community Survey and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Identifying "essential worker" occupations, women comprise 44 percent of the nation's full-time, year-round civilian workforce and 47 percent of all essential workers in the U.S.

According to the Maine Center for Economic Policy's (MECEP) State of Working Maine: 2021[6], 49 percent of workers in occupations considered high risk for contagion are women. Maine women comprise a majority of jobs in the sectors most impacted by the pandemic: leisure and hospitality, educational services (both private and public, K-12 and higher education), and healthcare and social assistance. According to the Maine Department of Labor's Center for Workforce Research and Information, Maine women accounted for 57 percent of the pandemic workers' jobs lost to Maine men's 43 percent[7]. As we enter the post-pandemic world of work, the negative effects on working women persist. MECEP's report further states, "Multiple pandemic-related factors are contributing to the decrease in labor force participation including fewer available job openings, personal safety concerns, school closures and hybrid learning models, and a lack of childcare.[8]"

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the overall gender wage gap for the full-time, year-round workforce is 82 percent[9]. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), using American Community Survey data, identifies the Maine gender wage gap at just over 83 percent[10].

The past two years have revealed well-known weaknesses in women's employment progress. Gender and racial wage inequity exist among workers within the same industries even when those workers have the same qualifications and experience. Those lower wages perpetuate inequity, as women and people of color are less able to build wealth than their white male peers. This gap is even wider for women of color working in Maine. In this state, according to the IWPR, for every dollar a White Man earns, a Black woman earns 65 cents; a Hispanic woman earns 69 cents, and an Asian or Native American woman earns 67 cents.

To address the recommendations made by the Women's Employment Committee in its prior reports and to ensure that women's concerns are addressed across all demographic and economic strata of Maine life, the State Workforce Board is undergoing a structural change that will weave the concerns of women across age, veteran status, disability, race, ethnicity, etc. throughout a new committee framework. In doing so, women's employment matters will be viewed and tackled across the broad spectrum of Maine's Jobs and Recovery Plan. In concert with WIOA and other partners, other state departments, and other women's policy and workforce organizations, Maine's workforce development system will widen its focus to complement Governor Mills' Jobs and Recovery Plan[11] by supporting Maine's small businesses, enhancing job training and skills programs leading to good paying careers, and investing in Maine's communities' and families by expanding the very supports that help women

most—affordable housing, high quality child and family care, lifelong learning, accessible health care, transportation, internet, and other infrastructure.

Workforce development is an inherent component of our economic self-sufficiency and personal well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that a healthy economy depends on a healthy workforce. Health, itself, relies on an educated population with enough to eat; a safe home, work, and school environment; affordable health care; and reliable affordable transportation to and from the workplace.

In May 2021, the Women's Employment Committee drafted these recommendations to the State Workforce Board:

Education and Training:

- Ensure that women are included in shorter-term education and training programs that result in workforce skills and credentials and career pathways leading to higher paying jobs with benefits
- Provide opportunities for women to explore and enter non-traditional and STEM careers through Pre-Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, internships, and other work-based learning options
- Offer collaborative and comprehensive wraparound and whole family supports that help women succeed in education and training (digital access, scholarship and emergency assistance, intensive advising, health care, access to child and elder care, transportation, housing)

Employment/Self Employment:

- Create family friendly workplace policies and benefits, including family and medical leave, paid sick time, health insurance, retirement, flexible work options, support for education and advancement
- Support pay equity, including minimum and living wage increases
- Provide training and technical assistance to employers on building and sustaining a diverse Maine workforce (DEI)
- Offer opportunities for women to start and grow small businesses, including options within Unemployment Insurance

Financial Security

- Ensure that policies and systems that provide a social safety net and address poverty are coordinated and aligned, including public benefits and income supports, federal and state tax credits, asset limits
- Provide timely financial education and coaching, including access to free tax filing assistance and financial resources, such as scholarships and matched savings programs

- Ensure that those groups that face the most barriers to success in education and employment are provided equitable access and opportunity, including women with disabilities, Wabanaki women, immigrant and refugee women, women who have been incarcerated and are re-entering communities, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, among others

General Role of the Women's Employment Committee

- Communication and coordination with other Committees and State Workforce Board (Board liaison to Committees, regular Chair/staff meetings with opportunity to provide input to agendas, identify intersectionality of priority issues and outreach)
- Utilize Committees as resources to and integrate into SWB, Maine DOL, and other state workforce and economic development initiatives (WIOA Plan, Economic Recovery and State Economic Development planning, Maine DOL internal and external proposals/initiatives such as MaineSpark)
- Continued data collection and communication with regard to target populations (gender, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.)

These recommendations, the original and modified strategic objectives in Maine's Unified State Plan for 2020-2023, and the following recommendations from the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women 2020 Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Maine[12] will be the hub of our efforts.

Economic Security

- Eliminate the Wage Gap
- Provide incentives to employers to provide paid family and medical leave
- Ensure access to comprehensive, accessible, and affordable health care
- Ensure access to comprehensive, accessible, and child and family care
- Provide incentives, access, and support for women's educational and training programs
- Provide programs that help older Mainers work and stay at home in their communities, such as the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) and the Drugs for the Elderly Program (DEL)

Education

- Improve programs that promote college affordability and access, such as Parents As Scholars, Competitive Skills Scholarship Program, HOPE, prior learning assessments, etc.
- Redesign learning experiences in STEM education to accommodate the learning styles and interests of girls and women
- Examine and improve financial aid policies to eliminate reduction of student aid when outside awards are received
- Support rural expansion of public transportation and high-speed internet

Freedom from Violence

- Support policies and laws that address workplace sexual harassment
- Support and expand access to paid time off for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence

Health

- Continue to expand ways to provide low or no cost reproductive, dental, and behavioral health services

Needs of Underserved Women

- Request that data gathered by Maine DOL, DHHS, DECD, DOE, and other state funded agencies includes breakdowns of gender, race, age, income, and ethnicity
- Insure representation of under-represented populations on commissions, boards, committees
- Train service providers to understand communications with those who have intellectual and developmental disabilities

While these recommendations do not encompass all that is needed to address Maine women in the workforce, they provide an organized approach to better meet our needs and overcome our challenges in the next two years.

[1] Unequally Essential: Women and Gender Pay Gap During Covid19

[1] https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/State-of-Working-Maine-2021.pdf

[1] ImpactByGender2020.pdf (maine.gov)

[1] https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/COVID19_Recession&Recovery2021.pdf

[1] Highlights of women's earnings in 2020 : BLS Reports: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

[1] https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-maine.pdf

[1] https://www.maine.gov/jobsplan/home

https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/PCSW2020.pdf

Rural Residents lacking reliable transportation

Maine is a geographically large, rural state in which those without affordable, reliable transportation face significant barriers to accessing occupational training and employment.

Rural communities in the state's three regions have limited or non-existent public transportation services. The larger cities are served by municipal or regional bus services, but intercity bus links are limited. Stakeholders must work to identify new ways for rural Mainers to access workforce and educational resources. Some do not have access to high-speed internet and many lack basic computer literacy skills.

Workforce boards will work to promote the resources of Maine's public library system as a key partner in addressing this issue. Maine has over 266 public libraries, the smallest of them serving an island population and the largest serving urban hubs (Portland, Lewiston-Auburn, and Bangor). Libraries are vital centers of community access to technology and resources for online learning. Recent surveys reveal that 750,000 Mainers have a library card. Over 1.7 million high speed internet sessions took place through 230 libraries. (Each library has between 100 mbps to 1 gigabit of fiber connections.) Maine libraries offer safe, family welcoming environments where single parents can access job search resources with children in tow. They offer informal training in digital literacy from tools to set up email accounts (which are needed to register for labor exchange and file unemployment claims) to assisting with uploading resumes to various job sites.

In partnering with Maine's public library system, workforce providers can promote participant access to resources in the Digital Maine Library, specifically, the Career Preparation, Adult Skills and Computer Skills Center. The Digital Maine Library also provides access to "Career Transitions," an online resource for job seekers that assists them in finding sustainable employment. The Maine State Library invests state and federal dollars as well as money from the Maine MTEAF (Maine Telecommunications Access Fund) to provide a vast array of resources for all Maine citizens. The Career Preparation Center provides specific occupational practice tests that assess and provide online skill development through varied occupationally-specific tools that address readiness to enter careers from allied health to homeland security. Residents can also access tools that prepare them to pass high school equivalency exams such as the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) and post-secondary entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or Accuplacer.

Local Boards will develop agreements with regional libraries and, using best practices already available in state, engage in staff cross-training that will inform workforce system staff about the resources libraries offer and how to promote these to their customers. Library staff, in turn, will become versed in promoting the programs and resources provided through CareerCenters.

When the CareerCenter closed in Waterville, the Waterville Library (Library) established an active partnership to provide access to career services and expertise from agencies such as the Augusta CareerCenter, New Ventures, the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, Chambers of Commerce, local workforce boards. The Library has fully integrated and embedded workforce development as part of its mission and activities. The Library hosts itinerant staff from the Augusta CareerCenter who are able to provide employment and training services as well as a local job fair.

Many public libraries can assist members of the public who are not digitally literate, including those who either do not have access to or do not know how to navigate the internet or on-line resources. All partners must continue to engage in creating solutions because the need for this level of one-on-one digital guidance far outstrips the capacity of either library or CareerCenter staff to address alone.

The Maine State Library has partnered with the Drucker Institute to launch Bendable Maine in the summer of 2022. Bendable is a robust learning marketplace that will allow Maine residents of all ages to easily discover learning content that is just right for them. As it relates to workforce initiatives, Bendable is being developed through collaborations with employers,

labor leaders, workforce development officials and others to ensure we provide learning opportunities that are truly relevant and in accord with Maine's 10-year Economic Development Strategy.

Older workers

Older workers in Maine face considerable barriers to employment. The median age in Maine is 44.6 years compared to the national average of 38.1. This segment of Maine's population is large and growing rapidly. In 2018, 21 percent of the population was over age 65; by 2036 this figure is expected to increase to 28 percent. As the first baby boomers reach traditional retirement age, labor force participation among older workers will increase. As increasing numbers age into their 70s and beyond, labor force participation is likely to decline. This initial increase presents an opportunity to find ways to capitalize on the skills and experience of older workers who continue to work, either in their current careers or in "encore" careers.

Proven strategies to engage older workers include educating employers about the benefits of hiring older workers who, as a cohort, are recognized for their expertise and skills, judgement, commitment to quality, and demonstrated work ethic. Older workers are valued for their flexibility regarding work hours, schedules, place and benefits, deferred retirement option plans, job sharing, and workplace accommodations.

The Older Workers Committee:

The work of the SWB's Older Workers Committee (OWC) will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meet. (see page 128)

Formerly Incarcerated

The formerly incarcerated often face barriers re-entering life outside of the corrections system. The Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) estimates it will release 6,000 prisoners from its facilities within the next five years. Based on the current population, at the time of their release, 31 percent of these individuals will have reading skills comparable to the middle school level and 76 percent will be similarly prepared in math.

Finding employment after release greatly reduces the likelihood that an individual will commit another crime. Workforce service providers assist those transitioning out of the corrections system to access job search assistance resources, but system partners will need to work more closely with employers to identify ways they can best capitalize on this prospective labor pool. Evidence-based approaches will be promoted. Some local areas are currently launching projects that include provision of career services in pre-release and county jails that educate soon to be released inmates about job search and workforce training resources and that establish relationships between them and prospective employers. Maine is also working with employers to reduce concerns about hiring formerly incarcerated. Previous job fair–like events have been held at two Maine State Prison facilities. Employers who attended reported that it helped to better understand the system as well as the rehabilitation and education programs in which inmates participate. In addition, Maine is promoting the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the Federal Bonding Program as incentives to employers considering hiring justice-involved individuals. The MDOL and DOC recently agreed to a partnership where DOC staff will pre-certify for WOTC and issue Federal Bond vouchers to inmates as part of their release processing. These formerly incarcerated individuals will leave correctional facilities with documents offering incentives to employers who hire them.

During the First Session of the 130th Maine Legislature, Governor Mills signed 'An Act Relating to Fair Chance in Employment.' The law became effective in October of 2021. This new law prohibits employers from inquiring about an individual's criminal history on an initial employment application and from stating in employment advertisements that an individual with a criminal history may not apply.

An employer may inquire about a prospective employee's criminal history during an interview or once the prospective employee has been determined otherwise qualified for the position. If an employer inquires about a prospective employee's criminal record, the prospective employee, if still eligible for the position under applicable federal or state law, must be afforded an opportunity to explain the information and the circumstances regarding any convictions, including post-conviction rehabilitation.

There are exceptions if a background check is required or if it would be inappropriate for an individual with a certain criminal history to apply.

The intent of this new legislation is to open up employment opportunities to individuals who were formerly incarcerated. This bill adds to the work the Departments of Labor and Corrections are doing in order to help address barriers to employment for this section of the workforce.

DOC has also implemented registered apprenticeship programs in some of its facilities for both staff and inmates. They also work closely with the university and community college system in the provision of educational opportunities for inmates.

Younger workers

WIOA requires that all programs serve youth with significant barriers to employment or education, including: high school dropouts, pregnant or parenting, homeless or runaway youth, those subject to the criminal justice system, youth with disabilities, and low-income youth who are basic skills deficient or lack English proficiency. These are documentable barriers, but the youth that fall under these categories often cope with numerous additional challenges such as low aspirations, depression, substance use, unstable homes, lack of appropriate adult role models, family violence, neglect, abuse, rural isolation, lack of transportation, sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination, and an overall lack of basic work-readiness competencies.

Youth service providers will partner to assess the need for a full menu of youth-oriented services from attainment of high-school diploma to parenting skills, financial literacy and career counseling. Employers will be at the table to offer work experience, internships and adult role-modelling and will continue to be involved with occupational and career awareness activities like the youth academies offered in all three local areas that provide youth with numerous youth service elements (career exploration, financial literacy, work experience, peer mentoring and more).

The Younger Worker Committee:

The work of the SWB's Younger Worker Committee will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meet. (see page 128)

Maine Children's Cabinet

The Maine Children's Cabinet plays a vital role in convening and facilitating coordination across state agencies and initiatives and policies that will improve and promote the healthy development of children and youth in Maine, including youth ages 14-24. Children's cabinet members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections. In collaboration with key staff from each of these agencies, the work of the Children's Cabinet is coordinated by staff in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF).

Designated staff from the Departments comprising the Children's Cabinet meet twice monthly to maintain open communication about changes and developments in programming and policies across state agencies for children and youth, coordinate the implementation of specific strategies, and identify new opportunities to collaborate across programs to advance strategies and goals. The Children's Cabinet strategic plans lay out two overarching goals:

- All Maine children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed, and
- All Maine youth enter adulthood healthy and connected to the workforce and/or education.

The JVSG is a non-competitive, USDOL funded program that provides over $800,000 annually to Maine, supporting 11 full time staff positions. A mix of disabled veterans outreach program specialists and local veteran's employment representatives (LVERs) work out of one-stop CareerCenter offices. There is one LVER who serves as the state veterans program manager based at the central office in Augusta.

The Veterans' Employment Committee*:*

The work of the SWB's Veterans' Employment Committee will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meet. (see page 128)

The Hire-A-Vet campaign, which promotes the hiring of 100 veterans in 100 jobs with 100 employers in 100 days, will now be coordinated by the new SWB Worker Employment, Education, and Training Committee.

The 2021 campaign kicked off on August 26, 2021 with an in-person hiring fair at the Augusta Civic Center and ended on December 16, 2021, with a total of 217 veterans, including 42 women, and military family members being hired.

The average hourly wage of veterans hired was $24.12, an increase of $0.20 from the 2020 campaign. In 2021, 166 employers signed on to the campaign, and fourteen of the sixteen counties in the state had veteran hires in them. During the campaign, 189 participants attended 11 educational programs to serve veteran and non-veteran job seekers and employers.

Employers have partnered to make the initiative a success and all goals have been exceeded each year. The campaign has connected nearly 750 employers with 1,000+ veteran-hires since its inception in 2015 and has been recognized as a best practice by the USDOL and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA).

Persons with language barriers

People who are foreign-born and for whom English is not their primary language typically face considerable barriers to employment in the United States. According to 2018 American Community Survey one-year estimates[14], approximately 3.5 percent of Mainers were born outside the United States. Of those, nearly one third entered the U.S. since 2010.

According to the American Community Survey, about 6 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home.

Persons with language barriers live throughout the state. However, clusters of foreign-born Mainers with language barriers are more prevalent in cities where services are more available, such as in Lewiston/Auburn, Greater Portland and Saco/Biddeford. According to the Maine Center for Economic Policy, in addition to New Mainers. Maine has a population of second-,

third-, and even fourth-generation French-speaking Franco-Americans. Roughly 10 percent of adult Franco-Americans and Acadians in Maine do not have a high school diploma or equivalency and one in five has some college but no degree. Low English language proficiency among this population may account for some of these numbers. Even within the cities, the state does not have enough current resources available to meet the need for English language instruction.

The SWB, at its September 18, 2020 meeting, voted to establish the SWB Immigrant Workforce Committee. This committee was charged with working to identify issues and best practices regarding the recruitment, retention, and employment of immigrants in Maine and develop strategies to meet the needs of immigrant workers and Maine employers. The primary functions and duties of this committee are:

- Promote involvement of Maine's immigrant communities in establishment of workforce policies.
- Work with the SWB/MDOL, DOE, DHHS, DECD and other state agencies to establish a written strategic plan and subsequent policies (if necessary) to support immigrant workforce services. The plan should focus on the following:
    - Recruitment, retention, education (secondary, post-secondary, ESL), and employment;
    - Cultural considerations for businesses and potential employees impacting employment;
    - Licensing and credentialing; and
    - Funding.
- Develop benchmarks and baseline standards to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services for immigrants with barriers to employment.
- Improve communication with appropriate agencies, non-profits, the faith community, and other community-based organizations that already serve immigrants.

The work of the SWB's Immigrant Workforce Committee will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meeting. (see page 128)

Individuals living in poverty and with low levels of education

Other people with barriers to employment in Maine include those who are low income with low levels of education. Estimates between 2015-2019 show twelve percent of the population lives in poverty. Nearly 35% of Black or African American alone and 30% of American Indian or Alaska Native alone lived under the poverty line. Nearly 25,000 Mainers over the age of 25 have less than a 9th grade education, with another 47,000 without a high school diploma. The State Workforce Board's (SWB) subcommittees focus on many of those populations who are statistically in poverty. Committee chairs are working across the committees in recognition that each constituent group is not mutually exclusive and many barriers to employment are crosscutting.

WIOA - TANF PARTNERSHIP OBJECTIVES

Under Governor Mills' administration, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program will be a full partner of the one-stop system as recommended under WIOA. As such,

the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will support and guide its TANF service provider (currently and hereafter, Fedcap) to work with core and required partners of the one-stop system to jointly serve customers and, as appropriate, leverage and share resources on their behalf.

First-Steps to Partnership

The Greater Portland and Rockland CareerCenters will serve as pilot sites for the development of collaborative service delivery. Staff from each agency have identified program services that each agency provides, such as assessment, case management, plan development, barrier mitigation, training, and job search activities such as job fairs and job development through outreach to employers.

The pilot project teams identified specific services they can collaborate on, including the following:

- Supplemental job search services, such as participation in job search, resume, and interviewing workshops offered by each provider
- Registration with Maine JobLink, the labor exchange system that matches worker skills with jobs listed by Maine employers (i.e.: teaching Fedcap staff how to guide TANF clients through this process and/or having employment services staff assist TANF recipients with this process)
- Coordination between agencies on client service plan development to eliminate unnecessary duplication of services for co-enrolled customers
- Referrals and program co-enrollment that will enable customers to leverage the supports and resources of multiple programs
- Co-management and accountability of participant involvement in activities and services of partner programs, such as coordinated and/or shared case management and formal protocols for communication between programs on behalf of shared customers
- Ongoing cross-informing between Fedcap and employment services to better align service coordination overall
- Collaboration on employer outreach and job development activities

Staff collaboration and communication steps have been drafted between employment services, Fedcap and other DHHS staff to include:

- Involvement of DHHS regional planners acting as liaisons between programs and possibly co-located at pilot sites (CareerCenters or Fedcap service sites)
- Formal cross-training in which Fedcap staff will learn how to access WIOA core and required partner services and vice versa
- Sharing of best practices and practical example of resource leveraging and braiding of services
- Instituting regular (monthly) partner team meetings to:
    - Further develop relationships
    - Fine tune and implement collaborative practices
    - Discuss pilot and customer progress and success and address identified challenges

- Promote continuous improvements
- Define success and establish measurable outcomes

Coordinated Sector Pilot

A second pilot designed to address worker shortages in the healthcare sector and meeting the work requirements of TANF is in development. The pilot will focus on workforce needs of healthcare providers and how TANF and other partner resources can be aligned to meet the sector needs. The project will focus on locations with high but unmet demand for entry-level healthcare positions. The project will involve Adult Education, the Maine Community College System, and the TANF-funded Parents as Scholars and Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE) programs. The collaborative will work to launch participants on career paths with advancement opportunities and the potential for ongoing training and development, allowing trainees to advance in skills and earnings over time.

Formal Steps

DHHS will formally partner with each of Maine's three local workforce boards to take part in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that guides collaborative and integrated service delivery across programs and funding streams. Local workforce boards act as the lead conveners of partners for their regions.

The Northeastern Workforce Development Board (NWDB) has oversight of Aroostook, Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis and Washington counties.

The Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board (CWMWDB) has oversight of Androscoggin, Franklin, Kennebec Oxford, and Somerset counties.

The Coastal Counties Workforce board, (CCWI) has oversight of Cumberland, Knox Lincoln, Sagadahoc, Waldo, and York Counties.

The boards work with partners to develop and maintain the local one-stop system and to articulate the coordinated service delivery design for their local region. Local boards bring additional partners to the table and promote collaborative resolution of issues facing the region such as poverty, the effects of opioid use and more. Local boards also negotiate cost sharing between partners to ensure adequate one-stop infrastructure and access to all partner programs and eliminate redundancies such as multiple intake or assessment specialists when these could possibly be provided by staff shared between programs.

Signing of a MOU is a formal step that introduces TANF as a partner to the one-stop system and outlines how TANF service providers will work with all required partners going forward.

Future Steps

For partner agencies to better serve TANF recipients it will be beneficial for them to adopt a whole family approach to jobs that looks at not only the enrolled individual but that takes children and other family dependents into consideration when developing service delivery approaches that will enable them to achieve success through a holistic approach to employment services. Likewise, partners should understand how the benefits cliff affects TANF recipients.

TANF could play a key role in educating system partners regarding the benefits of two-generation approaches to service, as well as how to use a benefits cliff tool to be developed for Maine.

[1] American Community Survey 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates

[2]Maine Workers with Disabilities http://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/.

[3]Gender Pay Gap- Recent Trends and Explanations
https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/page/files/20160614_gender_pay_gap_issue_brief_cea.pdf

[4]2017 Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Maine
https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/MePCSW2017Report.pdf

[5]Unequally Essential: Women and Gender Pay Gap During Covid19

[6]https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/State-of-Working-Maine-2021.pdf

[7]ImpactByGender2020.pdf (maine.gov)

[8]https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/COVID19_Recession&Recovery2021.pdf

[9]Highlights of women's earnings in 2020 : BLS Reports: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

[10]https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-maine.pdf

[11]https://www.maine.gov/jobsplan/home

[12]https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/PCSW2020.pdf

[13]Maine Hire-A-Vet Military Culture 202
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5ZdVPP4QOB-tAfF1fXygXWBMfAfXsBDE

[14] American Community Survey 2018 ACS 1-Year Estimates

[15] Ibid

[i] The pandemic created a difficult environment for data collection and estimation which affected the Current Employment Statistics data program. Employer response rates to the monthly payroll survey were lower during the early months of the pandemic and preliminary estimates from April through December 2020 experienced substantial revision following annual benchmarking in early 2021 to the universe of covered employment derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages. For more information, see
https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/blogs/2021_workforce_data_revisions.pdf

[ii] Businesses that increased telework did not necessarily offer telework arrangements to all employees.

[iii] The Census Bureau notes that experimental data products may not meet the data quality standards of other Census Bureau data products. Some estimates in the experimental household pulse survey may be particularly imprecise with larger standard errors compared to other published Census Bureau data products. For more information, please see
https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products.html

[iv] The labor force includes those who are employed and those who are not employed but are actively seeking and available for work—the unemployed. Retired and other people not employed who are not seeking or available for work are not in the labor force and not counted as unemployed.

[v] It is believed that a substantial number of claims filed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic involve imposter fraud and are likely included in these counts. The volume of fictitious claims filed was particularly high in May of 2020. Educational attainment information

is self-reported. Claimants not reporting educational attainment information are not included in these tabulations.

2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

II.(a.2) Workforce Development, Education, and Training Activities Analysis

Maine has a variety of programs and activities to address the skilled workforce needs of employers that focus on developing the skills, abilities, and credentials of the population, including those with barriers to employment. The aggregate public investment in these activities is significant, totaling more than $500 million. Developing greater levels of coordination and alignment among programs is an integral component of this unified plan and essential to navigating Maine's many workforce development challenges.

The tables in II.(a.2.a.) provide an analysis of Maine's workforce development, education and training activities that receive regular public funding.[1][2] For the purposes of this analysis, programs and activities are grouped into four categories: WIOA core partner programs, other

publicly funded employment and training programs, other publicly funded education programs, and additional programs.

II.(a.2.A)The State's Workforce Development Activities

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Core Partner Programs

The WIOA core partner programs: adult, dislocated worker and youth programs; employment services, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and adult and basic education served more than 90,000 participants and represented $56.9 million in public investment in fiscal year (FY) 2019 (58 percent of which was federal, 24 percent state and 18 percent local funds). This information is displayed in Table 5, below.

The MDOL oversees administration of the Title IB adult, dislocated worker and youth programs and the Title III employment services program. In program year 2018 (PY18), 542 adults, 264 unemployed workers and 402 youth were served by these programs. On average, 75.2 percent found jobs. During the year 4,819 job seekers received individualized career services and 42,700 participated in labor exchange services.

MDOL's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) works to bring about full access to employment, independence, and community integration for people with disabilities. While under the oversight of the U.S. Department of Education, BRS operates within the offices of MDOL at CareerCenters and provides VR services through its Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). The co-location of VR and employment services offers greater opportunities for aligning programs and services. During PY20 BRS had 2,104 new applicants and served 6,004 individuals through plans for employment.

Maine Adult Education (hereafter, Adult Education) is part of the Maine Department of Education. Service providers are housed within nine educational programming areas (hubs) and consist of 67 local providers aligned with local school districts statewide. In fiscal year (FY) 2019, over 17,000 individuals participated in high school completion, workforce training, and college transitions programming. Of those, 5,830 participated in federal programs directly linked to high school equivalency completion, entering employment, and entering postsecondary education.

Over 23,000 people also participated in lifelong learning classes such as health and wellness, political awareness, personal finances, and other community enriching courses.

Maine's unified plan emphasizes greater levels of integration, alignment and coordination among core programs and one-stop partners.

In 2016, Adult Education began implementing Integrated Education and Training (IET). The passage of WIOA in 2014, enabled Adult Education to use federal literacy funds to support training when combined with education. Integrating relevant reading, math, and comprehension instruction, occupation training, employability skills, and English language acquisition as needed is a training model with proven effectiveness. Another key piece of an IET is the earning of a credential of value. Combining these elements compresses learning time frames and accelerates entry into the workplace. While IETs are successful, they are expensive to develop and run, making cost-sharing with partners essential. The IET programs offered are based on identified local workforce board needs, and on collaboration with employers, other service providers, and postsecondary institutions. From the initial six programs, the number of IETs has grown to 402 in FY19. The goal is to increase the number of adults receiving credentials through an IET to 800. IET is a proven training model that enhances learning comprehension by integrating classroom and occupation training and often compresses learning time frames. Based on identified local workforce needs, the pilot projects were developed with extensive employer engagement and the involvement of support service

providers and a variety of educational institutions. Since then, IET programming has been rolled out statewide and is a required programming element for each adult education hub.

5: Maine's Public Sector Investment (in Millions) in Workforce Development; WIOA Core Partner Programs

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title IB	$6.87			$6.87	MDOL	WIOA Title IB provides employment and training services to adults, dislocated workers, and youth who meet priority and eligibility criteria. IB programs overseen by three local workforce boards and delivered through four service providers served a total of 1,230 participants. Of those who exited the programs an average of 75.4 percent were employed. Of those who participated in classroom training, 63 percent earned a degree, diploma or credential.
WIOA Title III Employment Services	$3.60			$3.60	MDOL	WIOA Title III amends the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 and provides employment and labor exchange services to individuals and employers. Over 42,700 job seekers accessed the

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						Maine JobLink labor exchange system in which 5,408 employers posted 31,464 jobs. Individualized career services were provided to 4,819 job seekers who required more intensive assistance finding employment.
WIOA Title IV Rehabilitation Services	$16.30	$8.20	$0.30	$24.80	USDOE/ MDOL	The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) works to bring about full access to employment, independence and community integration for people with disabilities: The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps individuals with a range of disabling conditions to achieve or retain employment; the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides services to individuals who are blind or have low vision; and the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened assists individuals with hearing loss. During PY20, BRS had 2,104 new applicants and

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						served 6,004 individuals through plans for employment.
WIOA Title II Adult Education	$1.70	$6.00	$11.17	$18.87	MDOE	Maine Adult Education promotes programs that help adults get the foundational skills they need to be educated and productive workers, family members, and citizens. The major areas of instruction and support are adult basic education, adult secondary education (high school completion), English language acquisition, college transition, and workforce training. These programs emphasize foundational skills such as reading, writing, math, English language competency, career awareness and exploration, workforce training, and problem-solving. In FY19, adult education served 17,640 adults in academic and workforce programs, including 5,830 participants in federal funded

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						programs. An additional 23,150 adults participated in self-sustaining personal enrichment courses.

	Federal	**State**	**Other**	**Total**		
Totals in millions	**$31.0**	**$14.2**	**$11.7**	**$56.9**		
Percentages	**55%**	**25%**	**21%**			

Other Publicly Funded Employment & Training Programs

A wide range of employment and training activities in Maine occur outside the core WIOA programs. Many of these activities are described in Table 5, below. These programs are supported by $45.2 million in public funding (see Table 6) and deliver employment and job training services to a variety of population groups including veterans, dislocated workers, youth, and individuals with skill deficiencies and other barriers to employment. Programs are accessible through Maine's one-stop CareerCenters administered by local workforce boards in three regions.

In addition to the programs displayed in Table 6, a variety of other employment and training activities are funded through discretionary grant awards to the state of Maine. Such grants include, but are not limited to H1B grants, Youth Build, and Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Training (TAACT) grants.

6: Maine's Public Sector Investment (in Millions) in Workforce Development; Other Publicly Funded Employment and Training Programs

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG)	$0.78			$0.78	MDOL	Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) funds are allocated to state workforce agencies from the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) in direct proportion to the number of veterans seeking employment within their state. The

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						grants support two principal staff positions: disabled veterans' outreach program specialists, and local veterans' employment representatives. This grant provides funds to exclusively serve veterans, other eligible persons and, indirectly, employers.
Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)	$.55			$.55	MDOL	The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program is a federal program that provides a path for employment growth and opportunity through aid to US workers who have lost their jobs as a result of foreign trade. The TAA program seeks to provide these trade-affected workers with opportunities to obtain the skills, resources, and support they need to become reemployed.
Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)	$0.07			$0.07	MDOL	The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a federal tax credit available to employers for hiring individuals from certain target groups who have consistently faced significant barriers to employment.
ReEmployment Services & Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)	$0.82	$0.00	$0.00	$0.82	MDOL	The ReEmployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program assists unemployed workers to return to work more quickly by delivering and services to those claimants profiled as "most likely to exhaust"

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						and all transitioning veterans receiving unemployment compensation. Targeted claimants will be provided relevant reemployment services and eligibility review interviews. Services will be delivered through group workshops, one-on-one meetings, and other methods allowing individuals who would not be able to attend for various reasons to attend.
CareerCenter General Funds		$0.98		$0.98	MDOL	The Maine CareerCenter provides a variety of employment and training services at no charge for Maine workers and businesses. A portion of CareerCenter General Funds support staffing and related Apprenticeship programming depending on federal funding levels.
Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP)		$3.98		$3.98	MDOL	The Competitive Skills Scholarship (CSSP) helps workers learn new skills and succeed in a changing economy. The program is open to all qualified Maine residents and pays for education and training for high wage jobs in demand in Maine. The number of new CSSP applicants accepted into the program each year is based on available funding and allocated by county.

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
WIOA Title IDDislocated Worker Grants (DWGs)	$1.10			$1.10	MDOL	National dislocated worker grants (NWDGs) provide additional assistance to support employment and retraining efforts for dislocated workers displaced due to mass layoff or natural disaster. USDOL offers access to these funds through a competitive process to address other issues affecting workers such as the opioid crisis or need for technology upgrades. Maine is in the process of implementing a single portal from which job seekers can access the services of all core partners. The portal allows information to be shared between the information systems of each partner upon request from the job seeker, saving the customer from answering the same questions multiple times.
Maine Apprenticeship Program (MAP) and Apprenticeship Expansion Grant	$5.59			$5.59	MDOL	Maine Apprenticeship Program (MAP) and Apprenticeship Expansion Grant helps mobilize Maine's workforce with structured, on-the-job learning in traditional industries such as construction and manufacturing, as well as emerging industries such as healthcare, information technology, energy, telecommunications

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						and more. Registered apprenticeships connect job seekers looking to learn new skills with employers looking for qualified workers, resulting in a workforce with industry-driven training and employers with a competitive edge.
WIOA Title IC: Penobscot Job Corps Center	$9.40			$9.40	Boston Regional Office of Job Corps	Job Corps is a no-cost education and career technical training program administered by the USDOL that helps young people ages 16 through 24 improve the quality of their lives through career technical and academic training. The Job Corps program is authorized by Title I-C of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The Penobscot Job Corps Center is operated by Career Systems Development Corporation for the USDOL.
WIOA Title IC: Loring Job Corps Center	$9.50			$9.50	Boston Regional Office of Job Corps	See above
Maine Conservation Corps (MCC)	$0.40	$0.09	$0.70	$1.40	Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry	The mission of Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) is to accomplish conservation initiatives that inspire individuals and enhance communities. The MCC is a state AmeriCorps program, comprised of members who undertake conservation projects while completing job

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						readiness training and achieving personal development goals. Service inherently includes the distillment of personal responsibility, accountability, teamwork, communication, problem solving, as well as many other appropriate workplace behaviors and attitudes. Members also engage in career research, goal setting, resume and cover letter writing, develop interview skills, and earn certifications as part of their AmeriCorps terms.
New Ventures Maine (NVME)	$0.20	$0.90	$0.70	$1.80	UMA/ UMS	New Ventures Maine (NVME) is a statewide community outreach and education program of the University of Maine at Augusta/University of Maine System. NVME provides in-person and online training and individual coaching in career planning, entrepreneurship, and financial education and asset building. For Mainers in life and career transitions, NVME provides an empowering environment for participants to define and achieve goals. NVME helps individuals recognize strengths, overcome barriers, access resources, develop a plan and take

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						action towards their goals--finding good jobs, furthering their education, starting a business, managing their money and building savings and assets.
Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)	$1.90			$1.90	USDOL/ A4TD	The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a community service and work-based training program for unemployed, low-income persons over the age of 55 with barriers to employment. Authorized by the Older Americans Act (Title V), the program provides subsidized, service-based training by placing participants in paid internships at 501C3 non-profit and public agencies. Participants are also able to participate in workshops that improve their job search skills and job readiness. Individuals train for an average of 20 hours per week and are paid minimum wage. The community service training serves as a bridge to unsubsidized employment opportunities.
Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG)	$4.00	$3.50	$3.30	$10.80	JMG	Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG) partners with public education and private businesses to offer results-driven solutions

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						to ensure all students graduate, attain post-secondary credentials and pursue meaningful careers. JMG is hosted in Maine's public middle and high schools, and community college and university systems. JMG reaches more than 10,000 students throughout all of Maine's 16 counties. JMG programs are led by JMG specialists who serve as mentors and educators. The JMG model integrates competency-based learning strategies with career exploration. JMG helps students overcome academic, financial and social barriers to help students reach their fullest potential. JMG increases high school graduation rates, post-secondary persistence, and degree attainment.
WIOA Title ID YouthBuild Portland (YBA)	$1.00			$1.00	USDOL	Youth Building Alternatives (YBA) program serves teens and young adults who struggle to find their way in the traditional education system. Since 1994, high school dropouts aged 16-24 were assisted in successful transition to adulthood through an alternative education model that includes HiSET exam preparation, construction skills training, leadership development, job skills,

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						and life skills. Through YBA, young adults obtain important certifications including NCCER, OSHA-10, ServSafe, and more. Most advance toward postsecondary education or career-oriented employment. In addition to the program itself, one year of follow-up services support graduates' transition to education and work.
WIOA Title ID National Farmworker (NFJP)	$0.20			$0.20	USDOL	The National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) provides workforce development services and training assistance to migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their dependents.
WIOA Title ID Indian and Native American (INA) Program	$0.20			$0.20	USDOL	The purpose of WIOA Indian and Native American (INA) programs is to support employment and training activities in order to: develop more fully the academic, occupational, and literacy skills of such individuals; make such individuals more competitive in the workforce and to equip them with entrepreneurial skills necessary for successful self-employment; and promote the economic and social development of INA communities in accordance with their goals and values.

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
Federal Bonding Program	$0.30			$0.30	USDOL	The USDOL established the federal bonding program in 1966 to provide fidelity bonds for "at-risk," hard-to-place job seekers. The bonds cover the first six months of employment at no cost to the job applicant or the employer.
	Federal	**State**	**Other**	**Total**		
Totals in millions	**$32.6**	**$8.1**	**$4.9**	**$45.6**		
Percentages	**71%**	**18%**	**11%**			

**Program funding is sporadic.*

In addition to core partner programs and other employment and training programs, the University of Maine System (UMS), the Maine Community College System (MCCS), Maine's Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Maine Quality Centers (MQC) provide education programs to prepare participants for success in careers and the workforce. As shown in Table 7, below, these programs represent more than $440 million in annual public funding, 80 percent of which are state funds.

With seven campuses[3] and annual enrollment of more than 40,000, the UMS represents a foundational component of the state's postsecondary education system. The university system offers associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees as well as a selection of specialized undergraduate and graduate certificates.

Maine's network of seven community colleges[4] has a combined enrollment of more than 18,000 of which 94 percent are Maine residents. 65 percent of these students attend part time. The MCCS offers certificate, diploma and associate degree programs directed at the educational, occupational, and technical needs of Maine residents as well as the workforce needs of employers. The goals of the MCCS are to create an educated, skilled, and adaptable labor force responsive to the changing needs of the economy, and to promote local, regional, and statewide economic development.

The UMS and MCCS have been working together to develop an ecosystem around micro-credentials/digital badges which are employer recognized. With the support of MDOL and other partners, the UMS received a $350,000 grant from the Lumina Foundation to enhance this ecosystem and focus on engaging people of color, low income, Native Americans and incarcerated individuals.

Additionally, the UMS and MCCS have been engaged in a regional and national project to improve the transparency of available credentials and educational opportunities through a searchable, centralized credential registry, Credential Engine. New England Board of Higher Education received a grant of $650,000 to launch High Value Credentials for New England

(HVCNE) in partnership with Credential Engine. HVCNE will provide individuals, institutions, state policy leaders and employers the tools to:

- Develop a common language to describe credentials
- Evaluate credentials' value
- Identify critical education and employment pipelines
- Understand the skills and competencies obtained in earning a credential

The mission of Maine's CTE program is to ensure that students acquire the high-quality technical skills that will prepare them for postsecondary education, entry into an ever-changing workplace and society, and to meet the rigorous academic standards of Maine's Learning Results. Students benefit from this integrated system of academic and applied learning.

MQC provide customized workforce training grants to employers who are either seeking to locate or expand their operations in Maine or who are interested in providing training to their incumbent workers. Training programs are coordinated and delivered through Maine's seven community colleges, and other service and training providers as needed.

In conjunction with the MCCS and MQC, Bath Iron Works (BIW) established a tuition-free training program at the former Brunswick Landing Naval Air Station. Using one of the former airplane hangars, participants get training and exposure to the facets of welding, pipe fitting, insulation and painting in the ship building industry. Acknowledging the difficulties of transportation for some students, housing for the four-week program can also be provided on site. BIW has an agreement to interview successful Maine Job Corps welding students for positions at BIW as they prepare to transition out of Job Corps.

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
Career and Technical Education (CTE) (secondary)	$2.30	$56.50		$58.80	MDOE	As part of the Maine Department of Education's ongoing commitment to support all learners, Maine Career and Technical Education (CTE) aims to ensure that students acquire the high-quality, industry-recognized technical skills and related

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						academic standards that will prepare them for postsecondary education and entry into an ever-changing workplace and society.
University of Maine System (UMS)	$54.50	$230.90	$28.80	$314.20	UMS	The University of Maine System (UMS) offers associates, bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees (including the JD degree) as well as a selection of specialized undergraduate and graduate certificates. The UMS currently is developing a series of micro credentials specific to 21st century work ready and technical skills and is working across the state to develop a statewide approach to this. The UMS features seven universities — some with multiple campuses— located across the state, as well as eight University College outreach centers, a law school, 31 additional course sites, and

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						Cooperative Extension. It has an annual enrollment of nearly 30,000 students in credit bearing programs and serves over 500,000 individuals annually through educational and cultural offerings, including non-credit continuing education and professional development programming.
Maine Community College System (MCCS)	$4.70	$70.00		$74.70	MCCS	The mission of the Maine Community College System (MCCS) is to provide associate degree, diploma, and certificate programs directed at the educational, occupational, and technical needs of the state's citizens and the workforce needs of the state's employers. The primary goals of the MCCS are to create an educated, skilled and adaptable labor force responsive to changing economic needs and to promote local, regional and statewide economic development.
Maine Quality		$0.90		$0.90	MCCS	The Maine Quality

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
Centers (MQC)						Centers (MQC) program funds customized workforce training delivered through Maine's seven community colleges. MQC grants are available to fund pre-hire, post-hire, and incumbent worker training. The program is designed to ensure that businesses have the qualified workers they need to succeed. Grant limits for incumbent worker training are based on company size. Employers with 1-50 employees may apply for 100 percent funding. Employers with 51-100 employees may apply for 75 percent funding, with a 25 percent company match. Employers with 101+ employees may apply for 50 percent funding, with a 50 percent company match. Other customized training is provided at no cost to either the business or trainee.
	Federal	**State**	**Other**	**Total**		

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
Totals in millions	**$61.5**	**$358.3**	**$28.8**	**$448.6**		
Percentages	**14%**	**80%**	**6%**			

Additional Publicly Funded Programs

The state correctional system, and Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership, Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment (ASPIRE), and Food Supplement Employment & Training programs provide workforce development activities to inmates, manufacturing employers and low-income adults. Details of these programs are provided below. Please note that the following table does not represent all publicly funded DHHS programs for employment supports with individuals with significant disabilities.

: Maine's Public Sector Investment (in Millions) in Workforce Development; Additional Publicly-Funded Programs

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
State Correctional System	$0.20	$3.20	$1.30	$4.70	MDOC	Provides programs and services to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.
Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnerships (MEP)	$9.40	$3.60	$0.20	$13.20	U.S. Dept. of Commerce	Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnerships (MEP) leverage a vast array of public and private resources and services that are available to every manufacturing enterprise in Maine. The nationwide system of MEP centers is linked through the U.S. Department of Commerce - National Institute of Standards and Technology, with the common goal to strengthen the global competitiveness of U.S.

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						manufacturers. MEP's mission is to become the state's premier provider of growth-based solutions for Maine's small and medium sized manufacturers; and its vision is to create profitable growth opportunities for small and medium sized manufacturers by helping them become more efficient, productive and globally competitive.
Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment (ASPIRE)	$20.10	$7.10		$27.20	DHHS	DHHS's Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment (ASPIRE) program is the training and employment program serving TANF recipients by developing individualized employment plans and providing supports which lead to successful transition to employment.
Food Supplement Employment & Training (FSET)	$0.80	$0.50		$1.30	DHHS	DHHS administers Maine's Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), including employment and training activities

Program	Federal	State	Other	SFY21 Funding	Overseeing Agency	Program Description
						(E&T) provided by MDOL at CareerCenters. Maine's E&T program is known as the Food Supplement Employment and Training (FSET) Program.
Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE)	$2.20	$0.10		$2.30	DHHS	Higher Opportunities for Pathways to Employment (HOPE) is administered by DHHS to assist low income families. HOPE provides financial assistance and campus-based navigators to support families and help them to achieve education goals leading towards employment.
	Federal	**State**	**Other**	**Total**		
Totals in millions	**$32.7**	**$14.5**	**$1.5**	**$48.7**		
Percentages	**67%**	**30%**	**3%**			

****National Institute of Standards and Technology, Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NIST MEP)*

: Maine's Public Sector Investment in Workforce Development; Summary

	Federal	State	Other	Total
Core Partner Programs (in millions)	$31.00	$14.20	$11.67	$56.80
Other Publicly	$32.58	$8.09	$4.91	$45.58

	Federal	State	Other	Total
Funded Education and Training (in millions)				
Other Publicly Funded Education and Training (in millions)	$61.50	$358.30	$28.80	$448.60
Additional Public Funded Programs (in millions)	$32.70	$14.50	$1.50	$48.70
Totals	$157.78	$395.09	$46.81	$599.68

[1] These tables do not include public investments in K-12 education (although secondary career and technical education is included), nor does this analysis represent a comprehensive view of DHHS training programs.

[2] Funding levels vary with a range of factors and are subject to yearly change, and allowable expenditures are governed by federal and state laws and policies.

[3] See Appendix D for a list of Maine's public and private colleges

[4] Ibid

II.(a.2.B)Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities

Strengths and weaknesses of Maine's workforce development activities are discussed below. These attributes and characteristics reflect the views of the core partners and the WIOA Steering Committee.

Strengths:

- Commitment and willingness among the core partners and other stakeholders to build a better workforce development system. Partners are committed to continuing and enhancing coordination and integration so that the people of Maine are better served. This commitment to bring the shared vision to fruition is foundational to repositioning Maine's workforce development system
- Quality of service, programs and operations
- Accessibility to stakeholders, business leaders and key decision makers. Collaboration and partnering are core strengths of Maine's workforce development system activities. Maine's close-knit workforce development communities foster an environment where business relationships can be easily maintained, resources mobilized quickly and access to key decision makers is abundant. This is a state with relatively little bureaucracy, which fosters access to decision makers and resources
- Apprenticeship program is successful in expansion by working with industry organizations to reach large and small businesses statewide

- Maine's relatively small population and lean infrastructure enables collaboration between service providers without layers of bureaucracy. For example, Bath Iron Works has been working with the Maine Community College System and Maine Quality Centers in the development of welding programs and guarantees an interview to anyone who completes the program.

Weaknesses:

- Maine's large geographic size and dispersed population present barriers to the efficient delivery of services. Rural communities in Maine struggle with higher than average unemployment rates. Delivering services to these rural areas is a challenge. Moreover, limited public transportation networks make it difficult for many to access employment opportunities.
- Maine's workforce development, education and training activities are governed by multiple state and federal agencies. This often results in coordination and alignment challenges. Maine is taking steps to better coordinate activities, starting with the creation of a statewide vision and goals for the workforce development system
- Individual and employer awareness of the workforce system and available opportunities, as well as how to access them continues to be less than desirable
- There are misconceptions about Maine's demographic challenges and the future workforce needs. While Maine is projected to have relatively flat job and workforce growth through 2026, there will be an estimated 73,000 jobs openings in Maine each year, largely to replace others as older Mainers leave the workforce
- Most stakeholders recognize the importance of using valid and reliable information to drive decision making, program evaluation and to support policy initiatives. Unfortunately, the core partners are currently working with three separate and discreet management information systems. The realities of current financial constraints leave the state without the means to develop a robust system for integrating data.
- Maine has limited financial resources with which to address its many workforce development challenges. WIOA program funds are allocated to states based on population size and unemployment levels. Maine's outlying counties are geographically large with comparatively small populations that are struggling with unemployment considerably higher than the state average rate. Delivering needed services to these individuals is costly and not effectively supported in the funding model. In addition, program administration funds are capped at 5 percent resulting in low levels of funding to cover fixed costs required to remain in compliance with administrative activities. Rural, less populous states such as Maine are at a "small state disadvantage.": they receive substantially fewer funds to support system costs comparable to large states and higher delivery costs.

II.(a.2.C) State Workforce Development Capacity

Workforce system partners continue to come together at the state and regional levels to identify and address challenges and gaps in service approaches, including more intense focus on diversity, inclusiveness, equity, and accessibility for all Mainers. State agencies and workforce partner pacts like Maine Spark ensure service provider staff are aware of methods for identifying implicit bias and assuring racial and cultural equity for all populations through shared staff development. New collaborations have naturally resulted as a result of the COVID pandemic, including cross training of Title IB staff by Maine Equal Justice and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services on how to assist participants to apply for TANF,

MaineCare, SNAP, and a plethora of other services. System partners collaborate to offer informational sessions that connect individuals to numerous assistance programs.

Additional resources have come to the state in the form of the Opioid and COVID disaster relief grants, which have focused on connecting affected individuals to humanitarian assistance, healthcare resources and have educated employers on the benefits of hiring individuals in recovery and by such reducing the stigma for individuals in recovery for whom gaining employment is a critical step in the recovery process.

New methods for virtual services and portals that will further align and integrate services are being explored as a result of new funding received by the State Workforce Board and the Maine Department of Labor, that will result in a holistic workforce system portal that will brand Maine's workforce system and a virtual one-stop that will be Maine's comprehensive one-stop with direct connect to all required partner services through a single portal.

B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

During November and December 2019, the State Workforce Board (SWB) convened 10 strategic planning sessions attended by over 100 stakeholders, including administrators of core programs, employers, workforce developers, educators, youth, advocates, representatives of state agencies and policy makers, to discuss the workforce development system and create a vision for a bright and prosperous future

Discussion centered on what success will look like for Maine's workforce development system in five to ten years and what will need to occur in order to make the vision a reality. A broad range of ideas were shared and discussed, some were challenged and others were some honed. Ultimately, participants discovered that they shared many of the same ideals. The resulting vision addresses the requirements of WIOA and creates a defined direction for Maine's future workforce system.

II.(b.1) Maine's Strategic Vision for 2023

Maine's residents and businesses will have economic opportunity and contribute to the growth of Maine through a responsive, networked and coordinated workforce development system across public and private sectors. All components of the workforce development system will be provided seamlessly, resulting in increased educational and employment attainment for residents with a focus on careers, not just jobs, and support Maine's business sectors with skilled and qualified workers.

II.(b.2) Goals

In order to fulfill this vision, the following goals have been set.

1. Maine's untapped labor pool will enter employment and advance into high-demand occupations of their choice through private and public investment in training, education, and supports.
2. Current and future workers will be equipped to meet industry talent needs, with the goal that 60 percent of Maine's workforce will hold a credential of value by 2025.
3. Create a networked, aligned and demand-driven workforce system across public and private partners and fosters the growth of Maine's economy while supporting equitable, safe, productive employment opportunities.

Barriers were addressed in section II. a. 1. B. Workforce Analysis as well.

Individuals with barriers to Employment

CONTEXT OF PANDEMIC AND CONTINUING BARRIERS

In July 2021, the Maine Department of Labor circulated a brief survey to better understand the barriers faced in returning to work. This survey was distributed to unemployment insurance claimants as well as active jobseekers on Maine JobLink—in total over 44,000 individuals. Additionally, the survey was translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, and Vietnamese to broaden accessibility. The survey was shared with worker advocate and other community partners to be distributed within their networks as well. In total, more than 2,600 individuals responded to the anonymous survey (see demographics in Appendix). The following outlines key takeaways and themes from this survey.

Survey respondents noted that there are several barriers preventing them from returning to work. The most cited barriers included a "lack of opportunities that match my skillset" (34%) and "COVID health risks or concerns" (31%).

Additional reasons preventing return to work related to:

- Job quality concerns regarding insufficient wages (29%), lack of benefits (15%), unpredictable schedule (13%) or lack of long-term positions (11%)

- Inaccessibility of relevant opportunities including lack of relevant jobs in the local area (21%)

- Lack of necessary social supports including lack of reliable childcare (15%) and transportation (6%)

Nearly one-third of respondents (30%) cited other barriers via open-ended response. Based on analysis of a random sample, the primary themes focused on age-related discrimination, challenges getting interviews in the competitive market and self-employment challenges related to economic recession (e.g., lack of clients, lower sales, and supply chain challenges).

Top barriers experienced differed by demographic and geographic characteristics of the survey respondent pool:

• COVID health risks were more commonly cited among older adult respondents as compared with younger counterparts—44% of respondents 55+ cited this as a key barrier as compared with 15% of respondents under 24. Additionally, survey respondents over the age of 55 cited ageism and age discrimination as barriers preventing them from returning to work. The theme of ageism accounted for approximately 25% of "other" barriers cited among older adult respondents.

• Women were more likely to cite childcare-related barriers: Among survey respondents, 15% cited lack of reliable childcare as a barrier preventing return to work. This reason was a more significant barrier among female survey respondents (20%) than male respondents (8%).

• Survey respondents outside of southern coastal counties were more likely to cite "no relevant jobs in my area" as a barrier. While only 18% of respondents from Cumberland and York counties cited this as a barrier, respondents from Franklin (32%), Washington (31%) and Piscataquis (35%) were twice as likely to lack of relevant local opportunities as a barrier.

Priority populations

Stakeholders and businesses in Maine grasp the need to prioritize services that will facilitate participation of **all** potential members of the labor force. They will continue to work to implement strategies that alleviate barriers to attaining employment.

SWB advocates on behalf of individuals facing challenges to employment. An official standing committee is charged with examining the barriers specific target populations face and developing recommendations that address such barriers. SWB promotes employment without discrimination based on the basis of gender, race, age, ethnicity, national origin or other barriers.

Individuals with barriers to employment include the following:

- Displaced homemakers
- Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- English language learners and those facing substantial cultural barriers
- Formerly incarcerated
- Foster care youth or youth transitioning out of foster care
- Homeless individuals
- Native American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and Native Hawaiians
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities
- Individuals with low literacy levels
- Older individuals
- Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility for TANF
- Long-term unemployed individuals
- Low-income individuals
- Single parents

Persons with disabilities

Maine can rightly claim a long standing and abiding concern with the employment issues facing people with disabilities. Addressing these issues and increasing the workforce participation of this population must be a priority to improve the economic wellbeing of individuals with disabilities but also for the state as a whole. Notably, Maine now prohibits the payment of sub-minimum wages to people with disabilities through a state law enacted in 2020.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2015 through 2019, just over 210,000 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16 percent of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This proportion was higher than that of the United States in which an estimated 13 percent of residents had a disability. The age distribution of the civilian noninstitutionalized population with disabilities differs from the general population (with and without disabilities) and has a higher share of persons over 64 and a lower share in cohorts 64 or younger. In Maine, nearly 40 percent of the population with disabilities is over 64 years, more than double the comparable share of the general population (19 percent).

Adults with disabilities in Maine are less likely to be employed than adults without disabilities. Fewer than half work or seek work; the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities is three times that of other working age adults. From 2015 through 2019, 35 percent of working-age Mainers with disabilities were employed compared to 81 percent of those with no disability. Those who do work earn less than workers with no disability. Median earnings of workers with disabilities were $20,185 in a twelve-month period, compared to median earnings of $34,131 among workers with no disability. Adults with a disability are more likely to live in or near

poverty regardless of work status and are less likely to have postsecondary education than adults with no disability.[2]

As described in the labor market information reported earlier in this plan, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented disruptions in the labor market and there was a significant impact to workers with disabilities as well, many of whom have underlying medical conditions with greater risk to the virus. Although American Community Survey data for 2020 and 2021 was not available for this modification, there are some promising trends being seen in the Current Population Survey, which is a primary source of monthly labor force statistics used by the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics. As reported by the University of New Hampshire's (UNH) Center for Research on Disability at the end of 2021, the labor force participation of people with disabilities across the country has recovered from the pandemic-related slowdown and actually increased to above pre-pandemic levels. As remarked by Dr. Andrew Houtenville, UNH professor of economics and the research director, "These gains suggest that the restructuring resulting from the pandemic may be benefiting people with disabilities. Ironically, it may have taken a pandemic to shake the labor market loose for people with disabilities."

***The Commission on Disability and Employment (CDE*):**

The CDE was established by the Maine Legislature in 1997. It promotes collaboration with the public and private sectors to increase awareness of and influence policy related to employment for people with disabilities. Its members envision a Maine workforce that includes all people with disabilities employed in jobs that meet both their economic and personal needs. The CDE issues a formal annual report that includes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

WOMEN

In March 2021, the United States Census Bureau produced an issue brief[5] on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the full-time, year-round workforce. Using 2019 data from the American Community Survey and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Identifying "essential worker" occupations, women comprise 44 percent of the nation's full-time, year-round civilian workforce and 47 percent of all essential workers in the U.S.

According to the Maine Center for Economic Policy's (MECEP) State of Working Maine: 2021[6], 49 percent of workers in occupations considered high risk for contagion are women. Maine women comprise a majority of jobs in the sectors most impacted by the pandemic: leisure and hospitality, educational services (both private and public, K-12 and higher education), and healthcare and social assistance. According to the Maine Department of Labor's Center for Workforce Research and Information, Maine women accounted for 57 percent of the pandemic workers' jobs lost to Maine men's 43 percent[7]. As we enter the post-pandemic world of work, the negative effects on working women persist. MECEP's report further states, "Multiple pandemic-related factors are contributing to the decrease in labor force participation including fewer available job openings, personal safety concerns, school closures and hybrid learning models, and a lack of childcare.[8]"

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the overall gender wage gap for the full-time, year-round workforce is 82 percent[9]. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), using American Community Survey data, identifies the Maine gender wage gap at just over 83 percent[10].

The past two years have revealed well-known weaknesses in women's employment progress. Gender and racial wage inequity exist among workers within the same industries even when those workers have the same qualifications and experience. Those lower wages perpetuate inequity, as women and people of color are less able to build wealth than their white male peers. This gap is even wider for women of color working in Maine. In this state, according to the IWPR, for every dollar a White Man earns, a Black woman earns 65 cents; a Hispanic woman earns 69 cents, and an Asian or Native American woman earns 67 cents.

To address the recommendations made by the Women's Employment Committee in its prior reports and to ensure that women's concerns are addressed across all demographic and economic strata of Maine life, the State Workforce Board is undergoing a structural change that will weave the concerns of women across age, veteran status, disability, race, ethnicity, etc. throughout a new committee framework. In doing so, women's employment matters will be viewed and tackled across the broad spectrum of Maine's Jobs and Recovery Plan. In concert with WIOA and other partners, other state departments, and other women's policy and workforce organizations, Maine's workforce development system will widen its focus to complement Governor Mills' Jobs and Recovery Plan[11] by supporting Maine's small businesses, enhancing job training and skills programs leading to good paying careers, and investing in Maine's communities' and families by expanding the very supports that help women most—affordable housing, high quality child and family care, lifelong learning, accessible health care, transportation, internet, and other infrastructure.

Workforce development is an inherent component of our economic self-sufficiency and personal well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that a healthy economy depends on a healthy workforce. Health, itself, relies on an educated population with enough to eat; a safe home, work, and school environment; affordable health care; and reliable affordable transportation to and from the workplace.

In May 2021, the Women's Employment Committee drafted these recommendations to the State Workforce Board:

Education and Training:

- Ensure that women are included in shorter-term education and training programs that result in workforce skills and credentials and career pathways leading to higher paying jobs with benefits
- Provide opportunities for women to explore and enter non-traditional and STEM careers through Pre-Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, internships, and other work-based learning options
- Offer collaborative and comprehensive wraparound and whole family supports that help women succeed in education and training (digital access, scholarship and emergency assistance, intensive advising, health care, access to child and elder care, transportation, housing)

Employment/Self Employment:

- Create family friendly workplace policies and benefits, including family and medical leave, paid sick time, health insurance, retirement, flexible work options, support for education and advancement
- Support pay equity, including minimum and living wage increases
- Provide training and technical assistance to employers on building and sustaining a diverse Maine workforce (DEI)
- Offer opportunities for women to start and grow small businesses, including options within Unemployment Insurance

Financial Security

- Ensure that policies and systems that provide a social safety net and address poverty are coordinated and aligned, including public benefits and income supports, federal and state tax credits, asset limits
- Provide timely financial education and coaching, including access to free tax filing assistance and financial resources, such as scholarships and matched savings programs
- Ensure that those groups that face the most barriers to success in education and employment are provided equitable access and opportunity, including women with disabilities, Wabanaki women, immigrant and refugee women, women who have been incarcerated and are re-entering communities, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, among others

General Role of the Women's Employment Committee

- Communication and coordination with other Committees and State Workforce Board (Board liaison to Committees, regular Chair/staff meetings with opportunity to provide input to agendas, identify intersectionality of priority issues and outreach)
- Utilize Committees as resources to and integrate into SWB, Maine DOL, and other state workforce and economic development initiatives (WIOA Plan, Economic Recovery and State Economic Development planning, Maine DOL internal and external proposals/initiatives such as MaineSpark)
- Continued data collection and communication with regard to target populations (gender, race, ethnicity, disability, etc.)

These recommendations, the original and modified strategic objectives in Maine's Unified State Plan for 2020-2023, and the following recommendations from the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women 2020 Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Maine[12] will be the hub of our efforts.

Economic Security

- Eliminate the Wage Gap
- Provide incentives to employers to provide paid family and medical leave
- Ensure access to comprehensive, accessible, and affordable health care

- Ensure access to comprehensive, accessible, and child and family care
- Provide incentives, access, and support for women's educational and training programs
- Provide programs that help older Mainers work and stay at home in their communities, such as the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) and the Drugs for the Elderly Program (DEL)

Education

- Improve programs that promote college affordability and access, such as Parents As Scholars, Competitive Skills Scholarship Program, HOPE, prior learning assessments, etc.
- Redesign learning experiences in STEM education to accommodate the learning styles and interests of girls and women
- Examine and improve financial aid policies to eliminate reduction of student aid when outside awards are received
- Support rural expansion of public transportation and high-speed internet

Freedom from Violence

- Support policies and laws that address workplace sexual harassment
- Support and expand access to paid time off for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence

Health

- Continue to expand ways to provide low or no cost reproductive, dental, and behavioral health services

Needs of Underserved Women

- Request that data gathered by Maine DOL, DHHS, DECD, DOE, and other state funded agencies includes breakdowns of gender, race, age, income, and ethnicity
- Insure representation of under-represented populations on commissions, boards, committees
- Train service providers to understand communications with those who have intellectual and developmental disabilities

While these recommendations do not encompass all that is needed to address Maine women in the workforce, they provide an organized approach to better meet our needs and overcome our challenges in the next two years.

[1] Unequally Essential: Women and Gender Pay Gap During Covid19

[1] https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/State-of-Working-Maine-2021.pdf

[1] ImpactByGender2020.pdf (maine.gov)

[1] https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/COVID19_Recession&Recovery2021.pdf

[1] Highlights of women's earnings in 2020 : BLS Reports: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

[1] https://statusofwomendata.org/wp-content/themes/witsfull/factsheets/economics/factsheet-maine.pdf

[1] https://www.maine.gov/jobsplan/home

https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/PCSW2020.pdf

Rural Residents lacking reliable transportation

Maine is a geographically large, rural state in which those without affordable, reliable transportation face significant barriers to accessing occupational training and employment. Rural communities in the state's three regions have limited or non-existent public transportation services. The larger cities are served by municipal or regional bus services, but intercity bus links are limited. Stakeholders must work to identify new ways for rural Mainers to access workforce and educational resources. Some do not have access to high-speed internet and many lack basic computer literacy skills.

Workforce boards will work to promote the resources of Maine's public library system as a key partner in addressing this issue. Maine has over 266 public libraries, the smallest of them serving an island population and the largest serving urban hubs (Portland, Lewiston-Auburn, and Bangor). Libraries are vital centers of community access to technology and resources for online learning. Recent surveys reveal that 750,000 Mainers have a library card. Over 1.7 million high speed internet sessions took place through 230 libraries. (Each library has between 100 mbps to 1 gigabit of fiber connections.) Maine libraries offer safe, family welcoming environments where single parents can access job search resources with children in tow. They offer informal training in digital literacy from tools to set up email accounts (which are needed to register for labor exchange and file unemployment claims) to assisting with uploading resumes to various job sites.

In partnering with Maine's public library system, workforce providers can promote participant access to resources in the Digital Maine Library, specifically, the Career Preparation, Adult Skills and Computer Skills Center. The Digital Maine Library also provides access to "Career Transitions," an online resource for job seekers that assists them in finding sustainable employment. The Maine State Library invests state and federal dollars as well as money from the Maine MTEAF (Maine Telecommunications Access Fund) to provide a vast array of resources for all Maine citizens. The Career Preparation Center provides specific occupational practice tests that assess and provide online skill development through varied occupationally-specific tools that address readiness to enter careers from allied health to homeland security. Residents can also access tools that prepare them to pass high school equivalency exams such as the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) and post-secondary entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or Accuplacer.

Local Boards will develop agreements with regional libraries and, using best practices already available in state, engage in staff cross-training that will inform workforce system staff about

the resources libraries offer and how to promote these to their customers. Library staff, in turn, will become versed in promoting the programs and resources provided through CareerCenters.

When the CareerCenter closed in Waterville, the Waterville Library (Library) established an active partnership to provide access to career services and expertise from agencies such as the Augusta CareerCenter, New Ventures, the Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, Chambers of Commerce, local workforce boards. The Library has fully integrated and embedded workforce development as part of its mission and activities. The Library hosts itinerant staff from the Augusta CareerCenter who are able to provide employment and training services as well as a local job fair.

Many public libraries can assist members of the public who are not digitally literate, including those who either do not have access to or do not know how to navigate the internet or on-line resources. All partners must continue to engage in creating solutions because the need for this level of one-on-one digital guidance far outstrips the capacity of either library or CareerCenter staff to address alone.

The Maine State Library has partnered with the Drucker Institute to launch Bendable Maine in the summer of 2022. Bendable is a robust learning marketplace that will allow Maine residents of all ages to easily discover learning content that is just right for them. As it relates to workforce initiatives, Bendable is being developed through collaborations with employers, labor leaders, workforce development officials and others to ensure we provide learning opportunities that are truly relevant and in accord with Maine's 10-year Economic Development Strategy.

Older workers

Older workers in Maine face considerable barriers to employment. The median age in Maine is 44.6 years compared to the national average of 38.1. This segment of Maine's population is large and growing rapidly. In 2018, 21 percent of the population was over age 65; by 2036 this figure is expected to increase to 28 percent. As the first baby boomers reach traditional retirement age, labor force participation among older workers will increase. As increasing numbers age into their 70s and beyond, labor force participation is likely to decline. This initial increase presents an opportunity to find ways to capitalize on the skills and experience of older workers who continue to work, either in their current careers or in "encore" careers.

Proven strategies to engage older workers include educating employers about the benefits of hiring older workers who, as a cohort, are recognized for their expertise and skills, judgement, commitment to quality, and demonstrated work ethic. Older workers are valued for their flexibility regarding work hours, schedules, place and benefits, deferred retirement option plans, job sharing, and workplace accommodations.

The Older Workers Committee:

The work of the SWB's Older Workers Committee (OWC) will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meet. (see page 128)

Formerly Incarcerated

The formerly incarcerated often face barriers re-entering life outside of the corrections system. The Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) estimates it will release 6,000 prisoners from its facilities within the next five years. Based on the current population, at the time of their release, 31 percent of these individuals will have reading skills comparable to the middle school level and 76 percent will be similarly prepared in math.

Finding employment after release greatly reduces the likelihood that an individual will commit another crime. Workforce service providers assist those transitioning out of the corrections system to access job search assistance resources, but system partners will need to work more

closely with employers to identify ways they can best capitalize on this prospective labor pool. Evidence-based approaches will be promoted. Some local areas are currently launching projects that include provision of career services in pre-release and county jails that educate soon to be released inmates about job search and workforce training resources and that establish relationships between them and prospective employers. Maine is also working with employers to reduce concerns about hiring formerly incarcerated. Previous job fair–like events have been held at two Maine State Prison facilities. Employers who attended reported that it helped to better understand the system as well as the rehabilitation and education programs in which inmates participate. In addition, Maine is promoting the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the Federal Bonding Program as incentives to employers considering hiring justice-involved individuals. The MDOL and DOC recently agreed to a partnership where DOC staff will pre-certify for WOTC and issue Federal Bond vouchers to inmates as part of their release processing. These formerly incarcerated individuals will leave correctional facilities with documents offering incentives to employers who hire them.

During the First Session of the 130th Maine Legislature, Governor Mills signed 'An Act Relating to Fair Chance in Employment.' The law became effective in October of 2021. This new law prohibits employers from inquiring about an individual's criminal history on an initial employment application and from stating in employment advertisements that an individual with a criminal history may not apply.

An employer may inquire about a prospective employee's criminal history during an interview or once the prospective employee has been determined otherwise qualified for the position. If an employer inquires about a prospective employee's criminal record, the prospective employee, if still eligible for the position under applicable federal or state law, must be afforded an opportunity to explain the information and the circumstances regarding any convictions, including post-conviction rehabilitation.

There are exceptions if a background check is required or if it would be inappropriate for an individual with a certain criminal history to apply.

The intent of this new legislation is to open up employment opportunities to individuals who were formerly incarcerated. This bill adds to the work the Departments of Labor and Corrections are doing in order to help address barriers to employment for this section of the workforce.

DOC has also implemented registered apprenticeship programs in some of its facilities for both staff and inmates. They also work closely with the university and community college system in the provision of educational opportunities for inmates.

Younger workers

WIOA requires that all programs serve youth with significant barriers to employment or education, including: high school dropouts, pregnant or parenting, homeless or runaway youth, those subject to the criminal justice system, youth with disabilities, and low-income youth who are basic skills deficient or lack English proficiency. These are documentable barriers, but the youth that fall under these categories often cope with numerous additional challenges such as low aspirations, depression, substance use, unstable homes, lack of appropriate adult role models, family violence, neglect, abuse, rural isolation, lack of transportation, sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination, and an overall lack of basic work-readiness competencies.

Youth service providers will partner to assess the need for a full menu of youth-oriented services from attainment of high-school diploma to parenting skills, financial literacy and career counseling. Employers will be at the table to offer work experience, internships and adult role-modelling and will continue to be involved with occupational and career awareness activities like the youth academies offered in all three local areas that provide youth with numerous

youth service elements (career exploration, financial literacy, work experience, peer mentoring and more).

The Younger Worker Committee:

The work of the SWB's Younger Worker Committee will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meet. (see page 128)

Maine Children's Cabinet

The Maine Children's Cabinet plays a vital role in convening and facilitating coordination across state agencies and initiatives and policies that will improve and promote the healthy development of children and youth in Maine, including youth ages 14-24. Children's cabinet members include the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Labor, Public Safety, and Corrections. In collaboration with key staff from each of these agencies, the work of the Children's Cabinet is coordinated by staff in the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF).

Designated staff from the Departments comprising the Children's Cabinet meet twice monthly to maintain open communication about changes and developments in programming and policies across state agencies for children and youth, coordinate the implementation of specific strategies, and identify new opportunities to collaborate across programs to advance strategies and goals. The Children's Cabinet strategic plans lay out two overarching goals:

- All Maine children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed, and
- All Maine youth enter adulthood healthy and connected to the workforce and/or education.

The JVSG is a non-competitive, USDOL funded program that provides over $800,000 annually to Maine, supporting 11 full time staff positions. A mix of disabled veterans outreach program specialists and local veteran's employment representatives (LVERs) work out of one-stop CareerCenter offices. There is one LVER who serves as the state veterans program manager based at the central office in Augusta.

The Veterans' Employment Committee*:*

The work of the SWB's Veterans' Employment Committee will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meet. (see page 128)

The Hire-A-Vet campaign, which promotes the hiring of 100 veterans in 100 jobs with 100 employers in 100 days, will now be coordinated by the new SWB Worker Employment, Education, and Training Committee.

The 2021 campaign kicked off on August 26, 2021 with an in-person hiring fair at the Augusta Civic Center and ended on December 16, 2021, with a total of 217 veterans, including 42 women, and military family members being hired.

The average hourly wage of veterans hired was $24.12, an increase of $0.20 from the 2020 campaign. In 2021, 166 employers signed on to the campaign, and fourteen of the sixteen

counties in the state had veteran hires in them. During the campaign, 189 participants attended 11 educational programs to serve veteran and non-veteran job seekers and employers.

Employers have partnered to make the initiative a success and all goals have been exceeded each year. The campaign has connected nearly 750 employers with 1,000+ veteran-hires since its inception in 2015 and has been recognized as a best practice by the USDOL and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA).

Persons with language barriers

People who are foreign-born and for whom English is not their primary language typically face considerable barriers to employment in the United States. According to 2018 American Community Survey one-year estimates[14], approximately 3.5 percent of Mainers were born outside the United States. Of those, nearly one third entered the U.S. since 2010.

According to the American Community Survey, about 6 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home.

Persons with language barriers live throughout the state. However, clusters of foreign-born Mainers with language barriers are more prevalent in cities where services are more available, such as in Lewiston/Auburn, Greater Portland and Saco/Biddeford. According to the Maine Center for Economic Policy, in addition to New Mainers. Maine has a population of second-, third-, and even fourth-generation French-speaking Franco-Americans. Roughly 10 percent of adult Franco-Americans and Acadians in Maine do not have a high school diploma or equivalency and one in five has some college but no degree. Low English language proficiency among this population may account for some of these numbers. Even within the cities, the state does not have enough current resources available to meet the need for English language instruction.

The SWB, at its September 18, 2020 meeting, voted to establish the SWB Immigrant Workforce Committee. This committee was charged with working to identify issues and best practices regarding the recruitment, retention, and employment of immigrants in Maine and develop strategies to meet the needs of immigrant workers and Maine employers. The primary functions and duties of this committee are:

- Promote involvement of Maine's immigrant communities in establishment of workforce policies.
- Work with the SWB/MDOL, DOE, DHHS, DECD and other state agencies to establish a written strategic plan and subsequent policies (if necessary) to support immigrant workforce services. The plan should focus on the following:
    - Recruitment, retention, education (secondary, post-secondary, ESL), and employment;
    - Cultural considerations for businesses and potential employees impacting employment;
    - Licensing and credentialing; and
    - Funding.
- Develop benchmarks and baseline standards to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services for immigrants with barriers to employment.
- Improve communication with appropriate agencies, non-profits, the faith community, and other community-based organizations that already serve immigrants.

The work of the SWB's Immigrant Workforce Committee will be rolled into the new SWB Committee structure approved by the SWB at its December 10, 2021 meeting. (see page 128)

Individuals living in poverty and with low levels of education

Other people with barriers to employment in Maine include those who are low income with low levels of education. Estimates between 2015-2019 show twelve percent of the population lives in poverty. Nearly 35% of Black or African American alone and 30% of American Indian or Alaska Native alone lived under the poverty line. Nearly 25,000 Mainers over the age of 25 have less than a 9th grade education, with another 47,000 without a high school diploma. The State Workforce Board's (SWB) subcommittees focus on many of those populations who are statistically in poverty. Committee chairs are working across the committees in recognition that each constituent group is not mutually exclusive and many barriers to employment are crosscutting.

II.(b.3) Performance Goals

Title I Adult, Dislocated worker and Youth

9: Adult Performance Goals PY2022 & py2023

ADULT Proposed levels	**2022**	**2023**
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	69.05%	70.03%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	65.81%	66.90%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	$6,599	$6,750
Credential Attainment Rate	66.19%	67.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.85%	48.05%

PY2022 & py2023

DISLOCATED WORKER Proposed Levels	**2022**	**2023**
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	72.03%	73.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	76.42%	77.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	$8,900	$8,950
Credential Attainment Rate	65.48%	66.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	55.45%	56.0%

14: Youth Performance Goals PY2022& PY2023

YOUTH Proposed Levels	2022	2023
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	67.55%	68.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	69.33%	70.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	$4,000	$4,050
Credential Attainment Rate	55.88%	56.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	50.00%	51.0%

Title II Adult EduCation

3

	Program Year: 2022 Expected Level	Program Year: 2022 Negotiated Level	Program Year: 2023 Expected Level	Program Year: 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	36.00%		37.00%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit	34.00%		35.00%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4,750.00		$5,000.00	
Credential Attainment Rate	34.00%		35.00%	
Measurable Skill Gains	38.00%		39.00%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Title III – Wagner-Peyser

	Program Year: 2020 Expected Level	**Program Year: 2020 Negotiated Level**	**Program Year: 2021 Expected Level**	**Program Year: 2021 Negotiated Level**
Employment Q2 after exit	67%		68%	

	Program Year: 2020 Expected Level	Program Year: 2020 Negotiated Level	Program Year: 2021 Expected Level	Program Year: 2021 Negotiated Level
Employment Q4 after exit	65%		66%	
Median Earnings Q2 after exit	$5,350		$5,600	

Title IV Programs—Vocational Rehabilitation

Within the MDOL's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Maine has two federally designated state units, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), which deliver vocational rehabilitation (VR) services.

For the first two years of the 2020-2023 Unified State Plan, DVR and DBVI have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator and thus have identified an initial expected level of performance on that measure only from which to negotiate with the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The following indicators will be designated as "baseline" for VR programs in PY 2020 and PY 2021:

- Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)
- Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)
- Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)
- Credential Attainment Rate

	Program Year: 2020 Expected Level	Program Year: 2020 Negotiated Level	Program Year: 2021 Expected Level	Program Year: 2021 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Credential Attainment Rate	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Measurable Skill Gains	33.8%	33.8%	33.8%	35%

Table 18: Vocational Rehabilitation; Performance Goals PY2022 and PY2023

	Program Year: 2022 Expected Level	**Program Year: 2022 Negotiated Level**	**Program Year: 2023 Expected Level**	**Program Year: 2023 Negotiated Level**
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	44%		45%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	43%		44%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit	$4,325		$4,541	
Credential Attainment Rate	34%		35%	
Measurable Skill Gains	48%		49%	

II.(b.4) Assessment

A State Plan Implementation Steering Committee tracks progress towards the goals set out in the unified plan. The committee is comprised of representatives of the core programs and local board directors. As part of their work, they will continue to monitor the employment of untapped labor pools. For example, the committee will use tools like the American Community Survey for monitoring the employment of people with disabilities.

The state's economic plan identifies targets of increasing the annual wage by 10 percent and increasing the value of products sold per worker by 10 percent as measures of increased performance of workforce and economic development.

Members of the steering committee also participate in MaineSpark, an initiative striving to have 60 percent of Maine's workforce have a credential of value by 2025. The State Board has been tasked with making an annual report on this goal to the joint standing committees on education and cultural affairs and labor, business, research and economic development.

The State Board will continue to monitor and advise the Governor and the State on progress towards meeting employer needs.

Each core program monitors achievement of its negotiated performance measures and reports these to our federal partners annually.

C. STATE STRATEGY

Stakeholders of the workforce development system and state agencies with responsibility for the administration of core programs developed strategic objectives to achieve the state's vision and goals. These strategies reflect Maine's unique economic, workforce, and workforce

development characteristics; focus on delivering greater value to customers; and target opportunities for greater alignment between programs and increased system-wide efficiencies. Maine's strategic objectives are discussed below and more fully elaborated throughout this document.

Aligning with Maine's Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029, the Unified State Plan seeks to partner economic development with workforce development. The Economic Development Strategy identifies renewable energy (solar, wind, bio-fuel), sustainable fishing, aquaculture and bio-based products as sectors which will be areas of focus for the next 10 years. Coupling that with Maine's already growing needs in health care and manufacturing, workforce and economic development will be partnering to address the needs of established and emerging industries. Being a large, rural state, local workforce boards will be identifying local industry sectors as areas of focus as well.

Maine's strategy is three pronged to support employers, constituents and develop a sustainable system of growth for both of these important customers. The Strategic Objectives outlined below provide the framework and guiding principles of the implementation plan in III.a State Strategy Implementation.

Partner and Respond to Business Talent Needs

For Maine's economy to flourish, employers must have a ready supply of capable and skilled workers. Maine's strategic objectives begin with the recognition that the system must place business and residents at the center and construct programs designed to support them rather than placing programs at the center and requiring business and residents to manage the programs.

Specifically, Maine will:

1. Align and coordinate with economic development efforts to anticipate and prepare for the next generation of talent requirements by executing a joint business engagement strategy and continual cross-agency communication on business needs and opportunities
2. Work across state agencies to coordinate business marketing, outreach, and engagement efforts to streamline business access to services and talent
3. Establish strategy for regular engagement with regional business groups, industry associations to ensure alignment of education and training services with employer demand, with a focus on priority industries in Maine
4. Identify strategies to leverage private sector investment in training their workforce, including apprenticeships and other work-based learning approaches, advancement strategies, and an employer of choice designation for businesses offering quality jobs

The success of Maine's economy will ultimately be determined by the strength and quality of its workforce. As part of this unified plan, Maine will build its workforce using a multi-faceted approach.

Specifically, Maine will:

1. Align all public programs and funding that support Maine residents to increase their skills and education into a seamless continuum of programs and supports, with a focus on career pathways for in-demand occupations

2. Implement and expand best-in-class strategies to build worker skills and education and success through long-term engagement of residents, including:
    a. Career pathways that are employer-defined with clear handoffs and connections throughout
    b. Work-based learning, apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, and other strategies that support earning and learning together
    c. Work-readiness skill development throughout lifelong learning process
    d. A concierge service across state agency, non-profit and higher education portals to create a "no wrong door" approach that networks existing capacity together
3. Establish coordinated, networked and targeted strategies to engage untapped talent for high-priority populations with specific employment goals for each population, including:
    a. Families, using a two-generation approach that prepares both the current and future workforce for success
    b. Youth and young adults both in and out of school and work
    c. Veterans
    d. Individuals with disabilities
    e. Residents recovering from opioids
    f. Re-entering citizens
    g. New Mainers
    h. Rural Maine residents, including telecommuting and remote work strategies
    i. Older adults
4. Recognize and integrate essential work supports with workforce system to support workplace success, including child care, transportation, mental health and other services; identify and address gaps in work supports

Businesses

To achieve this objective, the core programs will employ a range of strategies that focus on alignment and integration of systems, services and operations.

Specifically, Maine will:

1. Establish coordinated infrastructure across public and private agencies with education and workforce programs and align along career pathways and within sectors with a focus on high priority populations that is responsive to changing business and resident needs
2. Re-brand and re-market the newly defined and expanded workforce system as a transparent and easily accessible system
3. Utilize data effectively through a common set of metrics across state agencies and move to an integrated data system
4. Leverage funding to expand the capacity of the workforce system through private sector investments, competitive federal procurements and untapped funding sources; braid

funds to support seamless service provision and partner with philanthropy to seed innovation

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT INITIATIVES AND HOW THEY ARE ADDRESSING CURRENT RECOVERY NEEDS IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

The Department of Labor has several ARPA initiatives that would address disparities in the workforce system for those who are unemployed, underemployed, or a part of target groups that statewide partners are trying to break down barriers to work and career development. The work being done by the Department includes cross-bureau action as well as coordination with other state agencies. Work of the Department to address disparity through ARPA initiatives can be broken down into the following themes:

- Economic Recovery
- Employer/Business Supports
- Training
- Jobseeker Navigation and Supports
- Healthcare
- Workforce Recruitment
- Equity
- Economic Analysis

Further, the Department of Education Office of Adult Education has several additional ARPA initiatives that address issues surrounding access and equity relative to the needs of populations and business sectors disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. These eligible populations suffered detrimental consequences of the pandemic and have been the slowest groups to benefit from recovery efforts. Adults and/or employers who do not meet eligibility requirements to be served by these funds will be referred for appropriate services funded by other sources.

Eligible Populations

- Low socio-economic status -Unemployed/Underemployed
- Women
- English language learners
- Members of communities of color
- Low levels of literacy

Eligible Business Sectors

- Lodging
- Restaurants
- Manufacturing
- Retail

- Healthcare

Initiatives and their descriptions:

Unemployment Insurance Initiatives

Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund Recovery

During the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased the need for unemployment benefits and substantially reduced the balance of the unemployment trust fund. The fund balance is a key factor in determining employers' unemployment tax rates for the subsequent calendar year. In 2020, Governor Mills authorized the transfer of $294 million on Coronavirus Relief Funds to the unemployment trust fund. This significantly reduced the tax increase for calendar year 2021. Similarly, Governor Mills and the Maine Legislature fully supported a transfer of funds in 2021 to reduce the unemployment tax increase for calendar year 2022.

Education & Training

Competitive Skills Scholarship Program Investment

The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) provides eligible applicants with financial support for education and training for High-Wage, In-Demand (HWID) Maine jobs. This funding will allow for the expansion of the current program to serve additional residents with an enhanced focus on individuals whose employment was impacted by COVID by intentionally targeting outreach to those who recently collected unemployment benefits. We are working with Maine Community College System and Adult Ed partners to identify short-term trainings that result in a postsecondary certificate, undergraduate degree, or industry recognized credential, leading to employment in HWID occupations. In addition to the financial support for tuition and fees that are not paid from other sources, including federal financial aid, the grant may also pay for other supports while a student is in training including childcare, transportation, books, supplies, equipment, and remedial and prerequisite training. In situations where a student fails to gain employment after successful completion of their training, an On-the-Job Training option could be introduced, making a direct connection to employment for the program participant.

Healthcare workforce initiatives

Tuition Remission

The Training for Incumbent Health Workers program will help people who work in the health care field gain skills and advance with their employer by providing financial support to attain advanced health care credentials. The ability to earn credentials while on the job will allow health care workers to advance in the profession, leading to better paying jobs for them and improved health care services for Maine people. The program lowers barriers to training and education by providing the training free of charge to interested employees – as opposed to tuition reimbursement which requires upfront, out-of-pocket spending. Further, by investing in training and credential attainment for incumbent frontline health care workers, the program will help improve retention rates and increase the average wage among health care workers. The program will work with employers across sectors and sizes—including long term care, hospital, behavioral health and dental sectors. The program will initially focus on technical training and may eventually also support emerging needs for foundational skills education, English Language Learning, and credential evaluation to support workers from priority communities (such as New Mainers, those with lower educational attainment, or those with additional barriers to next-level credential attainment).

Healthcare Navigators

Health Care Career Navigators will provide customized career guidance – including the creation of person-specific employment and training plans, help navigating available training opportunities, assistance with evaluation and translation of prior credentials, and referrals for health care job and apprenticeship opportunities – to help introduce people into health care jobs. These navigators will be housed within the Maine Department of Labor's CareerCenters and will work closely with employers and community-based partners to connect jobseekers with opportunities. Navigators will also help out-of-state and foreign-trained professionals translate credentials, access licensing, and learn how prior training may apply to health care jobs in Maine.

Healthcare Recruitment Efforts

Nearly 4.6 million direct care workers—including personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants—provide daily support to older adults and people with disabilities across a range of settings in the United States, predominantly in long-term care (LTC). As the population grows older and drives up demand for LTC, the sector continues its decades-long struggle to fill direct care positions and stabilize this essential workforce. The Maine Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Economic and Community Development have partnered to launch a public service campaign to promote the value and importance of the health care profession with the goal of recruiting more people, especially young adults, into the field. The effort, which spans social media and radio and include a dedicated website, will market health care as a meaningful, rewarding career that provides incredible opportunity for advancement and good pay and benefits. An allocation of this funding will be specifically dedicated to promote direct care jobs as a great opportunity for career advancement, aimed intentionally at increasing workforce participation in direct care jobs among immigrants, individuals with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and older adults.

Apprenticeship

Youth Pre-apprenticeship Programs

The Maine Apprenticeship Program is leveraging ARPA and additional federal grant funds to accomplish the following three goals: 1: Expand high-quality pre & apprenticeships; 2: Increase number of under-represented workers in apprenticeship; 3: Develop an integrated & effective statewide apprenticeship system. A core strategy of apprenticeship expansion will be partnering with Maine's businesses and industry associations, unions, education and training providers, and community-based organizations to develop new pre-apprenticeship programs. High-quality pre-apprenticeship programs provide foundational job and soft-skill training necessary to bridge trainees to successful employment as apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship programs can be delivered through high schools, adult education providers, community colleges, labor organizations, community-based organizations or workforce agencies. These initiatives will be targeted at youth (ages 16 – 24) at Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, high schools and out-of-school youth in need of a connection to gainful employment leading to financial stability and professional success.

Apprenticeship programs for key sectors

The Maine Apprenticeship Program is leveraging ARPA and additional federal grant funds to accomplish the following three goals: 1: Expand high-quality pre & apprenticeships; 2: Increase number of under-represented workers in apprenticeship; 3: Develop an integrated & effective statewide apprenticeship system. A core strategy of apprenticeship expansion will be partnering with Maine's businesses and industry associations, unions, education and training providers, and community-based organizations to develop new pre-apprenticeship programs. High-quality pre-apprenticeship programs provide foundational job and soft-skill training necessary to bridge trainees to successful employment as apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship

programs can be delivered through high schools, adult education providers, community colleges, labor organizations, community-based organizations or workforce agencies. These initiatives will be targeted at youth (ages 16 – 24) at Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, high schools and out-of-school youth in need of a connection to gainful employment leading to financial stability and professional success.

Jobseeker navigation & direct supports

Peer workforce navigation pilot

The Maine Department of Labor is seeking to partner with community-based organizations, worker groups, labor unions, or other non-profit organizations with deep ties to underserved and under-represented communities within the workforce in order to develop a peer workforce navigator pilot program that connects individuals disproportionately affected by COVID-19 with employment, skills development, and basic needs support resources, such as unemployment benefits. The Department is especially focused on increasing access to employment opportunities and basic needs resources among communities most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis including immigrants, individuals with limited English proficiency, inexperienced and untrained individuals, low-income and homeless individuals, individuals who have been out of the workforce for an extended period, individuals with low literacy and individuals with disabilities.

Worker's Fund

Many job seekers find themselves running into barriers during a job search or re-engaging in the workforce. COVID-19 added a layer of uncertainty and instability to the overall labor market, especially among communities hardest hit. Return to work options are challenged due to employer closures, downsizing, lack of access to child/family care, inconsistent schedules of in-person vs. remote schooling due to COVID spread, health and safety concerns, lack of funds to obtain job credentials/requirements and rising costs and difficult choices in providing essential basic living needs. Existing benefit programs offer limited coverage or are not accessible to all. The Workers Fund would seek to serve individuals among high-need populations, including disconnected individuals from the workforce and/or education system, unemployed workers seeking work, long-term unemployed (6 months or more) and individuals from priority communities - low income, disability, rural, veterans, BIPOC, women, justice-involved or in recovery. Funds would be accessed in one-time mini-grants to address clearly defined needs that prevents an individual from achieving employment success. Funds might be used to address barriers related to car repair, credential translation, driver's license fee, etc. Individuals would apply for funds via a centralized portal or through a referring service provider able to offer quick fund access to meet the barrier need and return people to the workforce.

CareerCenter Consultants

The ARPA resources will expand capacity by hiring additional outreach workers who will provide intensive services to unemployed and underemployed job seekers—with a specific emphasis on communities that experienced disproportionate effects of COVID-19—including BIPOC communities, those with lower educational attainment, justice-involved, immigrant communities, and more. Outreach workers will be out in the community developing relationships with community members by meeting them where they are—in libraries, schools, public spaces, or other settings. Job seekers will get help overcoming skill deficiencies, accessing supports to overcome barriers such as childcare and transportation, and an opportunity to receive continued follow-up support and guidance as they find suitable employment and start in new jobs.

Integrated Workforce Portal

Workers, employers, and service provider partners have voiced the desire for an easier way to connect to programs, resources and supports within the broad workforce system. To ensure individuals most affected by COVID are able to connect to much-needed supports and job opportunities—and help employers connect more easily with supports, programs, and jobseekers - funding will be used to develop a centralized online career portal, to include career exploration, training, employment, and support services, and to brand and market Maine's workforce system so that it is recognized as transparent and easily accessible. Workers and employers alike don't know the extent of the resources available to them or how to access them. Communities facing existing barriers—particularly those disproportionately affected by COVID-19 with higher unemployment rates including BIPOC communities, older adults, English language learners and individuals with disabilities--find themselves shut out of systems by technology they don't understand, bouncing between websites they can't navigate. Maine's career portal will be designed keeping specific constituent journeys in mind – with specific emphasis on these priority communities and industries most affected by COVID- to provide them a simple user-friendly way to access available jobs, workforce trainings, and other needed resources. The career portal will be concierge service connecting across state agency, training providers, adult and higher education sites, creating a "no wrong door" approach for Maine workers and employers.

Employer Supports with workforce development

Expand Progressive Employment

Maine's Progressive Employment Program offers a flexible and gradual approach to employment for individuals with disabilities. The approach emphasizes creating value for employers as well as individuals, resulting in increased workplace readiness, more supportive work environments, and increased worker and employer satisfaction. Through MJRP funds, MDOL will scale this successful Progressive Employment model with two additional communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and facing significant barriers to employment – individuals who are justice involved and those in recovery.

Worker Opportunity Tax Credit program capacity

The federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program provides tax credits to employers who hire individuals that face serious barriers to finding employment, from populations most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals include long-term unemployed individuals, unemployed veterans, low-wage workers, justice-involved individuals, and workers in certain rural counties—all of which were negatively affected by COVID. This funding will create additional capacity to process employer applications to take advantage of this program. Expediting the processing of applications filed by the employers will serve as a catalyst in ensuring that the targeted population (individuals disproportionately affected due to COVID-19) becomes gainfully employed at a faster rate.

Industry Partnerships

By taking a sector-based workforce development approach that organizes industries in Maine disrupted by COVID-19, and that are vital to economic recovery in communities impacted by COVID, DOL will support those industries' recovery and enable employers and industries to leverage ARPA and other funds across Maine's workforce system to create pathways to quality jobs. The Industry Partnerships Initiative seeks to identify, support and help grow workforce collaboratives in strategic sectors of the state's economy—composed of businesses, employers, workers, labor unions, and/or industry associations. Leveraging ARPA funds, these workforce collaboratives will identify shared workforce development needs related to recruitment, training and education, retaining and advancing workers—and develop solutions to address these shared challenges.

Education and Employment Seeker Supports

Career Advancement and Navigator Supports

These adult education-based navigators will serve primarily in geographic areas of the state with less access to post-secondary and other educational opportunities as well as support services. These areas include the counties of York, Kennebec, Androscoggin, Oxford, Lincoln, Waldo, Knox, and Sagadahoc. Navigators will be expected to work very collaboratively with workforce system partners and be out in the communities. Through a thorough intake process including academic, English language proficiency (if appropriate) assessments and workforce interests and potential inventories, navigators will guide eligible adults in the identification of a career pathways, assess academic levels and administer and interpret work interests and preferences potentials, development of personal career plans, procurement of any needed education, learning supports, skills acquisition, licensures or other preparation need for their next steps regarding education and employment. Navigators will also create partnerships with eligible employers and industry -specific trade associations to identify and develop programming regarding job and foundational skills needed amongst their workforce. This is a 2-year pilot program.

College and Career Success Coordinators

A success coordinator will be placed on each of the seven community college campuses. Coordinators will be responsive to the needs of current and perspective eligible community college students who may need additional assistance with foundational skills to successfully complete college level work. Assistance will also be provided to eligible adult education students to make a successful transition to community college. Services for these students may take place on the campus or at an adult education facility. Coordinators will collaborate with adult education and community college advisors and staff to make appropriate referrals of learners who may not be quite ready for college level work or at risk of being unsuccessful in their classes. This collaborative approach will extend to adult education success coordinators working with adult education navigators as well as with navigators and consultants employed by other workforce agencies, including the CareerCenter, and the MaineSpark Navigator and those working in workforce training and post-secondary institutions. Enhanced communication streams are essential for the coordinated delivery of education, workforce training and support services. These campus success coordinators will play an important student support role in the upcoming implementation of Ability to Benefit.

Education and Training Grants

English language acquisition

Many adult education providers struggle with inadequate resources to offer enough English language acquisition courses to meet the increasing statewide need. While some programs lack the resources to increase the number of courses, other programs must develop programs as English language learners move beyond the urban centers of Portland and Lewiston in search of employment and housing.

This federal funding, awarded through a statewide competitive grant process for adult education providers, will enable programs statewide to provide English language acquisition services to best meet needs appropriate for their communities and eligible employers. Barriers to employment and education faced by English language learners have severely impacted their recovery from COVID-19's financial impacts and will be addressed by all three grant opportunities.

- Basic English language acquisition – This funding focuses on providing and/or increasing English language acquisition courses to promote availability and access.
- Contextualized English acquisition– This funding on workforce preparation for English language learners. Classes will be developed to prepare learners to enter eligible

industries. With employer input, vocabulary will be aligned with targeted industry needs. Courses will include employability skills as well to accelerate participants' readiness for entering the workforce.

Employment Training

Workforce Training - This funding focuses on engaging with eligible employers to develop and deliver training that addresses their specific workforce development needs for potential and incumbent workers. These programs may involve a single employer or several employers from the same eligible industry sector. Programs involving English language learners will also include cultural awareness.

Evaluation

Evaluation staff (statistician and economic research analyst)

A number of workforce initiatives that DOL is leading and supporting in collaboration with other State agency partners are aimed at advancing three key goals: 1) increasing the number of individuals connected to jobs in Maine, 2) increasing the attainment of credentials of value, and 3) increasing the average wage among Mainers. It is imperative to track the success of the workforce initiatives in accordance with these goals—and look at disaggregated data to ensure those communities and industries most affected by COVID-19 are targeted, engaged and realize the benefits of the investments. Several programs are pilot efforts where learning what worked and what didn't is particularly essential as DOL and other State agencies seek to sustain the impact of these investment. This funding will provide funding for two additional evaluation staff to analyze the outcomes and effectiveness of the workforce ARPA initiatives within DOL by conducting an evaluation.

Table 19, Initiatives and funding for MJRP/ARPA initiatives.

Initiative	Administrating Agency	Budgeted Amount 2021-22	Budgeted Amount 2022-23	Total Budgeted Amount
Unemployment Compensation	DOL	80,000,000	0	80,000,000
Healthcare Tuition Remission	DOL	425,000	850,000	1,275,000
Foreign-Trained Health Care Workers	DOL	200,000	400,000	600,000
Training and Stackable Credentials	DOL	1,575,000	5,650,000	7,225,000
Healthcare Career Pathways	DOL	900,000	1,800,000	2,700,000
Campaign to Promote Direct Care Careers	DOL	500,000	0	500,000
ARPA Statistician	DOL	100,000	200,000	300,000
Clean Energy Apprenticeships	DOL	500,000	1,000,000	1,500,000
Youth Pre-apprenticeship	DOL	1,000,000	2,000,000	3,000,000

Initiative	Administrating Agency	Budgeted Amount 2021-22	Budgeted Amount 2022-23	Total Budgeted Amount
Programs				
Basic Needs for Underserved Communities	DOL	500,000	500,000	1,000,000
Expand Progressive Employment Program	DOL	500,000	500,000	1,000,000
Career Center Consultants - Workforce	DOL	360,000	740,000	1,100,000
Apprenticeships to Facilitate Economic Recovery	DOL	1,750,000	2,250,000	4,000,000
Connecting Workforce to Jobs	DOL	1,800,000	1,900,000	3,700,000
Competitive Skills Scholarships	DOL	500,000	1,000,000	1,500,000
Improve Career & Industry Awareness	DOL	1,700,000	2,000,000	3,700,000
Eligibility Specialist	DOL	200,000	200,000	400,000
Senior Economic Research Analyst	DOL	250,000	350,000	600,000
Career Center Consultants	DOL	1,249,781	1,302,565	2,552,346

The Maine Jobs and Recovery Act initiatives funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 represent amounts that are one-time funding.

III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

Maine's State Workforce Board meets the WIOA state board composition requirements and will implement the functions under section 101 (d) of WIOA. The State Workforce Board will assist the Governor in:

1. The development, implementation, and modification of the state plan

2. The review of state policies and programs and recommendations on actions to align programs to support a streamlined system, including the review and provision of comments on the State Plans, if any, for programs and activities of one-stop partners that are not core programs

3. The development and continuous improvement of the workforce system, including:

a. The identification of barriers and means to remove them to better coordinate, align, and avoid duplication among programs and activities carried out through the system
b. The development of strategies to support use of career pathways for the purpose of providing individuals, including low-skilled adults, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, with workforce investment activities, education and supportive services to enter or retain employment
c. The development of strategies for providing effective outreach to and improved access for individuals and employers who could benefit from services provided through the workforce development system
d. The development and expansion of strategies for meeting the needs of employers, workers, and jobseekers, particularly through industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations
e. The identification of regions, including planning regions, for the purposes of sec 106(a) and the designation of local areas under section 106, after consultation with local boards and chief elected officials
f. The development and continuous improvement of the one-stop delivery system in local areas, including providing assistance with planning and delivering services
g. The development of strategies to support staff training and awareness across programs supported under the workforce development system

4. The development and updating of comprehensive state performance accountability measures, including state adjusted levels of performance, to assess effectiveness of core programs in the state as required under section 116(b)

5. The identification and dissemination of information on best practices, including best practices for:

a. The effective operation of one-stop centers, relating to the use of business outreach, partnerships, and service delivery strategies, including strategies for serving individuals with barriers to employment
b. The development of effective local boards, which may include information on factors that contribute to enabling local boards to exceed negotiated local levels of performance, sustain fiscal integrity, and achieve other measures of effectiveness, and
c. Effective training programs that respond to real-time labor market analysis, effectively use direct assessment and prior learning assessment to measure an individual's prior knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences, and that evaluate such skills and competencies for adaptability to support efficient placement into employment or career pathways

6. The development and review of statewide policies affecting the coordinated provision of services through the state's one-stop system described in sec 121(e), including the development of:

a. Objective criteria and procedures for use by local boards in assessing the effectiveness and continuous improvement of one-stop centers
b. Guidance for the allocation of one-stop center infrastructure funds under sec 121(h)
c. Policies relating to the appropriate roles and contributions of entities carrying out one-stop partner programs within the one-stop delivery system, including approaches to facilitating equitable and efficient cost allocation of such system

7. The development of strategies for technological improvements to facilitate access and improve the quality of services and activities provided through the one-stop system, including improvements to:

a. Enhance digital literacy skills (as defined in sec 202 of the Museum and Library Services Act (20 U.S.C. 9101), referred to in this Act as "digital literacy skills")
b. Accelerate participants' acquisition of skills and recognized postsecondary credentials

c. Strengthen the professional development of providers and workforce professionals
d. Ensure technology is accessible to individuals with disabilities and individuals residing in remote areas

8. The development of strategies for aligning technology and data systems across one-stop partner programs to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies in reporting on performance accountability measures. This includes the design and implementation of common intake, data collection, and case management information, and performance accountability measurement and reporting processes, and the incorporation of local input into such design and implementation, to improve coordination of services across one-stop partner programs

9. The development of allocation formulas for fund distribution to local areas for employment and training activities for adults and youth workforce investment activities as permitted under sections 128(b)(3) and 133(b)(3)

10. The preparation of annual reports described in paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 116(d)

11. The development of the statewide workforce and labor market information system described in section 15(e) of the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 491-2(e)

12. The development of policies that promote statewide objectives for, and enhance the performance of, the workforce development system in the state.

Board membership complies with WIOA-required percentages of business and workforce representatives, government and state agency representatives, and representatives from community-based organizations.

Board membership was expanded in 2019 to include a third county commissioner to ensure representation from each local workforce area. Additionally, legislation was passed to add a seat representing the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) to the board (26 MRSA §2006, sub-§2-A). While the DECD representative had previously participated as an advisory member, this legislation codified their role on the board as a voting member. With the addition of these members, new employers and workforce partners were also added to the board to ensure it meets the employer majority and at least 20 percent workforce member requirements.

This same legislation also made members of the State Workforce Board subject to review by the joint standing committee of the legislature having jurisdiction over labor matters, and confirmation by the Legislature.

The board benefits from additional input from the Commissioners of Health & Human Services, Corrections, and Transportation, as well as representatives of the Maine Community College and the University of Maine systems.

The State Workforce Board meets quarterly and decisions are made by a vote of the majority present as articulated in the State Workforce Board by-laws. The by-laws also require a quorum of at least 50 percent of the appointed members and at least 50 percent of the quorum being business representatives.

The State Workforce Board is funded by the Maine Department of Labor and staffed by a director, a workforce development program coordinator and a labor program specialist.

It has six constituent committees that make recommendations to the board about service delivery and policy: Apprenticeship, Commission on Disability & Employment, Older Workers, Veterans, Women's Employment, and Younger Workers. These committees meet four to eight times annually. State Workforce Board members are active on the Youth, Veterans and Commission on Disability and Employment. Other committees are working on enhancing their membership and identifying State Workforce Board members to participate on the

committees. To ensure continuity between the larger board and committees, the State is integrating regular committee updates into Board meetings as well. As the State moves to implement the State Plan, committees will be instrumental in participating in the activities and providing feedback on implementation. The State Workforce Board staff also sit on the State Rehabilitation Councils for the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The State Workforce Board is in the process of implementing a process of providing updates to Board members between meetings. During the recent Covid-19 pandemic, updates were being provided on at least a weekly basis, at times, daily, and the intent is that updates will continue on at least a monthly basis when businesses reopen and information slows.

The State Workforce Board and the State Workforce Agency (SWA - Maine Department of Labor) will work together to establish and convene workgroups that focus on required implementation and service delivery components of WIOA.

Working closely with the SWA, core program staff and the workgroups, the State Workforce Board will fulfill its responsibilities to assist the Governor with all the required functions in section 101(d) of WIOA.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

A. CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE STATE'S STRATEGY

Workforce Development Infrastructure

Commissioners of the core programs are represented on the State Workforce Board. This ensures a level of equal representation and collaboration to initiate state-level system changes. The State Workforce Board also has the WIOA Implementation Policy Committee (WIPC). This committee is made up of the program directors of the core partner agencies and executive directors of the local workforce boards. This group generates and examines policies to meet WIOA requirements and guide program alignment. System-facing policies are presented to the State Workforce Board for consideration and validation.

The WIOA Program Partner Committee, made up of the lead administrators of all WIOA-required partners and leads from additional partner agencies, is convened on an as-needed basis to inform the board and/or work in collaboration to implement the goals of WIOA. Partners have made commitments to achieving an integrated and seamless workforce system through a written memoranda of understanding that provides the framework for how partners collaborate to serve workforce participants and employers. Partners will develop policies and procedures that improve shared customer flow.

The core partners recognize it important that employees and clients of their agencies understand the vision, the services available to users of the system, and the role and responsibilities of each partner relative to the success of the vision. To that end, they will:

- Work together with the local area one-stop operators to create and disseminate a common message about Maine's workforce development system
- Provide extensive professional development and cross-training between workforce partners so each can deliver a consistent message on services and practices (i.e. data/resources, recruiting, training opportunities, retention, educational opportunities, layoff assistance)
- Ensure agency points of contact have a broad knowledge and can be responsive and effective in connecting customers with workforce resources

- Contribute to informational websites for external stakeholders
- Develop marketing materials that highlight a collaborative approach to service delivery
- Post partner information on each other's website
- Create and disseminate marketing materials in alternate formats that are accessible to individuals with disabilities and reflect cultural competence
- Create and disseminate educational materials for employers regarding the benefits of employing priority populations, including veterans, older adults, youth, individuals with disabilities, formerly incarcerated, and New Mainers, paying specific attention to the needs of small businesses in rural areas of the state
- Use the compilation of data and evaluation with rapid cycle metrics as the cornerstones to increase the effectiveness of Maine's workforce development system. The core programs are committed to sharing data as allowed by law with vigilance regarding confidentiality and information security. The partners will establish mechanisms for tracking benchmark performance indicators. MaineEARNS and W.O.R.K. Services are two examples of activities involving the core programs that will help analyze and improve Maine's workforce development system.

Industry Outreach

Developing and sustaining close relationships with employers is essential to coordinating integrated responses to their needs. Using input from employers, the system will develop education and training programs to equip existing and future workers with necessary skills and align education and training programs that support industry-identified career pathways.

Employers will be engaged as system partners in a variety of ways to identify skill needs, validate stackable credentials, and act as training providers of work-based learning activities such as work-experience, on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeship, and customized training.

Business partners will be engaged at both the state and regional levels, through utilization and implementation of ongoing employer assistance initiatives such as the State Workforce Assistance Team (SWAT), a team made up of partners from education, workforce development, and economic development, and through strategic meetings with industry and trade associations and business-led forums.

A collaborative outreach campaign will be developed with involvement of workforce resource partners, education and training providers, and economic development entities. The outreach campaign will include development and delivery of oral presentations and marketing tools collaboratively created by the partners. They will present an easy to access, seamless system of employer services that blend workforce, education, and economic development resources in response to business needs. Recognizing the needs of employers to attract and retain a diverse talent pool, resources will include proven strategies and best practices in building an inclusive workforce.

Implement direct contact with businesses and their representatives.

State and local boards and business outreach team leads will generate the input and involvement of employers through:

- Meeting with individual businesses at local, regional, and state levels
- Hosting and/or attending regional industry forums that address workforce development needs

- Strategic planning and formal communications with industry and trade associations
- Events sponsored by state and local workforce boards
- Employer advisory committees to the Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, Maine Community Colleges, and the University of Maine system
- Chambers of Commerce and the Maine Workplace & Disability Connection

Lifelong Learning and Employment

Many Maine employers have identified an immediate need for skilled workers. Concurrently, many Maine adults with the need for employment do not have the time or means to enter traditional training programs or to commit to earning two or four-year degrees. Both employers and workers need alternatives to gain the skills, knowledge, and ability required for jobs within specific industry sectors. Through collaborative efforts, core partners will promote the use of stackable credentials, micro-credentials, Maine College and Career Access, Registered Apprenticeship, and other training programs that integrate and contextualize academic and workforce skills. These best practices of program delivery accelerate learning through concurrent rather than sequential pathways.

The core partners see great promise in their work to develop and institutionalize portable, industry recognized credentials that can be earned in a relatively short period of time. While recognizing the need for entry-level workers, the Maine workforce system is not interested in creating a system of credentials that lead only into entry-level positions. In full-support of the goal to develop a system of lifelong learning and continued connection to employers, Maine is focused on developing a system that addresses accelerated pathways to employment.

To fully implement and support the activities noted above, Maine's core partners are committed to:

- Adopt and articulate a shared vision of an aligned lifelong learning system that clearly delineates each partner's role and responsibilities in the development of a seamless continuum of programs and supports leading to employment
- Demonstrate shared leadership and commitment to institutionalizing this lifelong learning system
- Work within the workforce system (including required one-stop partners, non-required organizations and employers) to construct and deploy the activities listed above
- Focus on the development of portable, stackable credentials of value for in-demand occupations. The U.S. Department of Labor defines a "stackable credential" as "part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications and help them move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs" (Training and Employment Guidance Letter 15-10, U.S. Department of Labor).
- Work within Maine's academic arena to support and expand on the work being done to develop portable, stackable, in-demand micro-credentials that are accepted by employers and lead to digital badges bearing post-secondary credit
- Establish pathways to employment that contain agreed upon multiple entry and exit points that enable all learners to participate as a result of earning various credentials and degrees
- Give priority consideration to referring adults to the Maine College and Career Access program to receive, according to their learning and employment goals, the academic,

employability skills and introductory hard skills needed to enter a postsecondary education or training program without the need for remedial coursework

- Recognizing the need for individuals to possess foundational skills for success in employment and meeting life challenges, all core partner programs will be developed with consideration regarding the inclusion of foundational skills in math, reading, and literacy which may best be provided prior to entering a credential or other job training program, or concurrently
- Develop a system of accountability to ensure that education and workforce training initiatives provide the knowledge and skills necessary for employability
- Provide equal access to these opportunities through the implementation of universal design from the program design stage through implementation and reflect cultural competency
- Integrate work-readiness skills into programs offered throughout the lifelong learning process
- Identify and integrate into the workforce system, those supports needed for workplace success; childcare, transportation, mental health, intensive academic and career advisement and other services
- Use and promote data and continuous improvement strategies. Partners are data-driven and focused on continuously improving efforts by measuring participants' interim and ultimate outcomes as well as process indicators
- Support professional development. Partners support robust and ongoing professional development for relevant practitioners and administrators
- Develop a process of promoting credentials as a pathway to employment
- Create differentiated strategies that support equity in rural areas

<u>Adjustments made due to Pandemic may be found in section II.(a) Economic and Workforce and Workforce Development Activities Analysis.</u>

B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

Further, the core partners are well-connected to both required and optional one-stop partners, which allows for optimal use of other resources that can support Maine's workforce and employers. Partnerships with other state agencies, such as the Departments of Health and Human Services, Corrections, Education, and Economic and Community Development, are critical to maximizing federal and state resources while reducing duplicative or parallel efforts. Sources of funds that can be leveraged by mapping across agencies and programs will be identified. SNAP Employment and Training expansion in partnership with DHHS is one example. Pursuing other federal procurement opportunities and funds, such as the Lewiston Choice application, and meeting with philanthropic organizations to understand their priorities are other activities that will be undertaken. These partnerships are also critical to addressing statewide issues of housing, transportation, childcare and access to broadband, which were identified in the many listening sessions conducted for the Governor's economic development plan, as well as the WIOA State Plan. An important part of this strategy is the development of career pathways that include secondary and career and technical education, adult education, apprenticeship, post-secondary education, work-based learning, and other opportunities within industry sectors that are responsive to employer and job seeker needs.

Maine partners have taken great strides toward inculcating the "Whole Family Approach to Jobs" as a best practice for serving low income individuals and their families. Also referred to as a two-generation approach, it brings human services, education and workforce stakeholders together to:

- Identify program and policy alignment opportunities at the local, state and federal level that will improve employment equity and economic stability for low-income parents and work toward undoing intergenerational poverty for families
- Promote state policies and systems alignment that will improve access to and success in education, training and employment for parents
- Develop a regional learning community focused on whole-family approaches to employment equity that will include employer stakeholders

Maine's Whole Families Working Group conducted research to assess the impact of benefits cliffs on families that rely on social service supports. The study reviewed the interplay between several state and federal programs and found that childcare and health benefits programs had the most extreme cliffs with downward slopes across all benefit programs, negatively impacting parents' financial security and capacity to work outside the home. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) at the state and federal levels was shown to be an effective policy lever to ease the cliff effect but more needs to be done.

Maine enacted a bipartisan package of bills, referred to as the Invest in Tomorrow package (LD 1772, LD 1774), in 2019. The new laws look to address the state's benefits cliffs. The package eliminates the gross income test for TANF, invests $2 million in whole-family pilot programs and increases the income disregard in TANF to support parents' transition to work. It also authorizes an increase in TANF funds for transitional food assistance and establishes a working group to align programs and improve accountability for better outcomes for families. In addition, the Legislature enacted LD 765, which requires the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to convene a stakeholder group to study asset limits in various state social service programs, including TANF and SNAP.

It is important for employers to understand how the benefits cliff creates work disincentives for low income working families. These employers understand that a very slight increase in wage could move the employee out of the income bracket to retain subsidized childcare or food stamps which they use to survive. Employers who participate in whole family approaches to jobs are better able to support and retain their employees through involvement with employee supports such as affordable childcare, providing non-cash incentives for exemplary work, supporting employees to advance their skills through tuition assistance or formal training opportunities leading to upward mobility along a formal career ladder.

To prepare a robust system of lifelong learning, agencies beyond the core partners need to be included in the process of developing stackable credentials. Maine is a geographically large state. The challenge of distance and limited resources have resulted in a tradition of collaboration and cooperation. Non-core partners are needed as each brings expertise, adds value to the partnership and greatly increases the success of developing a highly integrated lifelong learning and employment system. Partners vital to meeting this strategy include, but are not limited to, Department of Health and Human Services, state and local libraries, state and local workforce boards, state and local chambers of commerce, secondary educational institutions, Maine's Community College and University Systems, Department of Corrections, industry associations and labor associations. Due to our current shared vision to improve the state's economic viability and the prosperity of residents (many of whom are common clients), a variety of collaborative efforts between these agencies are already in place. These provide a firm foundation to build upon.

In part because of the tight labor market, demand from businesses interested in adopting registered apprenticeship to recruit, hire and train a skilled workforce continues to increase. Apprenticeship provides an alternative, structured pathway for youth and adults to earn a credential of value and good wages while meeting employers' needs. As a truly viable career pathway in Maine, apprenticeship programming continues to expand with the following activities currently underway:

- Partnership with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) to develop apprenticeship opportunities for BRS customers with disabilities. Even though the pandemic impacted Maine's economy and apprenticeship opportunities, much has been accomplished and apprenticeship is now being offered statewide. This work will be further supported by the addition of a BRS Apprenticeship Navigator through MDOL's State Apprenticeship Equity, Expansion, and Innovation grant and related initiatives funded as part of Maine's Jobs and Recovery Plan.
- Expansion of existing registered apprenticeship programs offered within the prison system to better prepare formerly-incarcerated individuals for successful re-entry to employment
- Development and expansion of quality youth apprenticeship programs, in collaboration with Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools and community colleges, that provide youth with a paycheck and structured on-the- job learning that allows them to apply relevant and affordable classroom training that results in dual credit toward high school graduation and an associate degree. Also pursue support of out-of- school youth apprentices with WIOA funding and services
- Focus on the registration of additional community colleges as registered sponsors of apprenticeship to facilitate small business access to apprenticeship programming and affordable related technical instruction
- Work with system partners and employers to establish entry level apprenticeship programs that articulate into more advanced apprenticeship training programs

C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

Maine's core programs are in agreement about the importance of a coordinated customer service approach in achieving an effective workforce development system. Time is of the essence in addressing the employment and life needs of people with barriers. Progress is being made but results must come quicker through the creation of coordinated, networked, and targeted strategies to engage the untapped talent also referred to as high-priority populations. Individuals who may already be financially under-resourced, dealing with health (physical, mental and or emotional) challenges, lacking foundational academic skills including English language literacy, unaware of the how to navigate the current workforce system, or lacking basic computer skills to apply online require a system of help that is agile and responsive.

The re-branding and marketing of the system will reflect this coordination and customer-centered focus. W.O.R.K. Services is one example of an initiative underway to establish an integrated referral and registration system that is easily accessible to individuals no matter when or where they need help with education and/or employment.

Individualized career plans are also recognized as a primary tool to ensure that activities are coordinated and that resources are effectively used across programs to provide comprehensive and high-quality services.

Adult education is experiencing an increase in the number of younger dropouts enrolling in preparation classes to earn their HiSET, the test that lead to Maine's high school equivalency credential. Most of these younger adults need fewer hours of preparation before testing and

score higher than other demographic groups. In FY 19, 36 percent of HiSET testers ages 17-18 scored at the college and career readiness level on all five assessments. In the 19-24 age group, 35 percent scored at the college and career ready level. These two age groups scored significantly higher than the 23-44 age group in both pass rates and college and career readiness attainment. Advising and recruiting efforts by adult education providers, in collaboration with postsecondary partners will address steps to engage these individuals in additional education and training opportunities leading to employment.

Adult education is exploring how this data may support changes to the current high school completion process to reduce the drop-out rate, especially for those students who have the academic skills, but do not want to remain in the high school environment. Steps will be taken to establish an improved referral process to more quickly connect students who leave high school with an adult education provider. A system, that includes robust youth apprenticeship opportunities may result in an alternative that provides these younger adults with credentials and a pathway to postsecondary opportunities.

Refugees, asylum seekers, and foreign-trained professionals face unique challenges to entering the workforce. Credentialing issues and limited financial assistance to pay for prior learning assessments keep many New Mainers from accessing appropriate training and employment opportunities. In addition to creating additional opportunities for English language acquisition, core partners will engage with other workforce development stakeholders to try and streamline the foreign credentialing process and improve licensing process through work with the state licensing departments. This can include improved workforce development State resources to provide low and no-cost evaluations of foreign secondary and postsecondary credentials and better participant assessment and navigation in the process.

Core partner leads will monitor the progress of collaborative efforts to ensure the needs of sub-populations are being systematically addressed statewide. This group will also work to ensure that no instances of implicit bias are impacting the creation and delivery of services.

Adjustments made due to Pandemic may be found in section

D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

Through the statewide visioning sessions, information was gathered from employers and others regarding their understanding of and needs and recommendations for an effective workforce development system. Each core partner has learned from experience that no one agency can successfully meet the needs of employers and workers on their own and that there is strength in the many workforce programs in Maine combining resources on behalf of shared customers. Whenever possible, interagency staff must work to leverage available funds and resources. Moving forward, partners will collaborate and seek opportunities for co-enrollment, so that available funding can support as many individuals as possible.

The outcome of employment is critical for successful engagement and retention of learners in both academic and job skills training programs. WIOA requires that the core partners coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality services to employers to meet their current and projected workforce needs and to achieve the goals of industry or sector partners in the state. To meet that goal, all partners need to understand the services each has to offer, speak a common language, and promote the part that each partner plays in the system. local, regional and state plans to align programs and activities is also critical to best providing services to employers. Partnerships with businesses and sector strategies will increase knowledge of current and projected workforces needs, to ensure workforce training, education and employment placement are job-driven and forward thinking.

The state plan implementation committee will be responsible for gathering information from the partners to coordinate efforts, streamline services to employers, look for opportunities that dovetail efforts with the Maine Economic and Community Development Plan and leverages resources. It will ensure that each agency can use consistent language to effectively communicate with employers that:

- Their input is required for creation of a workforce system that is committed and responsive to their needs
- Clarify the roles of each partner in the system
- Clarify what they can contribute toward establishing stackable credentials and micro-credentials that advance the progress of entry level workers
- Clarify the benefits of registered apprenticeship, internships, on the job training, customized training, incumbent worker training, and support services
- Assistance is available to help them identify skills and qualifications for in-demand employment
- Employer engagement is vital in the creation of credentials that meet their needs and that will result in employment for those who earn them
- Employer input should guide the identification of sector pathways to enter employment

Located within the Maine Department of Education, the state office of adult education provides technical and grant management support to over 70 local adult education providers throughout the state. In FY19, providers served over 13,900 adults. The majority of these adults lack the foundational skills in numeracy, literacy and work readiness needed to be competitive in Maine's changing economy. The state director is a voting member of the State Workforce Board and local adult education programs are represented on each local workforce board. Adult education personnel at both the state and local levels participate on a number of boards and initiatives addressing the workforce needs of Maine's employers.

In addition to the state system-wide approach, there are many activities underway with the partners in the coordination of services to employers. Examples include:

- On a quarterly basis, the Statewide Workforce Assistance Team (SWAT), comprised of core partners and other key partners responsible for providing business services, convene to share best practices, provide program updates and learn about new opportunities. SWAT participants include but are not limited to staff from the following partners: WIOA service providers, Wagner Peyser, CareerCenter, Vocational Rehabilitation, Local Veteran Employer Representatives, State-funded apprenticeship and Competitive Skills Scholarship Programs, Rapid Response and Trade Adjustment Assistance, community colleges, adult education providers, chambers of commerce, and non-profit organizations engaged in workforce development activities. SWAT meetings have been held regularly for the past three years and have been instrumental in furthering collaborative workforce development efforts amongst interested parties
- The Maine-At-Work Initiative[1] was developed collaboratively with workforce partners and continues to be an easy way for employers to request assistance with their workforce needs. An on-line request is generated and sent to MDOL staff who either respond to the employer inquiry directly or forward it to a partner contact for response. Maine-At-Work is also marketed through a flyer enclosed with each employer's yearly unemployment insurance tax information to prompt them to request assistance if they have any workforce development assistance needs

- Maine's Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP) is open to individuals whose family income is at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and who do not yet already have a marketable post-secondary degree or credential. CSSP is funded by contributions from employers through and offset from their unemployment insurance taxes. CSSP provides funding to eligible individuals for education, training and necessary support services that lead to high-wage jobs that are in demand in Maine. The education and training must be universally recognized and accepted by the trade or industry in which the participant intends to seek employment. In 2019, CSSP served 1,041 individuals

- Job Fairs are held regularly at each CareerCenter. In the larger centers, job fairs for specific sectors are held so job seekers can apply to multiple employers within a sector. Staff engage with businesses in attendance to discuss their hiring needs to better understand what the businesses are looking for

- A successful model that needs to increase in implementation is Integrated Education and Training (IET). As the name implies, this type of programming involves intentional planning to deliver the specific academic, employability skills, and workforce training to a pre-determined audience resulting in a workforce credential and or further training and employment. For example, a group of learners may be enrolled in a welding program that incorporates instruction in reading and/or math all contextualized to pertain to welding. In this instance, the academic and trades instructors might work together to identify the vocabulary and calculation assistance participants will need to be successful. The benefit of this approach is it enables participants who may be closed out of a similar welding class because of low foundational skills to participate and be successful with appropriate supports.

- Historically, adult education providers in Maine have worked independently or with small-scale partnerships for specific purposes. Recently, local programs were grouped into regional hubs to promote common standards, fiscal efficiencies, economy of scale, and greater collaboration amongst the adult education programs within the hub. Rather than compete against each other for financial resources, the emphasis is on mutual collaboration and support. This reorganization has resulted in strengthening all programs, and especially those in smaller, more rural areas. Within the boundaries of each hub there are community college campuses, a local workforce board, CareerCenters, and a University of Maine presence. Many hubs are strengthening their connections to these organizations as well as with other core partners to address the needs of employers and workers.

Local providers will continue their long-standing work of connecting with individual employers to design instructional services in response to their needs. The number of employers contracting directly with a local literacy provider for help with workforce development is growing. As appropriate, these services may include job-site classes, contextualized vocabulary, connections with occupational training, Maine College and Career Access transition programs, micro-credentials, and other means that help build the foundational skills of students while preparing them for successful employment

- The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) coordinates and aligns services to employers that will encourage and support them in the hiring of individuals with disabilities. BRS also utilizes in-house staff to help provide the needed connections between Vocational Rehabilitation staff, clients seeking employment, providers, and employers. To do this, BRS learns the needs of employers and connects them with clients that have the strengths, abilities, and interests to meet those needs. BRS started this process working with youth through a model adopted from Vermont, called *Progressive Employment,* and has now expanded it to all ages of job seekers with

disabilities statewide through both the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Maine's *Progressive Employment* initiative takes a dual customer approach to meet the needs of employers and Maine youth with disabilities by matching them to activities such as: job tours, interviews, job shadows, work experience, and on-the-job training. These experiences give the employer the opportunity to meet their next generation of workers at little to no risk while also assisting the youth to build employment skills. Additionally through resources made available through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, the Progressive Employment strategy will be piloted over the next two years to assist individuals who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, those who are justice involved and/or in recovery.

Future activities identified during this state plan period related to the coordination, alignment, and provision of services to employers include:

- **Business outreach tools developed with cross-agency partner input:** Tools will be developed to support an integrated, seamless system of services to businesses. New marketing and outreach tools will be co-developed by members of the business response teams from education, economic and workforce development. Integrated business assistance marketing tools will stress services over programs and promote no-wrong-door access, whereby businesses can rely on single point of contact to access the full menu of services.

Similarly, a business needs assessment tool to be used by business outreach team members to assess needs pertaining to workforce and other business challenges will be created with partner and employer input. Use of the common tool will ensure business needs are easily communicated and assigned to specific partners.

An integrated service response tool will be developed to outline response actions, agency resource commitments, employer commitments, and expectations. This tool will be accessible, easy to understand, and serve as a plan to be followed by the employer and the multiple service agencies responding to the business needs.

- **Employer/Business Response Team - No-Wrong Door** State and regional-level business response teams will be identified and cross-trained. These teams will include leads from agencies with resources and capacity to assess and address business needs (both economic and workforce). Business response team members will attend ongoing cross-training necessary to understand and represent the full menu of services and to ensure a single point of access by which employers can acquire the information and resources necessary to address their workforce and business development needs.

Business response teams at the state and regional levels may include representatives from three key resource areas:

- Workforce development:
    - Employment services (MDOL's Bureau of Employment Services and Bureau of Rehabilitation Services) on behalf of:
        - Apprenticeship
        - Competitive Skills Scholarship Program -Business
        - Federal Bonding Program
        - Foreign Labor Certification Program
        - Labor Exchange

        - Rapid Response
        - Reemployment Initiatives
        - SafetyWorks
        - Trade Act
        - Veteran's Services
        - Work Opportunity Tax Credit
        - DHHS - TANF (Fedcap – Parents as Scholars – LIFT – HOPE)
        - Title IB service providers (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth)
        - Vocational Rehabilitation (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation & Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired)
        - Pre-Employment Transition Services
        - Workforce boards
- <u>Education and Training:</u>
    - Adult Education
    - Career and Technical Education Secondary Schools
    - Job Corps
    - Maine Community College System
    - Private schools, colleges, universities
    - Trade skills training entities
    - University of Maine System
    - Educate Maine
- <u>Economic Development</u>
    - Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI)
    - Department of Economic and Community Development
    - Regional and municipal economic development entities
    - Small Business Association
    - Small Business Development Centers
    - May also include (as appropriate):
        - Coastal Enterprises, Inc.
        - Employer representatives
        - Finance Authority of Maine
        - Live and Work in Maine
        - Maine Chamber of Commerce
        - Maine Development Foundation

        - Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership
        - Maine Rural Development Authority
        - Maine Technology Institute
        - Philanthropic entities

- **Expert Business Response Team** Comprehensive business support and integrated service strategies will be offered by a fully-informed business response team that has a grasp on the available resources available to be leveraged from a multitude of partner agencies. Cross-training of business response team members will include:
    - Understanding workforce development resources and who to work with at the local, regional, or state level
    - Understanding economic development resources and who to work with at the local, regional. or state level
    - Navigating education, training, and research and development resources
    - Understanding labor market and industry information and sources
    - Understanding best practices in attracting and retaining untapped labor talent pools
    - Understanding and effectively utilizing business outreach materials and tools
    - Effectively assessing employer needs and coordinating efficient low-risk responses in collaboration with business response team partners
    - Addressing employer needs using the integrated response tool approved by team partners
    - Tracking and communicating employer services to ensure follow-up and reporting of achieved outcomes
- **Seamless Coordination of Services** Business response teams will work behind the scenes to address industry needs using an integrated response tool as follows:
    - Using agreed-upon communication protocols to share business needs assessment data with appropriate partners
    - Within agreed-upon timeframes, partners will review and assess appropriateness of services their agency can offer and will identify the level and type of service(s) they can provide as part of the integrated service response, a point person and contact information, the dollar amount of either in-kind or cash resource to be provided, additional data required or steps the employer must take to access the resource, dates by which employer must provide information, timelines in which services/resources are to be provided, and outcomes achieved.
    - In most cases, the initial point of contact will act as lead liaison with the business on behalf of all partners and support the employer in achieving the desired outcomes and implementing the integrated service response.
- <u>Build awareness of the Maine Workforce System Build programs with a human-centric design approach that uses all available digital and non-digital tools. With support from a technical assistance grant from the National Governor's Association (NGA), the SWB will work with workforce system partners to:</u>

- Develop a portal which will align public workforce programs that support residents to increase their skills and education into a seamless continuum of programs and supports, with a focus on career pathways for in-demand occupations.
- Create a unified brand for Maine's workforce system that will:
  - Increase awareness of the workforce system for employers, and residents of Maine who are interested in jobs, careers and greater economic opportunities
  - Improve understanding of the scope of Maine's workforce system services and how to access them
  - Increase consistency across Maine's workforce partners to create a better sense of unity

A no-wrong-door, integrated service response strategy removes the need for employers to navigate a vast and complex system of services and assures they are presented with appropriate services. Interagency responses will promote layoff aversion activities, clarify and address perceived skill gaps, and allow workforce agencies to promote the employment of underutilized talent pools. It will link employers to business assistance programs and technical assistance on a just-in-time basis.

Properly assessment of an employer's workforce and business service needs is essential to developing and providing effective solutions. A collaborative approach to addressing business needs will eliminate duplication of efforts and ensure responses are developed with the focus on the employer rather than the program. As stated previously, business response team members must be those with an excellent command of the programs they represent and a good command of services/programs offered by the other partners.

[1]Maine at Work https://www.maine.gov/maineatwork/

E. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Educational institutions are key partners in Maine's workforce development system and play a critical role in the State's strategies to increase the effectiveness in how partners work together. Through articulation agreements, establishment of career pathways, joint professional development, and a focus on best practices that reduce barriers to employment (especially for high priority populations), the partners will work together and meet the strategic vision. To that end:

- The re-branding and marketing of the workforce development system will create and distribute a common message that conveys the role of educational institutions as part of the system
- The State's education and training systems will be supported to provide job-driven instruction as part of a cohesive continuum that includes secondary schools, adult education, community colleges, universities, on-the-job training, and apprenticeship
- Partners will increase engagement with secondary schools to expand student awareness of Maine's career pathways, in-demand occupations, and employment opportunities
- Postsecondary educational institutions and training organizations will join in the messaging of the workforce development system

- Engaging core partners and employers in micro-credentialing and digital badging will ensure that skills are meeting industry and business needs and credentials are recognized by employers
- Working with education, workforce, and employers, including the MaineSpark and All Learning Counts initiatives, criteria for a "credential of value" will be defined in a way which is clear, measurable, and meaningful to individuals and employers. Career pathways will be identified which allow workers to engage with educational opportunities that lead to higher wage occupations in in-demand sectors
- Workforce development service providers in each of Maine's local areas will partner with adult education providers, local community colleges, industry trade groups, and others to develop recruitment and training programs to meet the needs of individual or sector employers. For example, the Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP), provider of adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs in Maine's most northern county, regularly partners with the local adult education providers to address the new hire training needs of employers. A recent initiative involved three regional health care providers and resulted in a health care academy designed to prepare workers for entry-level positions in patient care. Similarly, a construction boot camp was developed in conjunction with adult education and Associated General Contractors to prepare entry-level workers to enter the construction trades. A new initiative is currently underway that will package recruitment, assessment and training services for a new processing factory.

Though adult education in Maine is characterized as working with learners beyond the age of compulsory education, historically, the majority of learners served have been in 24 and above. The efforts of adult education providers have been on moving this group on to college and/or employment. Adult educators are well-acquainted with the challenges and life situations of this group.

Data now indicates younger learners are seeking adult education services. Most of these students come well-prepared and earn high scores, many at the college and career-ready level. This group is not leaving school because they lack ability, but as a result of environmental issues. They report feeling bullied, disenfranchised, or dealing with anxiety and/or family issues. Adult education is no longer a place for problem students end, but a positive solution for a growing number of students. In response to this change, adult education will be taking steps to interact differently with the day school.

Steps planned:

- Conduct several listening sessions to hear from this group of young test takers more about why they chose adult education and how best we can serve them
- Provide professional development to instructors and staff on understanding the needs of this group
- Establish relationships with high school guidance counselors to inform them of possible ways adult education can help them, especially with career and postsecondary advisement as well as micro-credential attainment in technology and health care post-graduation
- Develop pathways to adult education for the 40 percent of high school graduates who do not have any post-secondary plans
- Explore pathways and collaborations with Career and Technical Education programs

- Work with high schools to formulate what it looks like for adult education to serve as a recognized pathway to high school completion

Adult education will look to update MOUs with educational partners and work to increase the number and quality of collaborations with other educational institutions and include those that may be missing.

It is important that communication occurs not only with the public postsecondary system but also the private institutions. There must be engagement with employer training departments to determine what foundational skills their current and prospective employees may need and how these skill requirements might be integrated into their training and hiring efforts.

Adult education will continue to draw on other agencies with expertise in the delivery of English language services to coordinate ways to meet the ever-rising demand for this type of instruction and will develop, introduce, and put into place, a referral system between the various programs and service providers so learners have access to the most appropriate provider.

Adjustments made due to Pandemic may be found in section

F. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

Core and other partner agencies will collaborate with the "MaineSpark" initiative (with a goal of ensuring 60 percent of Mainers will hold a credential of value by 2025) to ensure alignment of activities, sharing of information, participation in and contribution to cross-training and professional staff development, and participation in local, regional and state strategy implementation sessions. They will ensure local and regional employer stakeholder groups are apprised of the goals and work of the initiative and have opportunity for input on the specific credentials of value being considered and promoted.

Similarly, system partners will work with the University of Maine system to support work initiated through the "All Learning Counts" initiative, funded by the Lumina Foundation and focused on expanding opportunities for adults, (especially people of color) to attain credentials. The initiative supports the goal of MaineSpark and seeks to expand access to a range of credentials from micro-credentials to traditional degrees. Like MaineSpark, "All Learning Counts" is a coalition of public and private organizations working to develop a micro-credential ecosystem and to support adult learners in gaining credentials demanded by employers. Two critical components of this initiative are to validate skills learned outside of educational systems (non-institutional learning) for credit toward credentials and provide more flexible, accessible programming and access to support services that will address personal and academic challenges facing adult learners.

Key partners include University of Maine Orono and Augusta, the Wabanaki Center, Eastern Maine Community College, the Maine Department of Corrections and its vendor Edovo, the Maine Department of Labor, the State Board, the Maine Department of Education – Adult Education, the Maine State Library, the United Technologies Center and Educate Maine. Educate Maine is another collaborative initiative that promotes education and career readiness through teacher education and connecting teachers with businesses to ensure curricula are meeting the needs of industry.

It is important to stay in communication with the state postsecondary system and also the private institutions to stay current on their initiatives and avoid duplication. There must also be engagement with employer training departments to determine what foundational skills their current and perspective employees may need and how they might be integrated into their training and hiring efforts.

Adult education needs to draw on other agencies with expertise in the delivery of English language services to coordinate ways to meet the ever-rising demand for instruction.

A learner referral system between the various programs and service providers must be developed, introduced, put into place, and promoted to ensure learners, and the partner agencies have awareness of and access to the most appropriate provider.

Adjustments made due to Pandemic may be found in section

G. LEVERAGING RESOURCES TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

The establishment of a coordinated, networked, and targeted strategies approach is the first in a series of steps needed to use each agencies' resources effectively. Deliberately planning together to serve specific sub-populations can result in collaborative programming and grant writing that strengthens an application rather than competing against one another.

To best leverage resources, it must be clear amongst the partners what the resources can support. Each agency has slightly different eligibility requirements. Being aware of who partners can serve and who they cannot creates the ability to braid funding and serve more customers. Collaboration for resource sharing among partners on a state and local level is effective as funding streams ebb and flow. Frontline case managers will be fully knowledgeable of what is available and able to guide individuals to appropriate core program services and other available benefits such as Federal Financial Aid, TANF/ASPIRE, individual scholarships, and more. Leverage of supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) funds can result in a federal match of state funds.

The involvement of core partners to support the efforts of other agencies also results in a synergistic environment and improved outcomes. Educate Maine and the Maine Development Foundation are focused on the state's goal that by 2025, 60 percent of Mainers will hold a credential valued by Maine's businesses. A workgroup is being established to focus on improving Kindergarten – 12th grade coordination, in conjunction with the State's Economic Development Plan. Other organizations with a similar vision, human capital, and expertise that can be leveraged include Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), New Ventures, and Maine Educational Opportunity Center. Others include the trade associations, chambers, private employment agencies, and employer training departments.

Additional steps to undertake to leverage resources include:

- Beginning in 2022, adult education will have a career and college success coordinator on each community college campus
- Beginning in 2022 the community college system made free classes available to adult education college transition students
- Joint professional development for intake and advising staff of educational and workforce system partners
- Elimination of barriers for evaluation of foreign secondary and postsecondary credentials

The majority of workforce and economic development programs and resources require a commitment from the employer/business in exchange for program assistance. Such commitments range from agreement to hire trainees who successfully complete training, provision of in-kind or cash match toward cost of formal classroom costs, paying the full wage for on-the-job training with an understanding that a partial wage reimbursement will be provided to offset the cost. In most cases, the employer invests more than 50 percent of the cost of employee training.

Partner resources that can be leveraged are as follows:

- Labor market research and information provided by CWRI
- Prevailing wage data and workplace safety information and training provided by the Bureau of Labor Standards
- Employer tax information provided by the Bureau of Unemployment Compensation,
- Employee recruitment and labor exchange services provided by the Bureau of Employment Services, including job fairs
- Informational services and training to businesses by the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services regarding the benefits of and supports available for employing individuals with disabilities
- Help to the farming industry to access migrant and seasonal farm workers and assurance of safe and clean living and working environments for workers hired through the H2B program
- Assistance with development of registered apprenticeship programs through the Maine Apprenticeship Program, an industry-led employee training mechanism that provides businesses with a formal, long-term method for ensuring new hires and existing employees to attain necessary skills
- Recruitment of participants from each of the core partners and/or outside partners, including assessment of work history and work readiness skills required by the employer and required to succeed in the specific on-the-job training, customized training, integrated education and employment activity and incumbent worker training

The Maine Community College System's Business and Industry Program works to develop and deliver industry-specific training to businesses across Maine and New England. One of the programs offered is the Maine Quality Centers (MQC). The MQC program funds the cost of customized classroom training for new hires and/or incumbents whose positions will be backfilled once their skills have been upgraded. The MQC program is often packaged with WIOA funded OJT resources and the Bureau of Employment Services division of the Maine Department of Labor provides specialized recruitment services to the MQC to identify participants to fill the training slots.

Local workforce areas are partnering with Career and Technical Education Centers and high schools to offer a bridge program to the community college. This program allows CTE students to take college-level classes while in the secondary program and earn credits toward a college degree. This practice introduces students to college-level course requirements and alleviates the perception that college is beyond their reach.

Through Vocational Rehabilitation's Pre-Employment Transition Services, students with disabilities are engaging in real-world work-based learning activities (job tours, job shadows, paid work experiences, etc.) earlier. Partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates has yielded is yielding promising results for students with disabilities in a research project in targeted Maine schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a need to have more services for youth available virtually. Examples of new or expanded resources include a statewide Virtual Job Club, Informational Interviews conducted over Zoom, virtual employer presentations, and a new Virtual version of the Career Exploration Workshop – in addition to the online tool *Virtual Job Shadow*. Use of the Progressive Employment dual-customer approach is introducing Maine employers to a new generation of employees at low/no risk and innovative programming, such as Step Up and

College Prep, and opening post-secondary and career opportunities that have not existed previously for individuals with autism and visual impairments.

H. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

The State's strategies as described throughout this plan will address issues that prevent access to postsecondary credentials, including establishing youth apprenticeship opportunities and increasing the number of Registered Apprenticeships, addressing student loan debt issues that prohibit readmission, continuing partnership efforts with initiatives, such as Live and Work in Maine, to encourage college graduates to stay and work in Maine, supporting the transition of students from high school to community college and university, including advocating for smoother credit transfers between institutions, developing and sharing a clear, concise consumer handbook with information on postsecondary services, publicizing no-cost and low-cost training opportunities, and promote availability for Vocational Rehabilitation to collaborate and coordinate with educational institutions in provision of services for students with disabilities.

The world of workforce development is becoming increasingly aware of the meaning, benefits and uses of stackable credentials to enable a person to progress from a series of stackable short-term certificates to postsecondary degrees to their chosen occupations. In the world of education, a very similar process is referred to as micro-credentials. Each micro-credential certifies competency in a specific skill. These micro-credentials can be stacked to indicate higher level of skill attainment and in Maine, the goal for many is to connect them with recognized course credits and if desired, lead a holder of micro-credentials on to other credentials or degrees.

The benefits to earners of micro-credentials, especially for WIOA clients, are that they are not place based, are short-term, tied to learner mastery, can be earned online at the learner's convenience, are self-directed, contain job embedded content, many include college credit, eliminates duplication of coursework, and can be used to recognize and validate prior learning. These factors make them a valuable solution to the state's need to connect with learners who feel unable to participate in traditional education and/or training due to financial or time constraints or who believe they are not "college material".

The benefits of micro-credentials to the workforce system is that they clearly articulate what the person has done to earn the credential in a job specific area. In addition, whereas new programs of instruction at the higher education level can take a long period of time to develop and be approved, micro-credential development is very nimble. This makes for a timely response to employer needs.

Both adult education and the MDOL are currently participating in an All Learning Counts (ALC) initiative lead by the University of Maine System. The project focuses on engaging adults with barriers in earning micro-credentials and gaining employment. Committees are currently focusing on the sub-populations of low-income, Native American, English language learners and incarcerated individuals. Other partners include the community college system, Maine Department of Corrections, Edovo, Educate Maine and the Maine State Library.

Though the content area will vary, all of the micro-credential work is separated into three consistent areas of competency attainment.

- Level 1- Exploration and Discovery
- Level 2- Skill Development
- Level 3- Initiative/ Leadership

Following the completion of these three levels, the learner earns a stacked macro-badge, which is the cumulative assessment of skills, evidence of learning is visible and validates alternative

learning. Micro-badges, capturing 21st Century skill development and/or industry/association credentials, will also be embedded along the pathway, adding further value.

University of Maine System is part of Education Design Lab's Badged to Hire campaign, implementing employer-demanded 21st Century skill badges into courses and programs.

This micro-credential initiative relies on Maine's workforce data regarding areas of employer need and the specific competencies required of employees. It also includes the development of an employer advisory group to ensure, like stackable workplace credentials, that micro-credentials align with employer needs, will be recognized for employment purposes and support Maine's goal of a seamless continuum of programs and supports with a focus on career pathways for in-demand industries.

Adult education is expanding its connection to the state's postsecondary institutions regarding that continuous and seamless continuum. In 2019, adult education providers established a presence on three of the seven community college campuses. Efforts are continuing to expand that number. When adult education is on community college campuses, adult education learners envision themselves as college students and recognize they have adult education support services to help them transition to college. Having staff members on the campus also facilitates the communication that is needed amongst the two systems to articulate the best pathways for students.

Adult education will continue to build on the collaborative success of the Maine College and Career Access (MCCA) transitions program which also fully integrates into Maine's priority to develop a seamless continuum of programs and supports. MCCA, offered by adult education providers across the state, provides academics, college and employability success skills for adult education students seeking a postsecondary credential and/or employment. In the past, MCCA targeted adult students over 25 with a high school credential who were planning to attend a traditional postsecondary institution. In response to a changing adult education population and the Maine workforce needs, the state adult education office revised the grant goals in 2018 to include all adult education students and those seeking any postsecondary credential of value. This change allows adult education providers to increase access for young adults under 25 and for those students without high school credentials. Pathways for students from a high school credential to MCCA or a postsecondary credential were created.

Partner efforts also resulted in the Maine Community College System accepting college and career readiness scores on the HiSET in place of the NextGen ACCUPLACER placement test. This change, which began in early 2019, allows students who perform at the HiSET college and career level to enter directly into credit-bearing courses. Beginning at the time of student intake and throughout their preparation for taking the HiSET, emphasis will be placed on the benefits of scoring at the college and career readiness level. When learners are prepared trough MCCA To enter postsecondary without having to take developmental courses saves money and accelerates the path to graduation. Adult education providers, organized in regional hubs, continue to collaborate to ensure equitable access to MCCA programming across their region, as well as coordinating with postsecondary partners in their region to develop articulated courses or to encourage co-enrollment.

The adult education state director will continue meeting with representatives of the workforce training department of the Maine Community College system. Goals of those meeting have been to increase communication amongst the local programs and their community college partner with the focus on establishing the appropriate place for adult education to support learners in community college trades programs.

With greater availability for adult education students to earn college credits comes the possibility for them to enter community college with six college credits and be eligible for Pell funding. Currently, lack of access to federal financial aid is a major barrier for many WIOA

eligible learners to enter postsecondary. Working with postsecondary partners, including the university system to development a system for these learners to access Pell will greatly increase their access to academic and career education.

Adjustments made due to Pandemic may be found in section

I. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

For the first time in more than 20 years, Maine has a ten-year economic development plan. This plan for 2020-2029, created by the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) with input from many other government agencies, business leaders and private organizations, focusses on the state's economic growth, particularly in rural Maine, and includes language that resonates with the goals and priorities of this state plan.

"By 2030, Maine will be an international leader with a vibrant, sustainable, environmentally-responsible economy. All across the state, the people of Maine will have access to an unmatched quality of life and good-paying jobs"(Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029).

The hinge points of the DECD Plan are talent and innovation. This WIOA state plan includes several steps to address the DECD near-term recommendations and it will be important that related activities are coordinated on state, regional and local levels. Those include the development of a system of stackable, micro-credentials, increasing the availability of online learning, and instituting statewide a variety of real world, on the job learning opportunities.

Maine's economic development strategy focuses on three overarching goals: grow the average annual wage by 10 percent, increase the value of products sold per worker by 10 percent, and attract 75,000 additional people to Maine's talent pool. Seven core strategies have been outlined to achieve these goals:

1. Grow local talent
2. Attract new talent
3. Promote innovation
4. Support universal connectivity
5. Provide supporting infrastructure
6. Maintain a stable business environment
7. Promote hubs of excellence.

Workforce and economic development partners will work collaboratively to implement several action steps outlined in the State economic plan with a focus on four key industry sectors: Healthcare, Clean Energy, Manufacturing and Tourism.

Steps will be taken to promote career exploration, apprenticeship and internship opportunities and engage workers in continuing education that will result in attainment of stackable credentials for career advancement. Education partners will work to align curriculums to the digital economy and articulate career pathways that support workers along the continuum of careers in high-demand industry sectors. Providers working with diverse populations will strive to increase their participation in the workforce through specialized outreach, development of paid work experience opportunities, provision of service supports and promotion of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and Federal Bonding programs to name just a few.

Workforce and economic development leaders at the State level will work to achieve structural alignment of workforce and economic development priorities, joint business engagement responses, and to establish regular use of a common database of employer contacts and service responses.

Workforce and economic development leaders at the state level will work to achieve structural alignment of workforce and economic development priorities, joint business engagement responses, and to establish regular use of a common database of employer contacts and service responses.

In addition to this, the State Workforce Board and the workforce development system will be working with the Children's Cabinet to work with other state agencies to address other issues which impact Mainer's abilities to find and maintain employment such as housing, transportation and childcare.

Regional collaborations between workforce, education, and economic development partners continue to work to align resources and address the needs of local and regional employers.

ATEC is a collection of WIOA partners, higher education, legislator representatives, employers, and other relevant agencies like New Ventures. The leadership is a collaborative effort to "tackle" regional workforce and education issues and to identify and braid services to address business workforce needs.

In the tri-county area of Penobscot, Piscataquis and Hancock counties, Title IB services are provided by Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) which is also the lead regional economic development agency. In these complementary roles, staff from each part of the agency are able to integrate a wide range of services to businesses and community partners, including work to assist the regions recovery from the demise of traditional manufacturing industries (paper, textiles, shoes, etc.) and the associated dislocation of workers and community infrastructure. EMDC was instrumental in leading the charge to revision economic assets in the region leading to identification of new uses for abandoned mill sites, including site clean-up, to pave the way for new business development and launch retraining efforts to reposition the regions workers for new job opportunities resulting from those investments.

Similar collaborations between employers, education providers and workforce programs occur in the Central Western and Coastal Counties regions. Central Western service provider, Western Maine Community Action Program, promotes each collaboration through public media and on their website, publishing testimonials from participants, employers and partner agencies regarding each collaboration. Publications such as these promote additional employers and training providers to follow suit and because the projects often result in direct employment and credentials, it is an efficient way of recruiting prospective job seeker participants into the training initiatives.

ARPA/MJRP Listening Sessions

The Department of Labor held a series of listening sessions in partnership with the State Workforce Board in the Fall of 2021. A total of seven sessions were held with more than 200 participants. These sessions were co-hosted by local area workforce boards and attended by members of the SWB Immigrant subcommittee, service providers, employers, community partners, union representatives, training & education providers, State agency partners, and others.

The goal of these sessions was to provide an overarching view of workforce-related priorities within the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan and capture questions, ideas and suggestions from workforce partners to inform program design, planning and implementation efforts.

DOL and SWB presented an overarching workforce framework aligned with Maine Jobs and Recovery and Maine's 10-year economic plan priorities—seeking to advance the following three goals:

- Goal 1: Increase size of Maine's talent pool by 75,000 workers
- Goal 2: Increase attainment of credentials of value (from 44% to 60%) by 2025

- Goal 3: Increase average annual wages by 10% by 2030

Participants were asked to share input and ideas about how Maine's workforce system—with its full scope of partners—can work collaboratively, innovatively, equitably and sustainably to ensure it meets these goals and invests in transformative change. The following themes emerged across listening sessions:

1. Align existing players on shared goals & information.
2. Create an easier to navigate & accessible workforce system for priority communities.
3. Develop clear feedback loops with worker communities to inform program design & decision making.
4. Engage employers to invest in worker training, cultural competency, flexibility, and increased wages.
5. Embed sustainability in planning via collaboration, financial innovation, and outreach.
6. Expand access to career pathways via increased awareness, multiple on-ramps, and wraparound.

These discussions were an opportunity to get feedback from partners on how to address initiatives in the MJRP. During the stakeholder listening sessions, the Department in partnership with the SWB facilitated a discussion to gather more specific feedback, questions, and ideas about specific priorities, which includes: apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship, healthcare workforce strategies, industry partnerships, jobseeker navigation, training and educational supports, and employer engagement in creating an inclusive workplace.

Workforce Development Initiatives Through ARPA

Healthcare workforce initiatives

Tuition Remission

The Training for Incumbent Health Workers program will help people who work in the health care field gain skills and advance with their employer by providing financial support to attain advanced health care credentials. The ability to earn credentials while on the job will allow health care workers to advance in the profession, leading to better paying jobs for them and improved health care services for Maine people. The program lowers barriers to training and education by providing the training free of charge to interested employees – as opposed to tuition reimbursement which requires upfront, out-of-pocket spending. Further, by investing in training and credential attainment for incumbent frontline health care workers, the program will help improve retention rates and increase the average wage among health care workers. The program will work with employers across sectors and sizes—including long term care, hospital, behavioral health and dental sectors. The program will initially focus on technical training and may eventually also support emerging needs for foundational skills education, English Language Learning, and credential evaluation to support workers from priority communities (such as New Mainers, those with lower educational attainment, or those with additional barriers to next-level credential attainment).

Healthcare Navigators

Health Care Career Navigators will provide customized career guidance – including the creation of person-specific employment and training plans, help navigating available training opportunities, assistance with evaluation and translation of prior credentials, and referrals for health care job and apprenticeship opportunities – to help introduce people into health care jobs. These navigators will be housed within the Maine Department of Labor's CareerCenters and will work closely with employers and community-based partners to connect jobseekers

with opportunities. Navigators will also help out-of-state and foreign-trained professionals translate credentials, access licensing, and learn how prior training may apply to health care jobs in Maine.

Healthcare Recruitment Efforts

Nearly 4.6 million direct care workers—including personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants—provide daily support to older adults and people with disabilities across a range of settings in the United States, predominantly in long-term care (LTC). As the population grows older and drives up demand for LTC, the sector continues its decades-long struggle to fill direct care positions and stabilize this essential workforce. The Maine Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Economic and Community Development will partner to launch a public service campaign to promote the value and importance of the health care profession with the goal of recruiting more people, especially young adults, into the field. The effort, which will span social media and radio and include a dedicated website, will market health care as a meaningful, rewarding career that provides incredible opportunity for advancement and good pay and benefits. An allocation of this funding will be specifically dedicated to promote direct care jobs as a great opportunity for career advancement, aimed intentionally at increasing workforce participation in direct care jobs among immigrants, individuals with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and older adults.

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship programs for key sectors

The Maine Apprenticeship Program is leveraging ARPA and additional federal grant funds to accomplish the following three goals: 1: Expand high-quality pre & apprenticeships; 2: Increase number of under-represented workers in apprenticeship; 3: Develop an integrated & effective statewide apprenticeship system. A core strategy of apprenticeship expansion will be partnering with Maine's businesses and industry associations, unions, education and training providers, and community-based organizations to develop new pre-apprenticeship programs. High-quality pre-apprenticeship programs provide foundational job and soft-skill training necessary to bridge trainees to successful employment as apprentices. Pre-apprenticeship programs can be delivered through high schools, adult education providers, community colleges, labor organizations, community-based organizations or workforce agencies. These initiatives will be targeted at youth (ages 16 – 24) at Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools, high schools and out-of-school youth in need of a connection to gainful employment leading to financial stability and professional success.

Jobseeker navigation & direct supports

Peer workforce navigation pilot

The Maine Department of Labor is seeking to partner with community-based organizations, worker groups, labor unions, or other non-profit organizations with deep ties to underserved and under-represented communities within the workforce in order to develop a peer workforce navigator pilot program that connects individuals disproportionately affected by COVID-19 with employment, skills development, and basic needs support resources, such as unemployment benefits. The Department is especially focused on increasing access to employment opportunities and basic needs resources among communities most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis including immigrants, individuals with limited English proficiency, inexperienced and untrained individuals, low-income and homeless individuals, individuals who have been out of the workforce for an extended period, individuals with low literacy and individuals with disabilities.

CareerCenter Consultants

The ARPA resources will expand capacity by hiring additional outreach workers who will provide intensive services to unemployed and underemployed job seekers—with a specific emphasis on communities that experienced disproportionate effects of COVID-19—including BIPOC communities, those with lower educational attainment, justice-involved, immigrant communities, and more. Outreach workers will be out in the community developing relationships with community members by meeting them where they are—in libraries, schools, public spaces, or other settings. Job seekers will get help overcoming skill deficiencies, accessing supports to overcome barriers such as childcare and transportation, and an opportunity to receive continued follow-up support and guidance as they find suitable employment and start in new jobs.

Integrated Workforce Portal

Workers, employers, and service provider partners have voiced the desire for an easier way to connect to programs, resources and supports within the broad workforce system. To ensure individuals most affected by COVID are able to connect to much-needed supports and job opportunities—and help employers connect more easily with supports, programs, and jobseekers - funding will be used to develop a centralized online career portal, to include career exploration, training, employment, and support services, and to brand and market Maine's workforce system so that it is recognized as transparent and easily accessible. Workers and employers alike don't know the extent of the resources available to them or how to access them. Communities facing existing barriers—particularly those disproportionately affected by COVID-19 with higher unemployment rates including BIPOC communities, older adults, English language learners and individuals with disabilities--find themselves shut out of systems by technology they don't understand, bouncing between websites they can't navigate. Maine's career portal will be designed keeping specific constituent journeys in mind – with specific emphasis on these priority communities and industries most affected by COVID- to provide them a simple user-friendly way to access available jobs, workforce trainings, and other needed resources. The career portal will be concierge service connecting across state agency, training providers, adult and higher education sites, creating a "no wrong door" approach for Maine workers and employers.

Employer Supports with workforce development

Expand Progressive Employment

Maine's Progressive Employment Program offers a flexible and gradual approach to employment for individuals with disabilities. The approach emphasizes creating value for employers as well as individuals, resulting in increased workplace readiness, more supportive work environments, and increased worker and employer satisfaction. Through MJRP funds, MDOL will scale this successful Progressive Employment model with two additional communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and facing significant barriers to employment – individuals who are justice involved and those in recovery.

Worker Opportunity Tax Credit program capacity

The federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program provides tax credits to employers who hire individuals that face serious barriers to finding employment, from populations most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals include long-term unemployed individuals, unemployed veterans, low-wage workers, justice-involved individuals, and workers in certain rural counties—all of which were negatively affected by COVID. This funding will create additional capacity to process employer applications to take advantage of this program. Expediting the processing of applications filed by the employers will serve as a catalyst in ensuring that the targeted population (individuals disproportionately affected due to COVID-19) becomes gainfully employed at a faster rate.

Industry Partnerships

By taking a sector-based workforce development approach that organizes industries in Maine disrupted by COVID-19, and that are vital to economic recovery in communities impacted by COVID, DOL will support those industries' recovery and enable employers and industries to leverage ARPA and other funds across Maine's workforce system to create pathways to quality jobs. The Industry Partnerships Initiative seeks to identify, support and help grow workforce collaboratives in strategic sectors of the state's economy—composed of businesses, employers, workers, labor unions, and/or industry associations. Leveraging ARPA funds, these workforce collaboratives will identify shared workforce development needs related to recruitment, training and education, retaining and advancing workers—and develop solutions to address these shared challenges.

B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

Core partners of this Unified Plan utilize the following case management and management information systems (MIS): Adult Education uses MaineSTARS, Vocational Rehabilitation utilizes AWARE, and workforce programs administered by the Maine Department of Labor use Maine JobLink a system developed and maintained by America's Job Link Alliance.

The systems comply with current federal reporting requirements for each program. The data elements required for each program are being collected and will be used to support the coordinated implementation of Maine's strategic objectives.

MaineSTARS is a federally approved MIS system compliant with adult education's National Reporting System. Local adult education programs are required to use MaineSTARS for all intake, demographic, assessment, and attendance data. At the state level, aggregate numbers are compiled in MaineSTARS and used to perform data matches against Maine Department of Labor employment data, high school equivalency completion data, and the National Student Clearinghouse database for postsecondary enrollment.

The AWARE system collects and reports data required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services, as well as serving as a case management tool for the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The system is maintained by its vendor, Alliance Enterprises, and has been updated to meet WIOA reporting requirements.

The Maine JobLink (MJL) is a multi-faceted system with ability to interface with other MIS systems. MJL components include ReportLink which collects and dispatches the data required for federal and state reporting on behalf of multiple employment and training programs, ServiceLink, a case management system from which participant eligibility is determined and documented, employment and training plans are developed and updated, services are tracked, and assessment and outcome data captured, FiscalLink a financial management system that tracks program expenditures and funds leveraged from other resources, JobLink, which provides labor exchange services that match job seekers to employers position listings, ProviderLink also referred to as the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) which provides information on providers and programs approved for WIOA purposes, and finally, CertLink which provides a portal in which Maine employer can submit applications for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC). The Maine JobLink system serves the following programs: Title IB Adult, Dislocated worker and Youth programs, Employment Services, Trade Act, Veterans, National Farmworker Jobs Program, Apprenticeship, Competitive Skills Scholarship Program, National Dislocated Worker Grant programs, H1B programs and more as necessary. The system interfaces with Unemployment Compensation's – ReEmployME system, Adult Education's – Maine Stars system, and Vocational Rehabilitation's – AWARE system.

The Maine JobLink system also tracks services to employers from which part of the annual Effectiveness Serving Employers report is generated. Employer assistance staff from multiple agencies enter information about the services provided directly in the employer account. The

State has issued a policy delineating requirement for employer service tracking along with a guide for employer assistance staff from all service agencies to use. See PY19-01Employer Services Tracking policy[1].

In the autumn of 2016, Maine received a $1.1 million-dollar Reemployment and Systems Integration (RSI) Dislocated Worker grant (DWG) to investigate and implement a common access portal across core programs. The working group for this project gathered information from other states on their pursuit of similar initiatives and worked with vendors to review available options for solutions. A request for proposals (RFP) containing the State's requirements for a system was developed and a vendor secured through competitive bid. The system, named W.O.R.K. Services: Workforce Opportunities, Referrals, and Knowledge Services, went live in December 2019 at two soft launch locations, Bangor and Machias, and will be rolled out statewide in 2020. The system integrates the disparate management information systems of Adult Education, BES and BRS with the capacity for additional agency partners over time and includes a public facing portal. For more information on the portal see the Program Data; Data Alignment and Integration section of the plan for more information.

Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI), MDOL's labor market information provider, will add the data on participants of core partners to Maine's of Maine Education and Attainment Research Navigation system or MaineEARNS, thereby linking the records of core program participants with their corresponding wage and employment records for program evaluation and reporting purposes.

MaineEARNS also provides information on employment and wage outcomes for Maine workers who graduated from the University of Maine System and Maine Community College System after July 2008. Students, parents, educators, administrators, policy makers, and anyone interested in earning education credentials and employment in Maine will be able to use this data to research, plan and make informed decisions. Interest has been expressed by at least one private university to join in the collections and reporting. It is this same system which is being used to meet the requirement for the annual ETPL reporting.

b.2) State Policies

Administrators of the Maine's core programs had extensive discussions regarding the policies and practices that will enable the state to achieve its strategic objectives. At the beginning of these discussions, it became apparent that establishing the basic operating principles, or the 'must haves' of an integrated workforce development system will be essential to creating operational plans that implement the state's strategies. The principles outline how services can be integrated and delivered to customers of the one-stop system with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness in serving clients, minimizing duplication of efforts, and increasing customer satisfaction.

Following are the stages of customer flow that Maine's core partner programs developed for one-stop centers.

- Initial Triage
- Intake
- Assessment by one of four core partners
- Services and plan development

Initial Triage —The first point of contact for customer at a one-stop center must be knowledgeable, welcoming and capable of assessing the customer's needs and circumstances (e.g. does the customer have a disability?). In addition to performing an initial triage (a series of questions to identify what the customer's needs and where to direct them), the initial contact person, or "navigator" will make the customer feel understood and connected. The navigator is

responsible for directing customers to the optimal resources: intake, a specific program (referral) or the information center (self-service).

Intake (the process of gathering the data to determine eligibility)—Maine will have a common intake system where relevant customer data is captured and is electronically available to all partners with the informed consent of the customer. This will reduce the need for customers to fill out intake forms multiple times, thereby increasing efficiency of operations and customer satisfaction. Common intake will also foster greater continuity of service.

Assessment—Because core programs share a common purpose in assessing clients, there has been an effort to eliminate unique assessments and focus instead on an assessment process that is standardized, seamless, and integrated whenever possible. Progress in each area is outlined below.

Maine's efforts for assessments to be:

- Standardized. Core partners have set standards for assessment tools that are accessible and to be used for specific purposes. Two examples are the CASAS for numeracy and literacy, and the WOWI for career goals)
- Seamless. Electronic CASAS testing enables access to test scores throughout the state and minimizes assessment mistakes and duplications. Through the new W.O.R.K. Services website, core partners can access customer assessments across agencies. Now, customers only take tests when different skills need to be assessed. This modular system of assessment streamlines the customer experience and minimizes duplication of effort
- Integrated. Core Partners have all been trained on the same workforce assessment (the WOWI) and now recognize and understand a customer's assessment results even when the assessment is administered by another partner. The result is better communication among core partners

Services and Plan Development (getting every customer employed or on a career path)- Currently, a client's plan is not routinely shared among partners, thus reinforcing the 'siloed' nature of the existing system. As part of this unified plan, policies will be developed to enable a client's service plan to follow them (paper copy or scanned file) when they are referred to a new program.

Policies supporting the enactment of these basic principles

The range of policies listed below will be developed by the WIOA Steering Committee to support the aforementioned 'must haves':

- Policies governing and optimizing communication across and among programs and partners to foster better continuity of service and reduce drop-out rates
- Protocols for record or scanned sharing of individualized service plans among partners
- The development of a quasi-standard individualized service plan template; programs are expected to continue to use their proprietary framework
- Policy on standards for assessments and protocols for inter-agency and inter-program assessment sharing
- Policies for professional development to enable the:
    - Development of new skill sets for those operating as navigators

    - Proper reading and interpretation of partner individualized service plans
    - Proper interpretation of intake data
    - Proper use of the front-end software
    - Proper interpretation of assessment data
- Policies governing the development of system improvement measures (communication, dropouts, number of customers referred, etc.).

MOUs will also be further developed and guide work that can be done by and between partners to align services and formalize referral processes and guidelines. Such agreements will also catalog and map out the parts of the workforce development system that will be made up of comprehensive one-stop centers, affiliate one-stop centers, and various other points of service entry, such as partner service sites. The MOUs will be a major tool for articulating specific ways that resources, services, and information will be aligned and integrated and the level and extent to which each partner will jointly serve and or refer an individual customer.

Current policies in place that are to be followed by system partners, include policy [2], PY15-23-Veteran's Priority of Service[3], PY15-20 Change 1-Referring Veteran's with Significant Barriers to Employment to DVOPs[4], PY19-02 Expanded definition of Basic Skill Deficiency[5], PY16-04 One-Stop Certification Criteria[6], PY19-01 Employer Service Tracking Requirements[7] PY16-01 Memoranda of Understanding[8], PY19-04 Infrastructure Funding Agreements/MOU Phase II (DRAFT),(Appendix E)

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING & COST SHARING

Core and required partners must collaborate to design and support the local one-stop delivery system and must articulate how they will work together to jointly serve customers and share costs. It must be articulated through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with each of the three local workforce boards.

The process requires partners to identify the types and levels of services they offer, the comprehensive, affiliate, and other sites their services can be accessed from, how referrals and customer co-enrollment will be handled, and how resources of each partner will be leveraged and coordinated. In addition to service coordination, local partners must establish cost sharing agreements that at a minimum, delineate how infrastructure costs of the local one-stop system will be supported by each required partner. Local boards act as the lead in negotiating cost sharing and to develop the Infrastructure Funding Agreements. Local areas at an impasse in the agreement process must notify the Bureau of Employment Services who will provide technical assistance and if necessary, implement the state funding mechanism through which the state will impose infrastructure cost sharing requirements for that local area.

The Bureau of Employment services is currently working on a co-enrollment policy that will pertain to all core programs and other programs. The policy will promote co-enrollment and blending of services that are customer centered, seamless to the customer and that will stimulate higher-level collaboration and leveraging of resources between system partners.

[1]Employer Services Tracking Policy PY19-01
https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY19-01_Employer_Services_Tracking_Requirements.doc

[2]PY17-01-Nondiscrimination and Accessibility
https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY17-01_NonDiscrim-Accessibility.docx

[3]PY15-23-Veteran's Priority of Service https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY15-23_veterans_priority_of_service.doc

[4]PY15-20 Change 1-Referring Veteran's with Significant Barriers to Employment to DVOPs https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY15-20_referring_veterans_with_SBEs_to_DVOPs%20change%201.doc

[5]PY19-02 Expanded definition of Basic Skill Deficiency https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY19-02_Basic_Skills%20Deficient_Expanded_Definition.doc

[6]PY16-04 One-Stop Certification Criteria https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY16-04_One_Stop_Certification_Criteria.doc

[7]PY19-01 Employer Service Tracking Requirements https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY19-01_Employer_Services_Tracking_Requirements.doc

[8]PY16-01 Memorandum of Understanding Phase 1 https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY16-01_MOU_Phase_1.doc

1. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF–

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2. THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (E.G., CO-ENROLLMENT POLICIES AND UNIVERSAL INTAKE PROCESSES WHERE APPROPRIATE). IN ADDITION, PROVIDE THE STATE'S GUIDELINES FOR STATE-ADMINISTERED ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO A ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

Administrators of the Maine's core programs had extensive discussions regarding the policies and practices that will enable the state to achieve its strategic objectives. At the beginning of these discussions, it became apparent that establishing the basic operating principles, or the 'must haves' of an integrated workforce development system will be essential to creating operational plans that implement the state's strategies. The principles outline how services can be integrated and delivered to customers of the one-stop system with the goal of enhancing the effectiveness in serving clients, minimizing duplication of efforts, and increasing customer satisfaction.

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Current policies in place that are to be followed by system partners, include policy

- PY17-01-Nondiscrimination and Accessibility
- PY15-23-Veteran's Priority of Service
- PY15-20 Change 1-Referring Veteran's with Significant Barriers to Employment to DVOPs
- PY19-02 Expanded definition of Basic Skill Deficiency
- PY16-04 One-Stop Certification Criteria
- PY19-01 Employer Service Tracking Requirements
- PY16-01 Memoranda of Understanding
- PY19-04 Infrastructure Funding Agreements/ MOU Phase II

***The link to the IFA policy although incorrectly titled "DRAFT" is that actual ACTIVE IFA policy. When you click the link to the policy it will open it up in WORD and you will see that it is the Active policy not a draft.**

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING & COST SHARING

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costs. It must be articulated through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with each of the three local workforce boards.

The process requires partners to identify the types and levels of services they offer, the comprehensive, affiliate, and other sites their services can be accessed from, how referrals and customer co-enrollment will be handled, and how resources of each partner will be leveraged and coordinated. In addition to service coordination, local partners must establish cost sharing agreements that at a minimum, delineate how infrastructure costs of the local one-stop system will be supported by each required partner. Local boards act as the lead in negotiating cost sharing and to develop the Infrastructure Funding Agreements. Local areas at an impasse in the agreement process must notify the Bureau of Employment Services who will provide technical assistance and if necessary, implement the state funding mechanism through which the state will impose infrastructure cost sharing requirements for that local area.

The Bureau of Employment services is currently working on a co-enrollment policy that will pertain to all core programs and other programs. The policy will promote co-enrollment and blending of services that are customer centered, seamless to the customer and that will stimulate higher-level collaboration and leveraging of resources between system partners.

3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

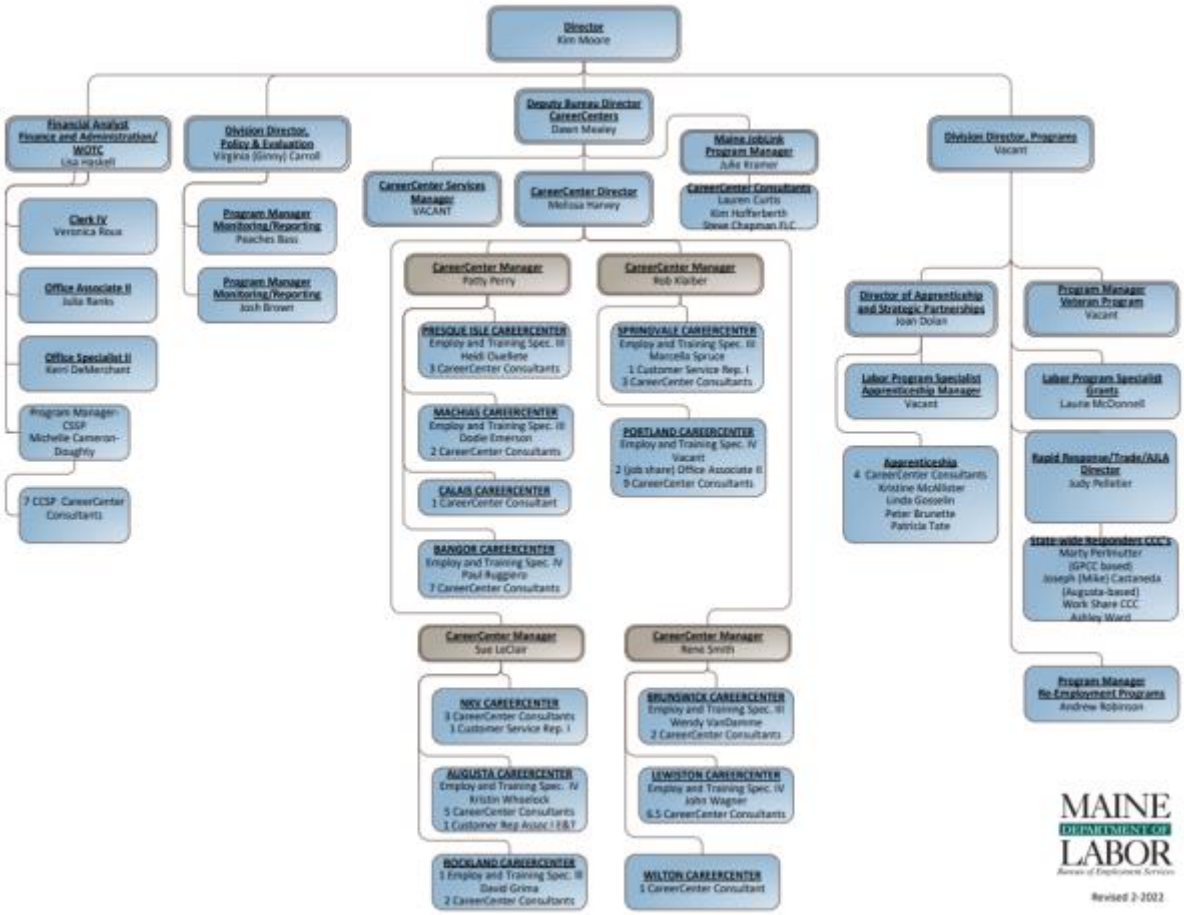
A. STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

The organization and delivery systems for the core programs covered in this Unified Plan are described below.

Adult, Youth, Dislocated Worker, and Wagner-Peyser Programs

The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) is the State Workforce Agency (SWA) established to provide oversight and administration of state and federal workforce programs. The Bureau of Employment Services (BES), within the MDOL, is designated to provide financial, administrative and policy support to Maine's one-stop system.

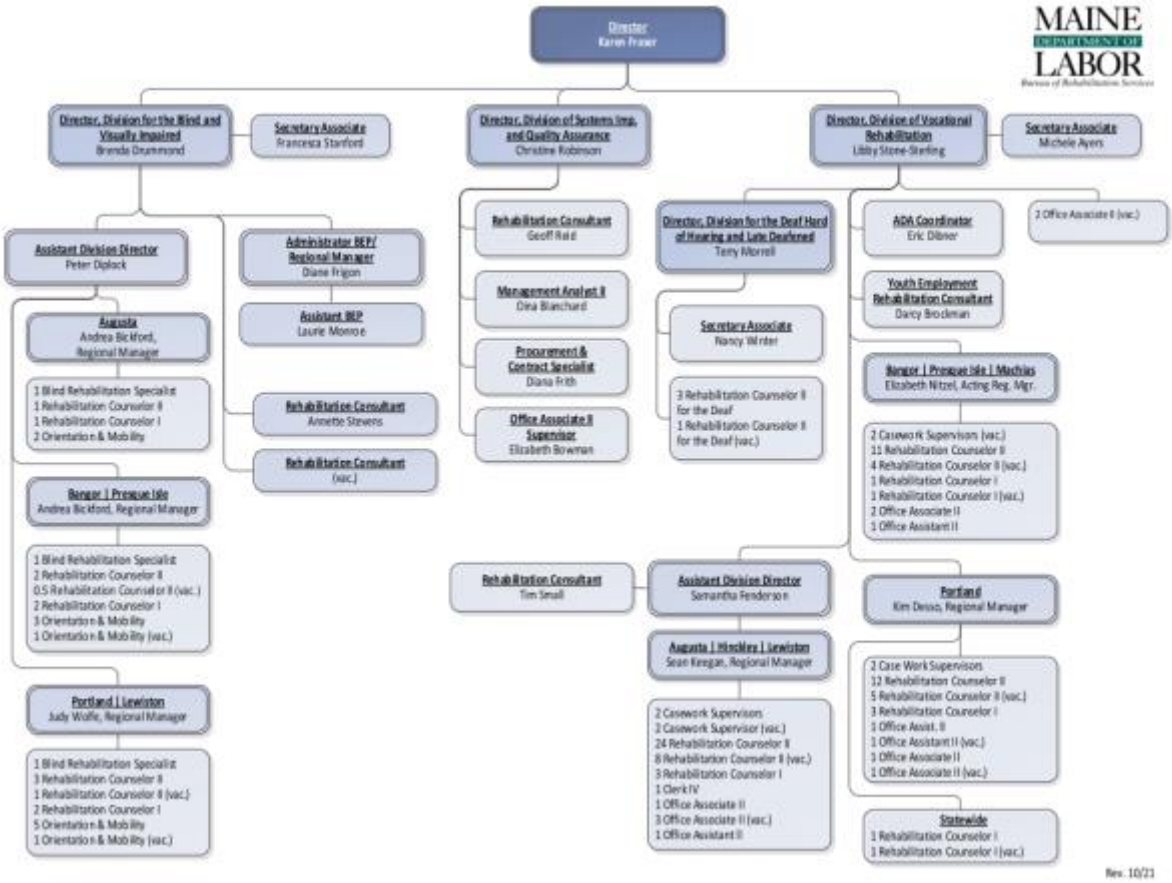
The BES provides labor exchange and employment services at one-stop centers across the state and through the Maine JobLink. BES also administers several USDOL-funded employment and training programs including: Veterans Services, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Rapid Response, Registered Apprenticeship Program. Bureau staff also conduct Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) certification and issue bonds to employers through the Federal Bonding grant. BES also administers the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP), a state-funded program targeted to low income individuals enabling them to attain post-secondary credentials in high-demand, high-wage occupations



Vocational Rehabilitation

Within the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), vocational rehabilitation services are delivered through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). DVR and DBVI staff are regionally based in seven one-stop centers and provide statewide coverage.

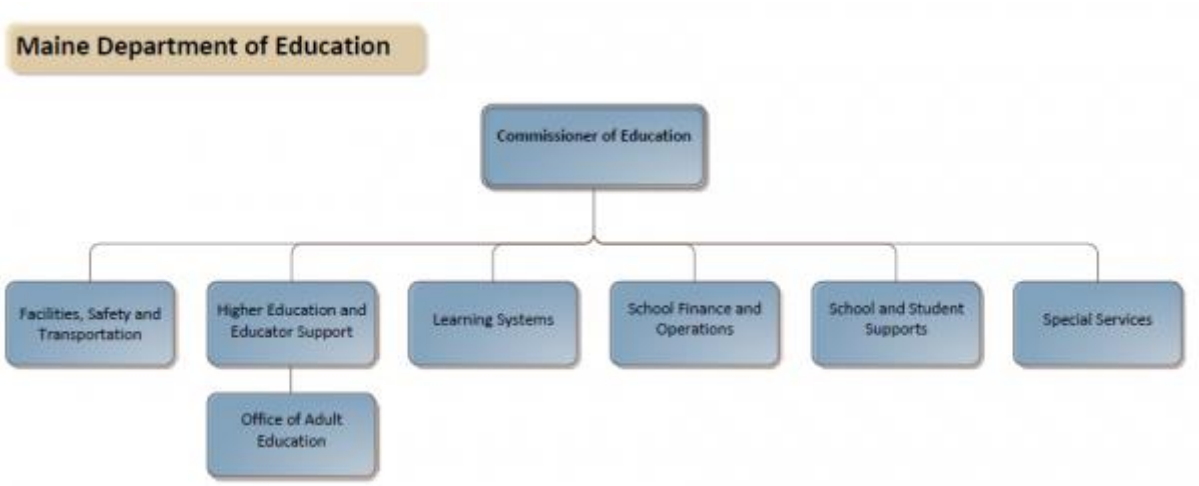
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services



Adult Education Organizational Structure

The Office of Adult Education and Family Literacy is the state agency within the Maine Department of Education that provides services, instruction, and vocational training primarily for individuals beyond the compulsory school age through a career pathways system. Elements of this system include learner intake, assessment, advising, instruction, and individual learning plans. It is guided by data management and analysis, annual monitoring, and annual professional development plans. The system uses appropriately certified staff, is designed to meet identified local needs, and makes use of partnerships and alignment with workforce development, postsecondary institutions, and support services.

Maine Adult Education offers courses in literacy and adult basic education, English language acquisition, citizenship, high school completion, college transition, career exploration and preparation, job skills training, and personal enrichment. In addition, support services, such as academic and career advising, and financial literacy are provided. Maine Adult Education has over 76 programs located throughout the state administered through public school administrative units.



B. STATE BOARD

Maine's SWB is responsible for the functions articulated in WIOA Section 101(d). The SWB serves as a convener of workforce, education, and business stakeholders and seeks to align and improve employment and training activities and programs to enhance the economic prosperity of Maine residents and enable business growth. The SWB implements Governor Mills' workforce development initiatives and ensures the workforce system is customer focused and responsive to job seeker and employer needs.

I. MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Membership Roster

The membership roster for the State Workforce Board, including members' organizational affiliations, is provided.

as of May 2022

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	Affiliation
Janet T. Mills	State of Maine	Governor
Guy Langevin, Chair	Dead River Company	Business representative
LuAnn Ballesteros	The Jackson Laboratory	Business representative
Allyson Coombs	Bath Iron Works (BIW)	Business representative
Bob Dorko	Sappi North America	Business representative
Meryl Fogg	Grand Rounds	Business representative
Aileen Huang-Saad, PhD	Roux Institute	Business representative
Vacant		Business representative
Colleen Hilton	Northern Light Health	Business representative
Adria Horn	Tilson Technology	Business representative
Kimberly Lindlof	Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce	Business representative

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	Affiliation
Robin Wood	Reed and Reed	Business representative
Christopher Morley	Mason's Brewing Co.	Business representative
Jennifer O'Leary	MaineHealth	Business representative
Mary Kate Reny	Renys	Business representative
Greg Sweetser	Sweetser Orchards	Business representative
Vaughan Woodruff	Insource Renewables	Business representative
Gordon McAleer	Bixby Chocolate	Business representative
Vacant		Business representative
Tarlan Ahmadov	Catholic Charities Maine	Worker Advocate
Bruce Noddin	Maine Prisoner Re-Entry Network	Worker Advocate
Jen Fullmer	Boots 2 Roots	Worker Advocate
John Leavitt	Carpenters Local 1996	Labor organization
John Patrick	Maine AFL-CIO	Labor organization
Grant Provost	Iron Worker Local 7	Labor organization
Jason Shedlock	Laborers' International Union of North America	Labor Organization- joint labor-management registered apprenticeship program
Peter Baldacci	Penobscot County Commissioner	County Commissioner
Steve Gorden	Cumberland County Commissioner	County Commissioner
Robert Sezak	Somerset County Commissioner	County Commissioner
Mike Sylvester	State Representative	Senator
Ned Claxton	State Senator	Representative
Julia Trujillo	DECD	State
Laura Fortman	Commissioner, MDOL	State (Title I-B & III)
Brenda Drummond	Director, Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired; Bureau of Rehabilitation Services/MDOL	State (Title IV)
Megan Dichter	Adult Education, DOE	State (Title II)

In addition to the members listed above, the following commissioners and higher education representatives also provide input to the board:

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	Affiliation

NAME	COMPANY/ORGANIZATION	Affiliation
Nina Fisher	Maine Department of Transportation	Deputy Commissioner
Sara Gagne-Holmes	Health and Human Services	Deputy Commissioner
Randy Liberty	Maine Department of Corrections	Commissioner
Rosa Redonnett	University of Maine System	Associate Vice Chancellor
Dan Belyea	Maine Community College System	Executive Director of Workforce Training

II. BOARD ACTIVITIES

Board Activities

In addition to the activities described above, the SWB assists the Governor in the development, modification, and implementation of Unified Plan. The SWB convenes member and stakeholder board meetings at least four times per year. Regular communications with board members are carried out via email. The SWB also maintains a website, which contains meeting minutes, important news, and other relevant information. The website serves as a communication tool with stakeholders and interested parties. State board activities also include the production of an annual report and the coordination of other activities that are relevant to the development of the state's workforce. During the autumn of 2019, the board hosted nine statewide visioning sessions to gather input into the creation of the State's workforce development vision and Unified Plan.

4. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS

A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE PROGRAMS

Assessment of Title I-B Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Program Services

Maine Bureau of Employment Services has established a schedule of formal monitoring, which includes a program and fiscal review of each of the Title I-B programs. Maine's Monitoring Policy and Guidance Manual covers oversight and monitoring of WIOA Title I-B and Title III programs and spells out the roles and responsibilities of local area monitoring and identifies criteria to be reviewed annually and on an ongoing basis.

Financial Risk Assessment

Fiscal reviews ensure that expenditures meet the programmatic, performance, cost category, and compliance requirements of WIOA. Fiscal reviews assess the quality of financial administration by reviewing and assuring that service providers have adequate internal controls and fiscal policies and procedures in place. Financial reviews are conducted using tools provided by the USDOL Employment and Training Administration. In addition to on-site fiscal reviews, the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS) also reviews the audit reports completed on each local area and their subrecipients. Bureau staff work very closely with DAFs staff to ensure that costs for which funds are being requested are allowable and documentation of such are clear and allocated appropriately.

Fiscal monitoring results in an informal exit interview at which identified findings and concerns are discussed and best practices lauded. It is followed up with a formal report that articulates specific findings, cites the regulations and/or policies pertaining to the findings, outlines required action steps that must be taken to resolve the findings and the timelines in which the action steps must be completed.

Procurement practices and policies are also reviewed to ensure that the local area has a clearly identified process for competitive procurement and appropriate procurement practices are in place for pass-through awards. Contract documents are reviewed to ensure they contain the required citations and protocols and procurement activities are also reviewed to ensure contract award decision makers have followed controls pertaining to conflict of interest.

Finally, the fiscal monitoring that the local areas conduct on their subrecipients is also reviewed for the same purposes listed above.

Local Board and Program Assessment

The Bureau of Employment Services' monitoring tool is fashioned after the "Core Monitoring Tool" published by the Employment and Training Administration. Each local area and its Title I-B sub-recipients are monitored annually. Monitoring is conducted to ensure the one-stop system is in compliance with the intent and substance of the rules governing funding streams and to identify whether the systems are operating to achieve state and local strategic workforce system goals. The monitoring tool is also designed to explore the working relationships between required workforce system partners. Monitoring provides an opportunity to identify best practices that can be replicated and to identify performance and compliance issues that need addressing.

Each year, the Bureau of Employment Services conducts on-site monitoring of the local board during which local board governance is evaluated and local area subrecipient monitoring activity is assessed. The local area governance review includes examination of board policies, board membership, and formal "Memoranda of Understanding" with required partners. It also includes a review of board minutes, requests for proposal, service and subrecipient contracts, quarterly reports and most recent progress in achieving planned service levels and performance goals. Inadequate policies and/or lack of required board membership are identified as findings and technical assistance is provided upon request.

The local area plan is reviewed against plan guidelines issued by the USDOL and Maine. Plans that do not contain all the required elements are not approved until they comply with all the requirements. Local areas are evaluated on the process used to develop and create the local plan, to ensure adequate involvement of system partners in identifying and implementing strategies outlined in the plan and that the plan contains steps for implementation of identified strategies. Local board certification is approved only if the local board has an approved plan in place, meets negotiated performance measures, maintains required local board membership, addresses any outstanding findings or policy requirements, and sustains fiscal integrity.

Methods the local board uses to communicate, educate and inform sub-recipients and system partners is also evaluated to understand local area effectiveness in meeting plan goals and promoting continuous improvements.

Local area subrecipients are also monitored annually to ensure that the local board oversight is adequate and results in subrecipient compliance. Subrecipient monitoring includes intensive file reviews to ensure that adequate documentation of eligibility, participant services, and performance outcomes are in place. Program staff interviews are utilized to gauge whether program design and delivery is being conducted according to requirements and local area plans and participant interviews are conducted to gain insight on the participant's perspective and satisfaction with the service being provided. Service providers are required to upload all validation and eligibility documentation eliminating the need for paper files. This allows staff to conduct file reviews through the central office on an ongoing basis.

Sub-recipient interviews allow the monitors to assess whether the service providers understand and are implementing service delivery according to the local area plan and whether they are familiar with and appropriately applying federal, state and local board policies and meeting the requirements of specific programs. Tools that service providers use to conduct

initial, comprehensive, and academic assessments are also appraised, as are the methods for providing and documenting provision of required services, including information about nondiscrimination and customer complaint process, labor market and career information, and job search assistance processes.

Program Youth services staff are asked to explain how they assess and document each youth participant's need for individualized or training services or need for any of the required youth service elements. File reviews and the number of enrolled, look to identify whether youth have access to each of the elements. Youth program case managers are interviewed to showcase service delivery methods. Staff interviews help reviewers understand how they develop employment and training plans or individual service strategies for youth and whether they partner with outside entities to provide any of the fourteen service elements, such as adult mentoring. Work experience files and agreements are reviewed, and staff members are asked to explain how work experience sites are monitored to determine that they are safe and are asked to describe how any issues identified at such sites are addressed. Service providers must also provide an overview of and discuss how work experience employers are educated about child labor law and safety requirements. Youth service policies and protocols are discussed to identify whether and how they differ from adult program policies and protocols.

Assessment of Employer Services

One of the fundamental methods for assessing quality of employer services is to identify if the information and services being provided are being coordinated with other one-stop system partners. Providers are asked to explain how they promote the services of the Maine JobLink and how they collaborate with other Maine business assistance entities, such as the Department of Economic and Community Development or the Small Business Development Centers, the business and industry team members of Maine Community Colleges and other local and regional education and workforce partners. Core partners are required to document services to employers in the Maine JobLink employer account system. This system is used to create the Effectiveness Serving Employers annual report, documentation requires that the employer have an account in the Maine JobLink and staff are educated to explain the many benefits to an employer of having a Maine JobLink account.

Quarterly Performance Assessment

Monitoring is an ongoing activity that requires local areas to submit quarterly reports that identify actual to planned service levels and levels of attainment of negotiated performance goals. Local areas submit both quantitative and qualitative reports which must include at least one service success story from each program each quarter. Planned spending is also reviewed against actual using quarterly fiscal reports to ensure spending thresholds are met and spending caps not exceeded.

Quarterly reporting allows us to address and understand issues regarding service or spending levels that are below or above planned levels. Bureau of Employment Services' responses to quarterly reports may be in written or oral form; whenever there are common issues across multiple local areas at once, a group conference call is initiated to share data and brainstorm action steps to address the issues directly with local board staff. The Bureau of Employment Services has recently added another component to monitoring, which is to conduct random checks of backup documentation for weekly drawdowns; this practice allows a just-in-time review of fiscal practices and internal controls.

In addition to monitoring of one-stop partner programs conducted by their own administrative entity, the level and ability of the partner programs to adhere to the activities identified in the local area Memorandum of Understanding, that pertain to provision of and access to services and cross-agency referrals, will be reviewed as part of the review process identified by each local board and as part of the annual monitoring process conducted by the MDOL.

Local areas are required to provide an annual report on the progress of their local/regional strategic plan activities, including partner-related activities identified in in the plan. These reports will also be used to evaluate and assess the efficacy of one-stop partner roles in the local one-stop systems.

Data Validation

The BES has developed a Data Element Validation Policy Manual that explains how data will be validated for Title I-B and Title III programs. The policy requires that all validating documents be uploaded into Maine JobLink at specific times and under specific document upload headings. It requires local areas to conduct a sample file validation exercise once quarterly to ensure staff are keyed in on what is required for data validation and includes both a quarterly and annual data element validation file review to be conducted by bureau staff as well. The manual identifies acceptable data element validation documentation and tools and report forms to be used by service provider staff. The policy includes a requirement for annual staff training on data validation that will explain the purpose of data element validation and that will address any areas in which validation checks have failed throughout the year. Files selected for validation each quarter are those of participants who have exited from the adult, dislocated worker, in-school and out-of-school youth programs.

The State Board has a subcommittee known as the program partner committee made up of core, required, and additional one-stop partners. The committee meets to discuss implementation of the local area Memorandum of Understanding and how to integrate services and implement cost sharing agreements. The mission for this subcommittee is to provide leadership to their service providers in the local areas on how to implement and improve a customer-centric, seamless, integrated workforce system that meets the needs of workers, including those with barriers to employment and employers.

One-Stop Certification

A key tool for assessing how well the system functions is the one-stop certification process. The SWB reviewed the criteria that must be considered for one-stop certification and identified two additional items to be included. The first additional component they identified was outreach; specifically, the level, methods, and outcomes of outreach efforts to both employers and target populations, but particularly to employers offering high-demand, high-wage job openings to targeted populations that cannot readily access one-stop services because they live-in isolated areas or are reentry civilian life after incarceration.

In addition to outreach, the SWB identified the capacity to meet or exceed negotiated performance measures by one-stop, so one-stop center performance can be compared, best practices identified and replicated, corrective action steps be implemented, and additional resources and technical assistance can be applied to one-stops that are having difficulty meeting or exceeding performance measures. State policy PY16-04 One Stop Certification[1] outlines the requirements for implementing a methodology and certifying one-stops.

The certification process is important to setting a minimum level of quality and consistency of services in one-stop centers across Maine. The certification criteria allow the state to set standard expectations for customer-focused, seamless services from a network of partners that will help individuals overcome barriers to becoming and staying employed. In order to be eligible to receive infrastructure funding, one-stop centers must be assessed and certified by the local board at least once every three years using criteria established under WIOA Section 121(g) and identified by the SWB in consultation with the chief elected officials and local boards, as outlined in the policy.

The SWB, in consultation with chief elected officials and local boards, will review the one-stop certification criteria at least once every two years and will update it as necessary to assure continuous improvement of the system. The SWB will ensure that one-stop certification criteria

is in alignment with the Unified Plan and that any revisions to the certification criteria will be formalized in a policy issuance and included as a modification to the Unified Plan.

If a local board also acts as a one-stop operator, the SWB will be the entity that evaluates and certifies the one-stops in that local area.

The criteria identified in this guidance will be used to evaluate one-stop centers for effectiveness, customer satisfaction, physical and programmatic accessibility, and alignment and integration of resources for the purpose of continuous improvement.

Evaluation Criteria must include assessment of how well the one-stop center:

- Integrates available services for participants and businesses in a way that is tied to locally negotiated performance goals
- Meets the workforce development needs of participants through provision of services and leverage of resources
- Meets the employment needs of local employers
- Operates in a cost-efficient manner
- Coordinates services among and between one-stop programs in a way that is seamless to the customer and eliminates duplication of services
- Provides access to partner program services to the maximum extent possible, including providing services outside of regular business hours where and when there is a workforce need identified by the local board
- Ensures equal opportunity for all individuals, including individuals with barriers to employment, to participate in or benefit from one-stop center services
- Acts to comply with disability-related regulations implementing WIOA Section 188 set forth in 29 CFR 38
    - Achieves or exceeds state negotiated levels of performance and other performance measures established by the local board for the local area
    - Has a process for identifying and responding to technical assistance needs of staff and partners
    - Has a system of ensuring professional staff have the requisite abilities, knowledge and skills required to administer services, including a system for provision of continuing professional development activities on behalf of professional staff, as necessary
    - Has a system in place to capture and respond to customer feedback and to ensure customer-centric service delivery and customer satisfaction (workers, seekers and employers)
    - Has a system in place to assess itself regarding these requirements and to implement continuous improvements

State Criteria: Per the SWB, local boards must also evaluate one-stop centers on the effectiveness of outreach strategies and efforts, including:

- Outreach to employers to provide information about the types of services, information and sector initiatives offered by and through the system

- Outreach to individuals who cannot easily access the services at the physical one-stop centers, including:
    - Individuals in remote areas
    - Individuals with disabilities
    - Individuals with limited English proficiency or literacy
    - Individuals who are currently incarcerated and preparing for release

Procedures and Methods of Evaluation: Local boards may adopt locally identified methods of assessment which may include:

- Assessment through a recognized certification mechanism, like the Malcolm Baldridge Award, that incorporates the above criteria
- Assessment using a specific evaluation tool designed to review and evaluate the above criteria
- Assessment using a combination of the above or other method as determined by the local board

Local Board Requirements and Deadlines:

- A draft of the local area process and evaluation instruments to be used must be submitted to the Bureau of Employment Services
- Local boards must ensure local one-stop system service providers and partners have been made aware of the process and evaluation instruments that will be used to evaluate and certify one-stops
- All local area one-stops must be evaluated and certified at least once every three years
- Documentation of certification of each one-stop must be provided to the Bureau of Employment Services

Local Area Criteria: Local boards may identify criteria in addition to that identified in state guidance. They must inform local system partners of the additional criteria via dissemination of formal policy or guidance and must include the additional criteria as part of the local/regional plan and must assess based on the criteria as part of the overall one-stop certification process.

Assessment of Title III Wagner-Peyser Programs –Accessibility - EEO Practices

Wagner-Peyser programs are assessed at the same time Title I-B program reviews are being conducted. Staff members are interviewed regarding knowledge and practice of explaining job order procedures and job seeker registration services and are asked to explain the ways in which they provide employer assistance and help in creation and resolution of jobs orders. An assessment of staff knowledge regarding equal opportunity and affirmative action requirements is also conducted along with a review of staff knowledge Wagner-Peyser regulations. Processes to provide initial assessment and appropriate referrals to center customers and front-end procedures are also reviewed. In some instances, participants may also be interviewed either in person or via telephone.

Monitors use portions of the Section 188 checklist ("Promising Practices Guide") and the requirements in the Maine Workforce System Policy 17-01, "Accessibility, Equal Opportunity, and Nondiscrimination," to conduct a portion of the accessibility review. Staff are also interviewed regarding their familiarity with complaint procedures, particularly the

discrimination complaint process. WIOA's Equal Opportunity Statement is reviewed as needed to ensure staff are aware of the particular requirements in handling discrimination allegations.

The State EO Officer role was recently moved from Bureau of Human Resources to the Maine Department of Labor. This will provide better WIOA expertise to the EO functions. The biennial Non-Discrimination Plan (NDP) was recently re-drafted and submitted to the USDOL CRC. After the CRC review, the NDP will be revised and updated to respond to any concerns or findings. A separate equal opportunity review is annually conducted by the State EO officer. Our case management database generates an EO report to provide demographic characteristics of people served. The EO officer reviews subrecipient compliance with universal access and nondiscrimination regulations through comparison of participant applications and enrollments against demographic data. Likewise, participant files are reviewed to ensure that all staff-assisted participants have been provided with the required EO statement and understand their right to file a complaint. Upon completion of the review, providers are supplied with a report of review outcomes and a corrective action plan to address findings.

Once the reviews are completed, the EO Officer will provide updated training to the WIOA core partners that will incorporate any findings into the presentation material.

Staff review the local board's annual assessment of accessibility of the centers and conduct a brief accessibility assessment while monitoring specific one-stops. Staff members must explain how customers can access the assistive technology in the centers; all required posted information is examined to ensure it reflects the most up-to-date version of the regulations and sites are checked to determine whether information is provided in Braille and other languages besides printed English.

At least once annually, a separate equal employment opportunity review is conducted by the State EO officer. The EO officer reviews subrecipient compliance with universal access and nondiscrimination regulations through examination of participant applications and enrollments against demographic data. Likewise, participant files are reviewed to ensure that all staff-assisted participants have been provided with the required EO statement and understand their right to file a complaint. Upon completion of the review, providers are supplied with a formal report of review outcomes and a corrective action plan to address findings.

Customer Satisfaction

Job Seeker and employer customer satisfaction surveys are conducted at least once annually in addition to any local area customer satisfaction activities. These are conducted using survey monkey and may include short phone interviews as well. In general, the results provide us with information about the perceived value of required services and whether the services are meeting the needs of the customer. The quality of staff assistance is also ascertained through the questionnaire. The results of the service are explained in the Annual Report.

Walk-in customers are requested to fill out a customer satisfaction survey at each visit, this tool has resulted in reconfiguring info center space, reviewing customer guides to ensure they are easy to understand, and other efforts toward continuous improvements.

Performance Results

Every two years, state performance goals for the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth and Wagner-Peyser programs are negotiated with USDOL. In turn, the Maine Bureau of Employment Services negotiates performance goals with each of the local areas. Technical assistance is provided to local area board and service provider staff regarding how performance is negotiated, measured and reported. The ability to achieve proposed performance levels can be affected by numerous factors, including unanticipated mass layoffs, layoffs of low-skill workers in a high-skill job market, and lack of job openings in rural areas. Most recently, low unemployment and an

increase in minimum wage each year for the last three years have had an effect on negotiated measures.

Assessment of Core Program Activities Using Annual Performance Accountability Assessment Results.

Now that all four core partners are required to report on the same performance outcomes, the State will be better able to compare outcomes for quality improvement purposes, based not only on the barriers of the individuals served, but on the type and level of services received through each core program.

Using specific reporting elements, such as co-enrollment, level and type of career service provided, level and type of training service provided (or not), amounts spent on each participant for each service type, participant demographics and local economic factors, the state will be able to develop a quality assessment that more deeply explores all of the data that may affect performance achievement.

The additional data will allow the state to compare the programs, service packages, co-enrollments and specific approaches of local areas (and individual service providers) that meet or exceed planned and negotiated measures with those of local areas that are having difficulty doing so. In doing this, the performance staff will be able to promote and/or require local areas that are struggling to achieve negotiated measures to replicate the practices of local areas that are exceeding goals. Such strategies may include, expanding the number of participants taking part in multiple core programs services simultaneously, such as adult education and Title I-B services. It may also identify that professional staff development pertaining to participant and/or employer outreach needs to be addressed. Finally, it may be that state, local area or service provider policies are restricting service blending possibilities and that by adjusting these the providers will be better able to address participant needs and provide supports for improved employment opportunities and longer-term employment success.

Once the state becomes adept at utilizing the Statistical Adjustment Model it will have the ability to identify factors that are beyond the local area's control, such as major downsizings, extreme rurality, higher levels of non-English speaking residents etc. and will be able to recommend proactive responses by core and other service partners in those areas that can begin to address those issues. Such as by directing collaborative investments to improved English literacy programs that combine English proficiency and occupational training, or that establish partnerships that link individuals without access to one-stops or affiliate sites (because they reside at extreme distances) through technology or new partnerships with adult education providers or municipal libraries.

Local Areas are conducting research around high-growth career pathways and training staff to utilize pathway models whenever providing labor market guidance to, or developing individual services strategies with, participants. It is likely there is some direct correlation between clearly defined pathways (both at the individual and local area level) and improved employment attainment and retention outcomes.

Maine reviews performance on a quarterly and annual basis using various methods, including program and fiscal report review, annual and ongoing desk top monitoring, and anecdotal information sharing. By using all available assessment data, monitors have been able to identify service models that result in better outcomes for high-risk youth that could be replicated in some areas but not all. If the state achieves at least 90 percent of the negotiated performance rate they are considered to have met the individual measure; however, when reviewing the overall measures for the state, the adjusted levels attained by all four core partners are considered.

[1]PY16-04 One Stop Certification Criteria https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY16-04_One_Stop_Certification_Criteria.doc

B. ASSESSMENT OF ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS

See III.b.4.A

C. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

before adjustment

Program Measures PY20 Outcomes Before Adjustment	Negotiated	Actual	Outcome
ADULT Employed 2nd quarter after exit	72.0%	67.4%	93.6% passed
ADULT Employed 4th quarter after exit	71.0%	67.9%	95.6% passed
ADULT Median Earnings	$4,953	$6,072	Exceeded
ADULT Credential Attainment	62.0%	73.0%	Exceeded
ADULT Measurable Skill Gain	45.0%	48.4%	Exceeded
DW Employed 2nd quarter after exit	79.0%	74.4%	94.1 passed
DW Employed 4th quarter after exit	76.5%	77.2%	Exceeded
DW Median Earnings	$6,500	$7,969	Exceeded
DW Credential Attainment	64.0%	72.2%	Exceeded
DW Measurable Skill Gain	50.0%	47.3%	94.6% passed
YOUTH Employed/ in education 2nd quarter after exit	70.0%	71.9%	Exceeded
YOUTH Employed/in education 4th quarter after exit	70.0%	73.1%	Exceeded
YOUTH Median Earnings	Baseline	$3,789	
YOUTH Credential Attainment	51.0%	50.7%	99.4% passed
YOUTH Measurable Skill	Baseline	35.6%	

Program Measures PY20 Outcomes Before Adjustment	Negotiated	Actual	Outcome
Gain			
WP Employed 2nd quarter after exit	67.0%	61.0%	91.0 passed
WP Employed 4th quarter after exit	65.0%	61.3%	94.3% passed
WE Median Earnings	$5,350	$6,182	Exceeded

The Bureau of Employment services in partnership with the Center for Workforce Research and Information have embarked on an evaluation of long-term outcomes of Title IB Adult participants who completed occupational training as a Certified Nurse Assistant or Medical Assistant, using wage match for those who exited the program as far back as 2016.

Recent progress on the evaluation includes identifying the business requirements of the study, the data elements that will be extracted and the formats the data must be compiled in from the overall Maine JobLink database. Staff from the Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI) have access to much of the Maine JobLink data through the MJL Tableau portal to identify specific data to be accessed and any data points that may be missing. A request from AJLA to match SSNs with participant ID numbers has gone in as this is one column of data that does not go into the PIRL data section and will be necessary for the long-term wage and industry sector match. Once the data is in place according to specifications, it will be run through the Maine Earns data base. Because data is being extracted from exiters of the PY16 program year going forward, some preliminary data outcomes will be available in the short run, the evaluation is a long-term project that will look at the data over a five-year period.

To this point, we have used the AJLA Tableau reports and the WIOA PIRL files to come up with project plan. We have identified which data tables we would need to import into the MDOL data warehouse in order to complete this work. We believe that exporting the data from AJLA Tableau reports is not the best approach because we would like to bring all participant data of interest to the study in one file (i.e. 2016-2022 data all in one file rather than smaller reports that can be exported from Tableau and patched together later on). We have analyzed the AJLA Tableau reports and how the data are stored and combined into the Enrollment Participation by Date Type Report. We have some additional data mapping/analysis work still ahead but are getting close to a data transfer and import plan. From there, we will need to work with our technical lead at Maine IT to build out a new staging area in the MDOL data warehouse where we can import and store these data tables.

However, CWRI requires AJLA to provide a crosswalk file that contains Job Seeker ID numbers and corresponding Social Security Numbers. Ideally, we would like to work with ALJA to build an automated data transfer process by which we could get a Job Seeker ID / SSN crosswalk file that is updated somewhat regularly, on a monthly basis for example. From there we can proceed to import the data and put it into the production environment in the MDOL data warehouse.

As an interim deliverable, we could provide a top-level outcomes report of WIOA program participants easily from there – once these files are securely transitioned to the CWRI MaineEarns system, it is expected a preliminary report could be produced in the first week of June 2022. This simple outcome report would include employment and wage outcomes such as 3-year and 5-year employment rates, full time employment rate, employment across industries, and median wages of CNA trainees who received WIOA funded training. To produce a more thorough written evaluation and construct comparison groups will take more time, we would need at least a few more months.

Assessment of Title II—Adult Education

TABLE 23: ADULT EDUCATION FEDERAL PARTICIPANT PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

	FY 2020				FY 2021			
Adult Education Learner Type	Enroll-ment	Measura-ble Skill Gains	Federal Target	Out-come	Enroll-ment	Measura-ble Skill Gains	Federal Target	Out-come
Adult Basic Education	2,935	29.40%	-	-	2,678	41.89%	-	-
English Speakers of other Languages	1,940	7.42%	-	-	1,394	29.41%	-	-
All Adult Learners	4,875	20.65%	42%	Did not meet	4,072	37.62%	36.00%	Ex-ceeded

-	FY 2020			FY 2021		
Primary Indicators of Performance	Percent Achieved	Federal Target	Outcome	Percent Achieved	Federal Target	Outcome
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	35.17%	-	-	33.22%	34.00%	Met
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	35.14%	-	-	32.10%	32.00%	Met
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4,784.63	-	-	$5,270.94	$4,250.00	Exceeded
Credential Attainment Rate	36.39%	-	-	48.07%	32.00%	Exceeded
Measurable Skill Gains	20.66%	42.00%	Did not meet	37.62%	36.00%	Exceeded

After exceeding federal targets in both FY17 and FY18, measurable skill gains decreased slightly in FY19 and the negotiated target of 41 percent for FY19 was not met. Performance measures are expected to improve in FY21 with recent changes to the managed information system to better capture skill gains for high school completion and an increased focus on post-testing learners. Baseline percentages have been established for employment and postsecondary outcomes in FY19 and with both increased academic rigor and better alignment with comprehensive career pathway services, Maine adult education's baseline percentages will improve.

Title IV Programs—Vocational Rehabilitation

Within the Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Maine has two federally designated state units, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) and the

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), which deliver vocational rehabilitation (VR) services.

In accordance with Section 116(b) of WIOA, as well as the Rehabilitation Services Administration's TAC 19-01, BRS is updating its internal controls and quality assurance processes to assure the accuracy, validity, and reliability of its performance data. As part of this effort, BRS is working with its core partners to develop additional data sources that will provide a more complete report of the outcomes achieved by people with disabilities served by DVR and DBVI. In addition to Maine unemployment insurance wage data, Maine will access the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS is also developing a data sharing agreement with Maine's Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. Progress on these initiatives have been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and related staffing resources but efforts to improve internal controls and data quality assurance will continue during the remaining two years of this Unified State Plan.

BRS is provides ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners, common performance measures, career pathways, and best practices in serving the needs of employers. BRS benefitted from an intensive technical assistance agreement with the previous WINTAC (the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center)in the areas of common performance measures, internal controls, career pathways, apprenticeships and peer mentoring and continues to access technical assistance and training from the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine JobLink as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding effectiveness serving employers.

For the first two years of the 2020-2023 plan, DVR and DBVI had two full years of data available regarding the Measurable Skill Gains indicator to identify an initial expected level of performance on that measure and now will be expanding that to establish performance goals for the five performance measures for the remaining two years of the plan, in accordance with RSA-TAC—22-02.

D. EVALUATION

The Bureau of Employment services in partnership with the Center for Workforce Research and Information have embarked on an evaluation of long-term outcomes of Title IB Adult participants who completed occupational training as a Certified Nurse Assistant or Medical Assistant, using wage match for those who exited the program as far back as 2016.

Recent progress on the evaluation includes identifying the business requirements of the study, the data elements that will be extracted and the formats the data must be compiled in from the overall Maine JobLink database. Staff from the Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI) have access to much of the Maine JobLink data through the MJL Tableau portal to identify specific data to be accessed and any data points that may be missing. A request from AJLA to match SSNs with participant ID numbers has gone in as this is one column of data that does not go into the PIRL data section and will be necessary for the long-term wage and industry sector match. Once the data is in place according to specifications, it will be run through the Maine Earns data base. Because data is being extracted from exiters of the PY16 program year going forward, some preliminary data outcomes will be available in the short run, the evaluation is a long-term project that will look at the data over a five-year period.

To this point, we have used the AJLA Tableau reports and the WIOA PIRL files to come up with project plan. We have identified which data tables we would need to import into the MDOL data warehouse in order to complete this work. We believe that exporting the data from AJLA Tableau reports is not the best approach because we would like to bring all participant data of interest to the study in one file (i.e. 2016-2022 data all in one file rather than smaller reports that can be exported from Tableau and patched together later on). We have analyzed the AJLA Tableau reports and how the data are stored and combined into the Enrollment Participation by Date Type Report. We have some additional data mapping/analysis work still ahead but are getting close to a data transfer and import plan. From there, we will need to work with our technical lead at Maine IT to build out a new staging area in the MDOL data warehouse where we can import and store these data tables.

However, CWRI requires AJLA to provide a crosswalk file that contains Job Seeker ID numbers and corresponding Social Security Numbers. Ideally, we would like to work with ALJA to build an automated data transfer process by which we could get a Job Seeker ID / SSN crosswalk file that is updated somewhat regularly, on a monthly basis for example. From there we can proceed to import the data and put it into the production environment in the MDOL data warehouse.

As an interim deliverable, we could provide a top-level outcomes report of WIOA program participants easily from there – once these files are securely transitioned to the CWRI MaineEarns system, it is expected a preliminary report could be produced in the first week of June 2022. This simple outcome report would include employment and wage outcomes such as 3-year and 5-year employment rates, full time employment rate, employment across industries, and median wages of CNA trainees who received WIOA funded training. To produce a more thorough written evaluation and construct comparison groups will take more time, we would need at least a few more months.

Adult Ed Annual Evaluations

The state office reviews each program for compliance with the Maine State Legislature's definition (LD 1780) of adult education as well as WIOA requirements. Programs that score high on the risk analysis for such things as having a new director, consistent late or incorrect reporting, not meeting objectives, or fiscal irregularities become priorities for monitoring. Programs that are not meeting their responsibilities and/or objectives are provided with additional technical assistance to help them to come into full compliance.

Within the Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Maine has two federally designated state units, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), which deliver vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. Each Title IV VR program conducts a comprehensive statewide assessment jointly with their respective State Rehabilitation Councils every three years to determine the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in Maine. It specifically focusses upon individuals with the most significant disabilities; individuals with disabilities who are minorities and have been unserved or underserved; and individuals who are served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system. The results of this evaluation, which relies on a wide range of data sources, including W.I.O.A., the U.S. Census Bureau, Social Security Administration and Consumer Satisfaction Surveys, serves to inform DVR and DBVI's State Plans and drives activities that are necessary to address the needs of individuals in Maine who are eligible for VR services.

In accordance with Section 116(b) of WIOA, as well as the Rehabilitation Services Administration's TAC 19-01, BRS is updating its internal controls and quality assurance processes to assure the accuracy, validity, and reliability of its performance data. As part of this effort, BRS is working with its core partners to develop additional data sources that will provide a more complete report of the outcomes achieved by people with disabilities served by DVR and DBVI. In addition to Maine unemployment insurance wage data, Maine will access the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS is also developing a data sharing agreement with Maine's Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. Progress on these initiatives have been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and related staffing resources but efforts to improve internal controls and data quality assurance will continue during the remaining two years of this Unified State Plan.

BRS is provides ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners, common performance measures, career pathways, and best practices in serving the needs of employers. BRS benefitted from an intensive technical assistance agreement with the previous WINTAC (the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center) in the areas of common performance measures, internal controls, career pathways, apprenticeships and peer mentoring and continues to access technical assistance and training from the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine JobLink as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding effectiveness serving employers.

5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

I. YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 128(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

Maine uses the basic formula identified in WIOA Sec. 128 (b) for local area distribution of WIOA Title IB youth funds and uses the basic formula identified in WIOA Sec. 132(b) for local area distribution Title IB formula funded Adult and Dislocated Worker funds. Because Maine uses the exact formula identified under these sections of WIOA the State has not issued a separate policy on WIOA Title IB fund distribution to local areas.

Of the total amount of funds allocated for Youth training under WIOA §128, the State will reserve 15% for statewide activities including administration as permitted by WIOA. The remaining amount will be distributed to local areas:

33 1/3% of the federal allotment to Maine is allocated to local areas based on the relative number of unemployed individuals residing in areas of substantial unemployment in each local area as compared to the total number of such unemployed individuals in the State.

33 1/3% of the federal allotment to Maine is allocated to local areas based on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals who reside in each local area as compared to the total number of such unemployed individuals in the State. "Excess number" means the number of unemployed individuals in excess of 4.5 percent of the civilian labor force.

33 1/3% of the federal allotment to Maine is allocated to local areas based on the relative number of disadvantaged youth compared to the total number of disadvantaged youth in the State.

The State will not employ the discretionary option described in WIOA §128(b) (3).

Data for the first two requirements will be produced by MDOL's Center for Workforce Information Services. Data for the third element will be provided by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) from census data.

The State will employ the discretion given by the Secretary of Labor to utilize the "hold harmless" clause described above.

As Maine follows the WIOA local area distribution formula, we are adding the "minimum percentage" component to the plan which delineates how funds are allocated to local areas for the Youth and Dislocated Worker Programs. The wording is exactly the same for both the Youth and Dislocated Worker allocation description.

Minimum Percentage – The Local Area will not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the two preceding fiscal years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with the preceding sentence shall be obtained by ratably reducing the allocations to be made to other local areas.

II. ADULT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

Maine uses the basic formula identified in WIOA Sec. 128 (b) for local area distribution of WIOA Title IB youth funds and uses the basic formula identified in WIOA Sec. 132(b) for local area distribution Title IB formula funded Adult and Dislocated Worker funds. Because Maine uses the exact formula identified under these sections of WIOA the State has not issued a separate policy on WIOA Title IB fund distribution to local areas.

Of the total amount of funds allocated for the Adult program under WIOA §132(b) (1), the State reserves 15 percent for statewide activities and administration as permitted. The remaining amount is distributed to local areas within 30 days of receipt as required by WIOA §182(e).

The state does not utilize a discretionary formula for distribution and has adhered to the basic allocation formula as follows:

33 1/3% of the federal allotment to Maine is allocated to local areas based on the relative number of unemployed individuals residing in areas of substantial unemployment in each local area as compared to the total number of such unemployed individuals in the State.

33 1/3% of the federal allotment to Maine is allocated to local areas based on the relative excess number of unemployed individuals who reside in each local area as compared to the total number of such unemployed individuals in the State. "Excess number" means the number of unemployed individuals in excess of 4.5 percent of the civilian labor force.

33 1/3% of the federal allotment to Maine is allocated to local areas based on the relative number of disadvantaged adults compared to the total number of disadvantaged adults in the State.

Data for the first two requirements will be produced by MDOL's Center for Workforce Information Services. Data for the third element will be provided by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) from census data.

The State will employ the discretion given by the Secretary of Labor to utilize the "hold harmless" clause:

MINIMUM PERCENTAGE--No service delivery area within any State shall be allocated an amount equal to less than 90 percent of the average of its allocation percentage for the two preceding fiscal years prior to the fiscal year for which such determination is made. If the amounts appropriated pursuant to section 3(a)(1) for a fiscal year and available to carry out

this part are not sufficient to provide an amount equal to at least 90 percent of such allocation percentage to each such area, the amounts allocated to each area shall be ratably reduced.

III. DISLOCATED WORKER EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) AND BASED ON DATA AND WEIGHTS ASSIGNED

Of the total amount of funds allocated for Dislocated Worker services under WIOA §132(b) (2), the State will reserve 25 percent for statewide rapid response activities as permitted by WIOA §133(a) (2) and will reserve 15 percent for statewide activities including administration as permitted by WIOA.

The remaining amount will be distributed to local areas according to WIOA §133(b) (2) (B). The following four data elements will be used to calculate allocation percentages:

Insured unemployment- The average weekly number of continued unemployment insurance program claims (less partial) during the previous full year for which data is available for each county is aggregated by local area and divided by the total to arrive at a percentage for each local area.

Unemployment concentrations- The annual average of unemployment for each county during the previous full year for which data is available is aggregated by local area and divided by the total to arrive at a percentage for each local area.

Declining industries data- The number of jobs lost between the previous full year for which data is available and the year five years previous to that year in both durable and non-durable goods manufacturing by county is aggregated by local area and divided by the total to arrive at a percentage for each local area.

Long-term unemployment data- The number of unemployment insurance program exhaustees during the previous full year for which data is available for each county is aggregated by local area and divided by the total to arrive at a percentage for each local area.

Data for these elements will be produced by MDOL's Center for Workforce Information Services. Each of the above elements is weighted equally.

The remaining factors named in §133(b)(2)(B)(ii), "plant closing and mass layoff data" and "farmer-rancher economic hardship data" will only be considered if proven to be useful for the distribution of funds to areas of need in Maine. Large plant closings have occurred in some Maine counties, but are not a predictor of the location of future large plant closings. Although ten years ago there were many farmers in certain areas of the state who were leaving agriculture, in the years since, there has been no wholesale dislocations which would require more attention to this occupation than others.

As Maine follows the WIOA local area distribution formula, we are adding the "minimum percentage" component to the plan which delineates how funds are allocated to local areas for the Youth and Dislocated Worker Programs. The wording is exactly the same for both the Youth and Dislocated Worker allocation description.

Minimum Percentage – The local area will not receive an allocation percentage for a fiscal year that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the two preceding fiscal years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with the preceding sentence shall be obtained by ratably reducing the allocations to be made to other local areas.

Allocation Distribution

MDOL will not exceed the 5 percent limitation of the Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker program allocations allowable for administrative functions, any remaining set aside funds will be used to conduct other required and allowable statewide activities.

Allocation distributions have always been figured according to each individual county within a local area. The formulas for calculating the allocations based on areas of significant unemployment, , excess unemployed, and disadvantaged adults will continue to be used in the county allocation formula.

The following charts provide a summary of the Program Year 2021 WIOA Formula fund distribution to local areas.

Title I Allocation of Distributed Funds for py2021 under Three Local Areas

Northeastern Workforce Development Board

Program	**County**	**Program $**	**Board Admin $**	**Total**
Adult	Aroostook	$166,437	$18,493	$184,930
Adult	Hancock	$87,082	$8,656	$85,647
Adult	Penobscot	$218,245	$21,824	$196,421
Adult	Piscataquis	$31,408	$3,141	$28,267
Adult	Washington	$89,457	$8,946	$80,511
Adult Total		**$609,687**	**$60,969**	**$548,718**
DW	Aroostook	$77,132	$7,713	$69,419
DW	Hancock	$108,977	$10,898	$98,079
DW	Penobscot	$209,423	$20,942	$188,481
DW	Piscataquis	$12,877	$1,288	$11,589
DW	Washington	$36,616	$3,662	$32,954
DWTotal		**$445,025**	**$44,503**	**$400,522**
Youth	Aroostook	$189,547	$18,955	$170,592
Youth	Hancock	$87,673	$8,767	$78,906
Youth	Penobscot	$261,233	$26,123	$235,110
Youth	Piscataquis	$29,993	$2,999	$26,994
Youth	Washington	$94,412	$9,441	$84,971
YouthTotal		**$662,858**	**$66,285**	**$596,573**
GrandTotal		**$1,717,570**	**$171,757**	**$1,545,813**

Coastal Counties Workforce Development Board

Program	County	Program $	Board Admin $	Total
Adult	Cumberland	$292,254	$29,225	$263,029
Adult	Knox	$43,570	$4,357	$39,213
Adult	Lincoln	$32,830	$3,283	$29,547
Adult	Sagadahoc	$33,644	$3,364	$30,280
Adult	Waldo	$55,431	$5,543	$49,888
Adult	York	$193,891	$19,389	$174,502
Adult Total		**$651,620**	**$65,161**	**$566,459**
DW	Cumberland	$203,014	$20,301	$182,713
DW	Knox	$40,152	$4,015	$36,137
DW	Lincoln	$35,463	$3,546	$31,917
DW	Sagadahoc	$28,448	$2,845	$25,603
DW	Waldo	$36,392	$3,639	$32,753
DW	York	$158,190	$15,819	$142,371
DW Total		**$501,659**	**$50,165**	**$451,494**
Youth	Cumberland	$321,306	$32,131	$289,175
Youth	Knox	$40,353	$4,035	$36,318
Youth	Lincoln	$30,232	$3,023	$27,209
Youth	Sagadahoc	$31,089	$3,109	$27,980
Youth	Waldo	$55,818	$5,582	$50,236
Youth	York	$194,730	$19,473	$175,257
Youth Total		**$673,528**	**$67,356**	**$606,175**
Grand Total		**$1,826,807**	**$182,682**	**$1,642,128**

Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board

Program	County	Program $	Board Admin $	Total
Adult	Androscoggin	$156,646	$15,665	$140,981
Adult	Franklin	$47,242	$4,724	$42,581
Adult	Kennebec	$145,045	$14,504	$130,541
Adult	Oxford	$105,811	$10,581	$95,230
Adult	Somerset	$168,919	$16,892	$152,027
Adult Total		**$623,663**	**$62,366**	**$561,297**

Program	County	Program $	Board Admin $	Total
DW	Androscoggin	$156,646	$15,665	$140,981
DW	Franklin	$47,242	$4,724	$42,518
DW	Kennebec	$145,045	$14,504	$130,541
DW	Oxford	$105,811	$10,581	$95,230
DW	Somerset	$168,919	$16,892	$150,027
DW Total		**$623,663**	**$62,366**	**$561,297**
Youth	Androscoggin	$169,382	$16,938	$152,444
Youth	Franklin	$59,583	$5,958	$53,625
Youth	Kennebec	$150,058	$15,006	$135,052
Youth	Oxford	$101,295	$10,130	$91,165
Youth	Somerset	$162,042	$16,204	$145,838
Youth Total		**$642,360**	**$64,236**	**$578,124**
Grand Total		**$1,889,686**	**$188,968**	**$1,700,718**

B. FOR TITLE II

I. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL AWARD MULTI-YEAR GRANTS OR CONTRACTS ON A COMPETITIVE BASIS TO ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE, INCLUDING HOW ELIGIBLE AGENCIES WILL ESTABLISH THAT ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS ARE ORGANIZATIONS OF DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS

Through a competitive, multi-year grant process, eligible providers apply for funds to provide adult education services. Eligible providers may include: local educational agencies; community-based or faith-based organizations; volunteer literacy organizations; institutions of higher education; public or private nonprofit agencies; libraries; public housing authorities; a nonprofit institution having the ability to provide adult education and literacy services to adults; and a consortium of agencies, organizations, institutions, and libraries described above; a partnership between an employer and an entity described in any of the categories listed above; and other organization types not in the list above that have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals.

Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy funds are used to provide adult literacy services throughout the state. Historically, adult education services have been provided in a variety of locations (i.e. public schools, libraries, CareerCenters, municipal buildings and other facilities) in each of Maine's 16 counties. Beginning in FY18, the state established nine adult education and career development areas that were aligned with the boundaries of the three local workforce boards. To encourage innovation and maximize efficiencies and resources, local adult education providers within these geographic areas were formed into hubs. The Maine Office of Adult Education awarded one AEFLA grant to each service area with the understanding that the eligible provider would have the capacity and intent to provide adult education services in a variety of locations throughout the service area.

Maine Adult Education released a competitive RFP (request for proposal) on February 21, 2019 to award contracts to eligible agencies for the provision of WIOA Title II Adult Education and

Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) services to eligible individuals in need of AEFLA services to improve their academic and workforce prospects. It is the purpose of Maine Adult Education under WIOA to provide adult education and literacy services that also align with the goals in the State of Maine 2020-2023 Unified Plan and encourage the growth of educational opportunities and, where applicable, to ensure career, citizenship and college readiness for all Maine adults. The initial grant cycle is for FY20-22 (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2021). Subject to continued availability of funding and demonstrated effectiveness as determined by outcomes, the Department may opt to renew the contracts for two renewal periods, July 2021 through June 30, 2023 and July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

Each eligible agency that applied, in order to be considered for funding, had to have demonstrated effectiveness in serving eligible adult learners (low levels of literacy, English language learners, learners with barriers) and the ability to meet the thirteen considerations of WIOA Title II. That effectiveness was determined by the State from the submission of relevant data as part of the proposal process. Required data needed to show numbers of low-level learners served, English language learners, educational gain, transition to employment and/or postsecondary or skills training. Proposals that are unable to provide evidence of adequate effectiveness were not considered.

Proposals were assessed on their ability to meet the thirteen considerations and other requirements of WIOA, demonstrate evidence of successful past performance in providing adult literacy services, programmatic alignment with local workforce board plan priorities, and the ability to successfully address the state's career pathways components. Additional WIOA requirements that must be met include the ability to offer programs that: lead to industry-recognized credentials; lead to postsecondary credentials; meet the educational and training needs of individuals with barriers; relate to in-demand industry sectors and occupations in Maine; and make use of technology to increase accessibility.

As a result of the RFP, nine two-year contracts were awarded to providers, one award to each of the nine service area hubs, as outlined in the RFP. Awardees held in good standing and maintaining demonstrated effectiveness may be eligible to renew the contract for up to two renewal periods. Approximately 90 percent of allocated funding is awarded as a "base amount" with 10 percent of the funding available for incentives. Base funding is calculated by determining a "per student" allocation taking into account both the population density and need for services by hub as indicated by data from the most recent American Community Survey. Incentive funding is distributed equally among all hubs meeting the specific state targets and incentive performance measures identified each year.

II. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE DIRECT AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS TO APPLY AND COMPETE FOR FUNDS AND HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE THAT IT IS USING THE SAME GRANT OR CONTRACT ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS

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C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The distribution of Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funds is based upon historically determined proportions of actual expenditures needed to serve individuals who are blind and visually impaired and those who have other disabilities in Maine, including case services, staffing and administrative costs. The two VR directors work actively with the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services to monitor the distribution of funds and will be conducting a more in-depth analysis to determine whether any redistribution of funds is needed given the experience over the last few years. The state legislature distributes funding for vocational rehabilitation services as part of the biennial budget. The amounts are generally based on the prior year allotment with adjustments made for personal services and funding requests submitted by the agency for specific purposes. These funding requests may or may not be approved by the legislature. Each VR division of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services has their own individual general fund appropriation account within the biennial budget which is the basis of each individual account within the state's accounting system. The general fund appropriation is not shared between the two divisions.

6. PROGRAM DATA

A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

Core partners of this Unified Plan presently utilize disparate case management and management information systems (MIS): Adult Education uses MaineSTARS, Vocational Rehabilitation utilizes AWARE, and Wagner-Peyser and Title I-B formula program providers use the Maine JobLink, a product of America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA).

Resources for new systems or system enhancements in a small state such as Maine are constrained (states with relatively small populations cannot cover the fixed costs of purchasing and maintaining operating systems as readily as larger states, which receive substantially higher funding allotments). These facts notwithstanding, Maine's core partners recognize that achieving the type of integrated and efficient service levels articulated in this plan will require 'breaking down the data siloes' and achieving greater levels of system integration.

In the autumn of 2016, Maine received a $1.1 million-dollar Reemployment and Systems Integration (RSI) Dislocated Worker grant (DWG) to investigate and implement a common registration and case management portal across the multiple core programs. The working group for this project gathered information from other states on their pursuit of similar initiatives and worked with vendors to review available options for solutions. A request for proposals (RFP) containing the State's requirements for a system was developed and a vendor secured through competitive bid. The system, named WORK Services: Workforce Opportunities, Referrals, and Knowledge Services, integrates the disparate case management systems and incorporates a public facing portal.

Currently in a limited release with a plan for statewide rollout in 2020, the system allows some connection of the core partner data systems and sharing of information among partners (with informed consent by the participant). This enhances and streamlines WIOA reporting, reduces duplication for participants and staff, simplifies the registration process, has capacity to add partner agencies over time and ensures data governance that maintains data security and personal privacy compliance. Because of Maine's rural geography, it also provides access for people who may have difficulty traveling to a physical site or need to utilize services outside normal business hours.

The portal allows individuals to submit initial personal information and find programs based on their answers to high level screening questions. These questions identify individuals who might benefit from programs, including identifying people with disabilities and those who have not achieved a secondary education and/or those interested in education and training opportunities.

Further work is anticipated to integrate with the state's unemployment compensation system, ReEmployME into the WORK Services system as intended by the RSI DWG grant.

The Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI), MDOL's labor market information provider, will add data on participants of core partners to the Maine Education and Attainment Research Navigation system or MaineEARNS, thereby linking the records of core program participants with their corresponding wage and employment records for program evaluation and reporting purposes.

MaineEARNS also provides information on employment and wage outcomes for Maine workers who graduated from the University of Maine System and Maine Community College System after July 2008. Students, parents, educators, administrators, policy makers, and anyone interested in earning education credentials and employment in Maine will be able to use this data to research, plan and make informed decisions. Interest has been expressed by at least one private university to join in the collections and reporting. It is this same system which is being used to meet the requirement for the annual Eligible Training Provider reporting requirement. Interest has been expressed from the University of Maine System to begin collecting and reporting on the awarding of micro-credentials and including them in the MaineEARNS system.

Maine has made strides in developing the capacity for core programs and other partners to share an integrated data system that will allow each agency to collect, utilize, protect, and report out data specific to their agency while also being able to share and utilize common data from other partner agencies. Agencies are acutely aware of issues of confidentiality and privacy in the sharing and reporting of information and take measures to ensure that participants provide consent to share information between agencies.

Ultimately, Maine will have to develop the capacity for core programs and other partners to share an integrated data system that will allow each agency to collect, utilize, protect, and report out data specific to their agency while also being able to share and utilize common data from other partner agencies. The core partners are committed to this process and have established a data systems workgroup containing members from each core partner tasked with researching available software and other technology solutions. It is still early in the process for systems alignment, but to date, the group has been formed and begun meeting. First steps in the timeline include researching available software and identifying which data system model might work best in Maine. Additional information regarding specific data system models is included in part two of the data alignment and integration section.

Maine has an integrated system for the following programs

Title IB Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth

Title III Employment Services & JVSG

Trade Adjustment Assistance

Maine Registered Apprenticeship Program (including recent expansion grants and ARPA-funded initiatives.

Dislocated Worker Grants, and until recently

National Farm Worker Jobs Program

Although the state worked hard to develop a way to share information between the Vocational Rehabilitation MIS system (AWARE) and the Adult Education MIS System (MaineStars) using a platform called W.O.R.K. Services, it never actually resulted in an integrated intake or the level of data sharing hoped for, so the partners stopped funding it.

It is highly unlikely that small-funded states like Maine will have the means to fund programming to integrate separate MIS systems going forward. The next best thing will be the use of a shared virtual AJC that is currently being developed using the CAREER DWG funds.

The WORK Services application described in the previous section brings Maine along the path of streamlining intake and delivery services. The plan was for a statewide rollout of the system in 2020 which the state hoped would increase the availability of information to participants and integration of the state's information management systems.

Although the state worked hard to develop a way to share information between the Vocational Rehabilitation MIS system (AWARE) and the Adult Education MIS System (MaineStars) using a platform called W.O.R.K. Services, it never actually resulted in an integrated intake or the level of data sharing hoped for, so the partners stopped funding it. It is highly unlikely that small-funded states like Maine will have the means to fund programming to integrate separate MIS systems going forward. The next best thing will be the use of a shared virtual AJC that is currently being developed using the CAREER DWG funds.

The State Workforce Board (SWB) will assist the governor in aligning technology and data systems across partner programs. With the leadership of the SWB a comprehensive strategy for aligning and integrating complex data systems will establish the parameters for new technology systems in order to allow core partner systems to communicate, enable common intake, and other shared front-end system activities. The MDOL is implementing a new management information system, provided by America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA), which facilitates federal reporting. The SWB will also take a leadership role in establishing the parameters for new system software that will enable common intake and other shared front-end system activities.

The SWB will advise the governor on technology systems for tracking benchmark performance indicators of programs and participants. Maine's Workforce Longitudinal Data System will play an integral role in measuring the outcomes of participants over time in order to measure and direct resources more effectively.

The SWB also convenes the WIOA Steering Committee and facilitates discussions in support of creating improved modes of service delivery to individuals, including those with barriers and who are unemployed. The core partners are also represented on the Steering Committee and through numerous meetings and discussions; a comprehensive strategy that reflects their input and the desire of the governor for increased efficiency of operations is being developed.

All core partners currently use wage data from the Unemployment Insurance system to report employment and median earnings performance outcomes required by Section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Bureau of Unemployment Compensation (BUC), the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the Bureau of Employment Services (BES), and the Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI) are all housed within the Maine Department of Labor. The BRS, which represents Title IV services, contracts with the BUC to conduct employment and earnings match necessary to report participant performance to the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor on a quarterly and annual basis. Through an agreement with the CWRI, Maine Adult Education also partners to conduct employment and earnings match on behalf of their customers. The BES houses the management information system (Maine JobLink) used by the following programs: Title I-B Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, Title III employment services, the Jobs for Veteran's State grant, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and Title ID National Farmworker Jobs Program. A process has been built into the system to match employment and earnings data necessary to report employment and earnings performance outcomes.

Credential attainment data for Title I-B adult, dislocated worker and youth services are collected through the Maine JobLink system based on data entered by service provider staff and validated through document uploads. Similarly, staff enter and track measurable skills gains for participants enrolled in training or education services. Title I-B programs report on five types of measurable skills gains. Title I-B providers track educational functioning level (EFL) gains through pre- and post-test scores using CASAS.

As a core partner, Maine Adult Education, also works with the Center for Workforce Research and Innovation (CWRI) and the Unemployment Insurance (UI) database through the Maine Department of Labor is able to meet employment and earnings performance data obtained through a data match using participant social security numbers. Although median earnings were not being collected or reported for Adult Education in the past, improved collaboration and integration of data reporting systems processes allow for accurate and complete employment and median wage data for federal reports.

Adult Education also collects performance measures regarding credential attainment and postsecondary outcomes. Credential attainment for secondary school diplomas and high school equivalency is obtained by accessing data through the State's managed information system, MaineSTARS and through the state account of the HiSET Data Access Manager database. Postsecondary enrollment information for adult education is conducted through a data match

using the National Student Clearinghouse through the Maine Department of Education. Although the information obtained through the clearinghouse is useful for tracking some postsecondary enrollment, it is not as effective in tracking successful postsecondary completions. Clearinghouse data is incomplete and does not include all recognized postsecondary education or training programs. To enable core programs to collect and report this required data, core partners are examining ways several data sets may be able to be combined to compile the data necessary for the required performance measures. The core partners are also exploring ways to align the Department of Labor's expanded Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) with the new data requirements under WIOA.

Measurable skill gains are currently collected and reported for Adult Education using the federally approved CASAS assessment for the pre-and-post testing of participants. Core partners have agreed to coordinate and align measurable skills assessment by implementing eCASAS as the assessment tool used by all partners. Currently eCASAS assessments are recognized and used by all local Adult Education programs, one-stops, and other eligible training providers. Results are shared where appropriate to reduce duplicative testing.

B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

All Title I-B performance measures, except measurable skill gains, are measured after exit from the program. Credential and employment outcomes may be measured up to one year after exit from the program. Staff continue to work with clients to provide follow-up services that will ensure success in employment and/or education.

In addition to staff-entered credential attainment data, the Bureau of Employment Services works with training providers to gather data on overall completion and credential attainment rates for all students attending approved programs of study listed on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). The ETP report combines participant outcome data tracked in Maine JobLink with all student data submitted by each training provider to the Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI). Data submitted to CWRI is cycled through their MaineEARNS data base to simplify this reporting requirement for eligible providers and data is combined with Maine JobLink data to produce the annual ETP report required under WIOA and required in Maine for continued approval as an eligible training provider. This report format is very new resulting in sparse data; however, as time moves on it is anticipated this report will be quite robust and promote sound decisions by WIOA participants in regard to how they will invest their training accounts.

Developing long-term participant outcomes is essential to creating a continuous cycle of program and system improvement. Moreover, as discussed in the first section of this Unified Plan (Economic and Workforce Analysis), Maine has a variety of workforce challenges that require measurement, tracking and assessment. As such, Maine's core partners are committed to producing an evaluation system that extends beyond what's required for federal reporting.

MaineEARNS will play an integral role in measuring long-term participant outcomes. It presently measures first year wage and employment outcomes of university and community college graduates at the campus, credential, and area of study level. As part of this plan, the system will be used to measure the outcomes of workforce development system program participants. To do so, the WIOA Steering Committee, core program managers and the SWB will collaborate to define the data that is required to inform decision making and program improvement.

The Department will explore other programs that are not presently using wage data for performance accountability evaluations to be added to the wage-matching system. There is an opportunity for Maine's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to develop a data sharing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Maine Department of Labor for the purposes of evaluating the outcomes of Department of Health and Human Services participants.

C. USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) WAGE RECORD DATA

A Maine Department of Labor Memorandum of Understanding regarding the use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage record data permits the MDOL to use the data in several ways. First, data will be used to measure and manage performance for: Title I-B Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth programs; Wagner-Peyser Employment Services; Trade Adjustment Assistance; Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC); National Dislocated Worker Grants; and other federal initiatives. Then wage data will be used for customizing and providing services to employers, and finally the data will be utilized to measure and evaluate long term outcomes and performance through the Maine Education and Attainment Research Navigation system (MaineEARNS) on behalf the department, other agencies, and educational institutions.

MDOL uses wage data to monitor the status and progress of participants enrolled in the Title 1-B, Wagner-Peyser and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs to certify work history for the WOTC program. The wage data will also be utilized to determine the initial and continuing eligibility of training providers approved to receive WIOA training funds and to be included on Maine's Eligible Training Provider List. In addition, standard assessments and reports will posted on the web so that consumers will be able to easily access information that will assist them in making choices about the variety of education and training programs available in Maine, and the providers of those training programs.

By funding MaineEARNS, Maine's policymakers have clearly signaled the move towards data-driven decision making in future rulemaking, goal setting, and program evaluation. Standard reports will be designed to provide information to evaluate the effectiveness of training programs administered by multiple partners. Standard reports will guide improvement of the workforce system by enabling administrators to evaluate program effectiveness and allocate limited public funds more effectively.

A Memorandum of Agreement between the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Unemployment Compensation (BUC) and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) permits the receipt of UI wage record data for individuals served by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). The data is used to comply with federal performance reporting requirements of the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation program (20 CFR Part 677). Additionally, the Agreement outlines the provision of employer data to BRS for the purpose of collecting work history and employment outcomes for DVR/DBVI clients, as well as providing effective outreach services to employers.

D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

Personally identifiable information at the individual record level is protected through systems security measures and by having all staff sign a confidentiality agreement and, as necessary, requiring customers to sign release of information forms. In terms of outside agencies personally identifiable information is protected by aggregating individual records and standardized confidentiality screening. MaineEARNS public facing results are aggregated to protect the confidentiality of participants being measured. In addition, outcomes with fewer than 10 participants are suppressed for confidentiality purposes. The Center for Workforce Research and Information is implementing additional privacy protections by adopting a System Security Plan based on FIPS 199/NIST 800-60 Vol2, Rev1 guidelines.

7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE FOR VETERANS

The State has issued a policy regarding priority of service for veterans, policy PY15-23 Priority of Service for Veterans [45.]

The SWB, the MDOL and local workforce service providers are responsible for developing strategies and implementing the veterans' priority of service as required by 38 U.S.C 4215(b) and 20 CFR Parts 1001 and 1010. Maine's one-stop system is the core mechanism that will

support, expand and maintain services to the veteran population throughout the State. Veterans and other eligible persons with significant barriers to employment as defined in Veterans' Program Letters (VPL) VPL 03-14, changes 1 and 2, VPL 07-14, and VPL 03-19.; or current guidance will be referred to the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) within the OneStop Centers to receive additional services.

Priority of service applies to Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Adult, Dislocated and Youth Grants, Demonstration Grants, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Wagner-Peyser, and other core programs funded by the U.S. Department of Labor and administered in Maine by the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL). Accordingly, MDOL has issued guidance to the State's Local Workforce Boards (LWBs) requiring local policy issuance to WIOA service providers to include priority of service for Veteran's requirements in agreements (plans, contracts and subcontracts). The MDOL and one-stop providers will take the necessary actions to ensure that priority of service opportunities are clearly visible and articulated to all customers who engage in one-stop services. At a minimum, priority of service to veterans and other eligible persons will include adherence to and implementation of the following guidelines:

Outreach/Recruitment:

• Inclusion of information regarding veterans' priority of service in printed materials targeted to customers and employers

• Inclusion of information regarding veterans' priority of service in presentations made to customers and employers

• Addition of veterans' priority of service information to service providers, Maine one-stop centers and MDOL web sites

• Pro-active recruitment of veterans by targeted strategies that focus on employers as well as job seeking veterans

Notification:

• Addition of a veterans' priority of service rights statement to the complaint procedures provided to a Veteran customer

• Addition of a veterans' priority of service rights statement to the signature portion of the paper intake forms

• Provision of the opportunity for veterans and covered persons to make known their veteran status

• The Maine JobLink job notification system, which will inform eligible veterans of job opportunities before all other registrants

Intake/Registration for Services:

• Written policies to establish that service providers who receive WIOA funds for employment and training programs will be required to identify covered persons at the point of entry to programs and/or services, so that veterans and other eligible persons can take full advantage of priority of service

• Written policies and procedures to ensure veterans and other eligible persons understand their entitlement to priority of service, the full array of employment and training services available, the eligibility requirements that veterans and other eligible persons must meet for entry into programs and services

Eligibility for Services will be delineated in written policies and procedures:

• That veterans and other eligible persons meet the statutory eligibility requirements applicable to the specific employment and training program

• That ensure veterans and other eligible persons are given priority of service where statutory or mandatory priorities are in effect and particularly, where local area service providers have instituted mandatory priorities due to limited funds

• That ensure eligible veterans and other eligible persons receive access to services or resources before non-covered persons when resources for services are limited

• That target special populations of veterans, including Special Disabled Veterans, Campaign Badge Veterans, Disabled Veterans, and other eligible persons

Many veterans face difficulty transitioning to civilian life and may require specialized employment and training services to boost their job prospects. Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) and MDOL have established effective program designs that include other providers, such as the Togus Veteran's Rehabilitation Program. Additionally, veterans with more severe adjustment difficulties may require counseling, social services, and more in-depth support from specialists who are equipped to address their needs. Delivery of services through the one-stop system to veterans and other eligible persons is standardized to ensure that no veteran or covered person is turned away without receiving some level of service. All Wagner-Peyser staff are trained to provide initial assessment and triage for all customers entering our CareerCenters, including veterans. After initial assessment, Wagner-Peyser staff will determine if they will provide needed services to the veteran and other eligible persons or if a referral to the local Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) is required.

The CareerCenter Intake Assessment form is utilized by all CareerCenter staff to assist in the triaging of veterans and other eligible persons to a DVOP. Staff are trained on front desk customer flow and screen process for veterans, in compliance with VPL 03-14, changes 1 and 2, VPL 07-14, and VPL 03-19. The form asks veterans specific questions and provides check-off boxes to make it easier for Wagner Peyser staff to appropriately sort and triage the veteran to the DVOP, other one-stop partners or community resources, depending on the veteran's responses to SBE related questions with a direct focus on "Priority of Service for all Veterans". In accordance with VPL 03-14, changes 1 and 2, VPL 07-14, and VPL 03-19, DVOPs will serve the following veterans and other eligible persons in the year(s) ahead and adjust if new VPLs instruct otherwise:

- A special-disabled or disabled veteran, as defined in 38 U.S.C. §4211(1) & (3), is a veteran who:
- Is entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retirement pay would be entitled to compensation) under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; or,
- Was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability;
- A veteran who is a homeless person, as defined in Sections 103(a) and (b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 1302 (a) and (b), as amended. This is updated to include paragraph (b) of Section 103 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which considers "homeless" to be any individual or family member who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions in the individual's or family's current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized, and who have no other residence and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

- A recently separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C. 4211(6) who has been unemployed for 27 weeks or more in the previous 12 months;
- A veteran who is an offender, as defined by WIOA Section 3 (38), refers to any eligible veteran or covered persons who is currently incarcerated or has been released from incarceration;
- A veteran lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate;
- A veteran who is low-income as defined by WIOA Section 3 (36);
- An eligible transitioning service member (TSMs), spouse and/or caregiver of the Armed Forces (as defined by VPLs 07-14 and 03-19) who has been identified as in need of intensive / individualized career services;
- A member of the Armed Forces who is wounded, ill, or injured and receiving treatment in military treatment facilities or warrior transition unit;
- Any veteran between the ages of 18-24.
- Vietnam-era Veterans. Pursuant to 38 U.S.C. 4211, the term "Veteran of the Vietnam Era" is an eligible veteran any part of whose active military, naval or air service was during the Vietnam era. "Vietnam-era" means the period beginning on February 28, 1961 and ending on May 7, 1975.

If veteran and other eligible persons do not qualify for the JVSG target population or if a DVOP is not currently available, they will be served by the next available CareerCenter staff person and will provide individualized career services for the veteran and other eligible persons. This may include assessment, planning, advocacy, job development, job matching, referral to other state and federal programs and follow-up.

Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) –

Disabled veterans and other eligible persons and veterans with significant barriers to employment that qualify for JVSG eligibility, may receive any of the services offered though the one-stop system and are referred to the AJC's Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) for additional individual assistance connecting them to a multitude of specialized resources and programs. DVOP's work exclusively with veterans and other eligible persons to facilitate their access to all programs and services for which they are eligible under the priority of service policy. These specialists provide one-on-one intensive service assistance with a focus on case management to include three elements:

- Comprehensive Assessment,
- Written Plan of Action, and
- Consistent Contact

The comprehensive assessment is a one-on-one assessment to gather and document information about an eligible participant to include contact information, military information, education, supports they are receiving, what are their immediate needs, barriers to employment, employment skills and interests, current work status and potential referrals and program eligibility. DVOP's work with participants to register them in This assessment is used in the writing of the Individual Employment Plan for the participant and uploaded to the participant's file in Maine JobLink.

Once the assessment is complete, the DVOP will work with eligible participants to draft an Individual Employment Plan (IEP) to identify employment goals, transitional objectives, provision of individualized career services, advocacy, job development, job matching, and

appropriate services and referrals to other state and federal programs. This will include a full range of career guidance, development and coordinated supports for the participant to gain or improve employability. The IEP and any supporting documentation, such as the DD-214, is uploaded to the participant's file in Maine JobLink.

Regular consistent contact is maintained between the DVOP and/or the Consolidated position and the eligible participant through case management. Contact that relates to the eligible participant's written IEP, needs and situation must be made at least every 30 days and can include meetings, updates and follow-up with the eligible participant on pre-, current and post-employment. All contact, including contact attempts will be documented in the participant's file in Maine JobLink.

DVOPs also outreach to communities where they participate in veterans' conferences, yellow ribbon events, job fairs and homeless veteran stand downs – providing outreach to veterans with significant barriers to employment.

In addition, a DVOP Specialist serves in the role of Intensive Services Coordinator (ISC) at the Togus VA, spending time, weekly, to conduct outreach to veterans with significant barriers to employment (SBEs) and to support the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program. The Intensive Services Coordinator (ISC) serves as the DVOP's central point of contact for service to VR&E participants. In addition to case management responsibilities, our ISC facilitates the dissemination of information to, and compiles information from, our DVOP Specialists who serve Chapter 31 participants. Our ISC serves as the coordination point to communicate information to and from VR&E staff to the JVSG Team Program Manager and on to Maine's Director of Veterans' Employment and Training (DVET).

Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER) –

In addition to DVOP, the CareerCenter's also employ Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs). The LVER conducts employer outreach and establish employment and training opportunities on behalf of all veteran clients that are served in their regions. The duties assigned to Maine's LVERs are to conduct outreach to employers, facilitate employment and training sessions, build relationships with required partners on employer outreach for veteran opportunities and completing reporting requirements.

LVERs advocate on behalf of Veterans for employment and training opportunities with Maine businesses and industry, community-based organizations, or with any entity that provides quality jobs offering good pay and benefits. Through these efforts, our LVERs develop relationships, jobs, training, or training opportunities for veterans and other eligible persons. They also contribute to the annual planning development and collaborative job placement strategy – The Maine Hire-A-Vet Campaign. The Maine-Hire-A-Vet campaign promotes the hiring of 100 veterans in 100 jobs with 100 employers in 100 days. Since its inception in 2015, the campaign has connected nearly 750 employers with 1,000+ veteran-hires and was recognized as a best practice by the USDOL and the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA).

As a core function of the position, LVERs assist in the coordination and participation of job fairs and/or hiring events, either in-person or on a virtual platform which can be conducted on both local and statewide levels and in both general and sector specific industries. LVERs are trained to know about one stop partner services that have the potential to improve employment and training options for employers and focus on the promotion of Veterans as job seekers who have highly marketable skills and experience. LVERs work directly with Wagner Peyser, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, State Vocational Rehabilitation and Adult Education staff to better understand options for employers in Maine and to increase employment opportunities for veterans.

LVERs conduct employer outreach in the local community, on behalf of ALL American Job Center (AJC) veterans. They educate and encourage employers to participate in employment support programs such as On the Job training (OJT), GI BILL OJT, Maine's Apprenticeship Program, Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP), Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), State of Maine Vocational Rehabilitation, Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and Federal Bonding.

As veterans and other eligible persons may be referred to any available employment and training service open to the general public regardless of funding source, it is important that all one-stop center staff establish and maintain effective working relationships with one-stop system partners and service networks. These relationships will strengthen coordination of interagency efforts to help support veteran service initiatives. Veterans' priority of service language will be integrated into financial and nonfinancial working agreements and Memoranda of Understanding with other organizations to ensure Maine's workforce development system is "Keeping the Promise!"

45 PY15-23 Priority of Service for Veterans https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY15-23_veterans_priority_of_service.doc

8. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The State Board has implemented the "Accessibility, Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination Policy" which codified the State's commitment to universal access and non-discrimination. Going beyond compliance with accessibility requirements, it seeks to provide universally accessible services.

Ensuring the accessibility of one-stop centers and compliance with disability-related regulations is also included in the "One-Stop Certification Criteria Policy", including:

- Making reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities;
- Making reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures where necessary to avoid discrimination against individuals with disabilities;
- Administering programs in the most integrated setting appropriate;
- Communicating with persons with disabilities as effectively as with others;
- Providing appropriate auxiliary aids and services, including assistive technology devices and services to afford individuals with disabilities equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, program activities; and
- Providing for the physical and programmatic accessibility of the one-stop center to individuals with disabilities.

The State will continue to enhance its education and outreach capabilities through the duration of this current plan through the ongoing training and support of partners in the implementation of a universally accessible system.

One facet of this is the enhancement of the Accessibility Guide currently available on the Bureau of Rehabilitation's website. Developed as part of a leadership academy, the site has served as a quick resource on information regarding accessibility and managing some of the potential issues. It provides quick, synthesized information on technical issues for things like documents and presentations, as well as building accessibility and etiquette. The State is working with the Information Technology Accessibility Committee (ITAC) to further develop the website. The site will be updated to ensure current content, re-designed to ensure better usability of the information and moved to provide greater visibility to the content for State agencies and

interested partners. The ITAC will take over the monitoring and updating of the content of the site, and the Office of Information Technology web services unit will take over the technical management of the website.

Section 188 Checklist

The WIOA Section 188 Checklist developed by the USDOL Office of Civil Rights will be a guiding document. The checklist is considered a comprehensive overview of requirements and provides reliable advice on achieving and sustaining universal access.

Leveraging existing resources and constituent committees

Maine continues to build and maintain a system that includes access based on language, race, national origin, religion, culture/ethnicity, ability/disability, age, sex/gender identity, and all other protected classes under WIOA, the Americans with Disability Act, applicable state laws, and other federal laws related to public access and civil rights. The working group developed "Priorities for Equal Opportunity/ Non-discrimination/ Accessibility Assessment of One Stops," user friendly guidance based on the Section 188 Checklist and the policy, to help them meet the standards.

The Maine State Workforce Board has several committees designed to address the workforce needs of specific constituencies, including women, older workers, younger workers, veterans, and people with disabilities. As issues or questions arise, these committees will be asked to advise on programmatic and physical access and to assist with policies and operational guidance to assure that the one-stop system and its partners are accessible and meeting requirements. Other organizations serving and representing job-seeking constituencies, including migrant and seasonal workers, "displaced homemakers," formerly incarcerated, populations whose identities are based on culture/ethnicity/religion, youth, people with disabilities, and older Mainers will be consulted and invited to participate in planning, policy review, staff training, testing and evaluating programmatic and physical access, including customer service. The State Rehabilitation Councils for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, as well as the Commission for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, State Independent Living Council and the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council, will also be included. Focus groups and surveys of customers and larger affected populations will be used to determine if accessibility goals are being met.

Core priorities

Developing a vision and working definition of universal access is essential. Maine does not have all the human and financial resources to implement and sustain universal access without a commitment to a long-term initiative. Therefore, the initial priority is the development of a five-year strategic initiative, with each year's efforts building on and refining prior efforts. The system's vision of universal access will dictate the goal(s) and will provide the destination for the five-year course. Determining how to best inspire system investment will be part of the working group's charge. Staff training and initial policy development will follow quickly.

Training: Professional development for any major systems or operational change is one of the best guarantors of sustainability. With the goal of sustained competence related to serving diverse populations and with related policies in mind within the workforce development system and among partner agencies, the work group will develop a training plan that is compatible and synchronized with other staff training. The objective of the universal access training efforts is sustained competence related to serving diverse populations and knowledge of related policies across the system and among partner agencies.

Training for employees will include information on locating and providing access to needed resources such as translators and interpreters, transportation services, and alternative formats.

The Section 188 Checklist will inform training topics and plans for managers, supervisors, and facility operations staff.

Initial training for staff and partners will include, at a minimum:

- General orientation to universal access, WIOA and other legal requirements
- Customer service-both culturally sensitive service and general customer service
- Resources within the system and in the larger community
- Complaint resolution

A variety of training approaches will be considered and deployed, depending on available financial and human resources, training topics, and other conditions. Co-training with and for partners will be considered to best use resources and help system partners' staffs to "be on the same page." Blending and braiding training resources will be a guiding principle.

All one-stop center staff will be trained and required to demonstrate competency in serving diverse populations and knowledge of related policies across the system and among partner agencies. One-stop center certification will depend on demonstrating that employees have achieved the required competencies in universal access.

Managers and supervisors, in collaboration with our WIOA staff development group, will provide training to new hires, and on an annual or biennial basis to all staff. The training will be recorded and some training will be offered through online training providers, such as the New England ADA Technical Assistance Center and other regional ADATACs. The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Maine Department of Education, and other agencies (such as those named above as Universal Access work group members/resources) will provide, or help provide, training.

Examples of other training to be offered, either concurrently or after initial training has been completed:

- Hidden disabilities
- Deaf culture
- Blind culture
- Mental health first aid
- Service animals
- Accessing community resources
- Creating accessible documents

The WIOA implementation steering team will identify a method for documenting compliance with training requirements for implementation by supervisors and managers. Documentation will be a required element of one-stop certification and monitoring.

Policies: During the implementation of the State's 2016-2020 Unified State Plan, the State Board implemented the Accessibility, Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination Policy which codified the State's commitment to universal access and non-discrimination. Going beyond compliance with accessibility requirements, it seeks to provide universally accessible services.

The policies will also reference procedures for filing complaints, which are already contained in our CareerCenter Customer Complaint Manual. Current staff people are familiar with the

manual and it is available on the shared drive for reference. Staff training includes customer complaint protocols and is part of the core training that we plan to provide to required partners.

The policy also requires the State and Local Boards to post required notices, meeting agendas and minutes, and other information and to ensure that their websites, meeting spaces, and documents meet current accessibility standards. The requirements are annually monitored.

Compliance with the policies will be required for one-stop certification. WDBs and operators will develop protocols to assist front-line staff in partner agencies on how to identify appropriate services for individuals and deliver them in an accessible and non-discriminatory fashion.

All front-line staff will be informed/reminded of the procedures for handling customer complaints related to discrimination or lack of access. Customer service training will be provided to all front-line staff within three months of hire, and after that annually. Managers, in collaboration with BES and the WIOA staff development group, will be responsible for providing and documenting this training.

Building on the work of the current state plan, the state will continue to develop policies and supportive training around priorities which include assistive technology and equipment responsibility, website/social media accessibility, programmatic and physical accessibility of workshops and events, service animal protocols, prohibition of automatic referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation, alternative formats for required tests/assessments, and consistent use of equal employment and accommodations tag lines. Program participation rules governing required orientation workshops, the RESEA program, and other mandatory programs will be examined to ensure full accessibility, especially access to alternative formats and accommodations. The feasibility of a central accommodations fund and various ways of ensuring/maintaining its solvency will also be explored.

Domestic violence and other challenges to access

Maine is a leader among states in ensuring that domestic violence victims have legal protections to avoid job loss and loss of unemployment insurance benefits due to domestic violence counseling, treatment, and court appointments. The universal access working group will examine how domestic violence affects physical and programmatic access to services and make any necessary changes to address this situation. Similarly, the working group will explore the potential implications of low literacy, financial hardship, and poor housing/homelessness on access to services. Policies and practices designed to mitigate the most challenging circumstances will be investigated in collaboration with low-income individuals, people who are homeless, and the organizations representing them.

Monitoring progress

The Section 188 checklist, 20 CFR Part 38 and policies will be used to monitor the system's progress toward universal access. Quantitative outcomes will be used, when practical, to assess system accessibility and utilization by WIOA's priority populations. Best practice models from other systems and other states will be researched and tailored to Maine whenever possible.

WDBs and operators will be responsible for developing mechanisms to deliver information on local workforce development system resources in an easy-to-access manner. They will conduct outreach to inform the public of these resources. Workforce development system partners and community agencies will also be informed of these resources and how to assist clients and participants in accessing and navigating the workforce system's resources.

In accordance with §678.800, WDBs will be responsible for ensuring that these provisions are implemented. Monitoring will include compliance with these policies. WDBs will assess their

one-stops at least once every three years. They will also review and update any criteria when conducting any program reviews or when updating their local plans.

When monitoring or other activities reveal a need for system-wide technical assistance, policy updates, or concerns related to non-discrimination and accessibility, the Bureau of Employment Services and others may provide or assist with providing the necessary TA.

We will use the Section 188 checklist, Promising Practices In Achieving Universal Access and Equal Opportunity: A Section 188 Disability Reference Guide, other tools and the USDOL's Integrated Service Delivery Toolkit to assist system partners, providers, and local boards with guidance on developing their own monitoring tools.

Implementing and monitoring compliance with these policies will be overseen by a universal access coordinator and a core Universal Access work group of system stakeholders and subject matter experts from the larger community, including the Alpha One (independent living center), Disability Rights Maine, the state ADA coordinator, Maine CITE (designated adaptive technology provider for the Maine Department of Education), NAMI Maine, and other agencies and entities with relevant expertise in both accessibility and non-discrimination. Members of the state or local workforce boards will be included.

The Bureau of Employment Services has a designated Assistive Technology specialist in each one-stop. The specialists' responsibilities include routine inventories of equipment. One-stop managers are responsible for ensuring that all assistive technology and adaptive equipment are functioning, and that adequate resources are available to replace/repair equipment, update assistive software, and obtain new equipment when needed.

Maine's CareerCenters are accessible to those with disabilities. The physical locations are ADA accessible and the services are accessible. Centers offer and use of a variety of adaptive equipment to mitigate barriers to using computers and accessing services. An accessibility assessment is done at least every two years when one-stop certifications are conducted and any necessary adjustments are made. When COVID-19 forced a reduction in in-person services and increase in virtual services, the Department still followed ADA guidelines. Virtual services allowed individuals relying on adaptive equipment to use their own rather than the specific equipment available at the centers. The Department of Labor including CareerCenters follow ADA guidelines in their on-line presence with regards to virtual displays, including alternative text for images and when requested, alternative methods of delivery. Invitations and communications to customers include a statement inviting them to contact us for accommodations. During the pandemic, the Department continued to monitor accessibility and continued to follow it's ADA rules and guidelines.

9. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

English language learners are a growing population of individuals served by the core partners and are a potential area of growth for Maine. Areas of the state and workforce system have more experience in working with individuals who are English language learners than other areas of the state. We plan to leverage the existing experience and knowledge of workforce system partners in enhancing the entire workforce system.

Policies - English language learners are included in the Accessibility, Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination policy established to codify the State's commitment to universal access and programmatic accessibility. This policy will be reviewed and enhanced as needed to address issues which arise. Additional policies will be developed to address the hiring of interpreters,

Training - The core partners and local workforce boards will work together to develop and deliver training programs regarding:

- Assessment of English language learners (language and cultural issues in evaluation and assessment)
- Development of materials in languages other than English
- Cultural awareness
- Hiring and Working with interpreters

The Accessibility Guide will be enhanced to address the unique needs of working with English language learners and assist partners in connecting with the appropriate resources to meet their needs.

The Maine JobLink, the labor exchange system for Maine and the case management system for Title IB and Title III program participants has a feature that permits registrants to select form over 70 languages and which translates the questions in MJL to that participant's language. Additionally, the partners of the system develop and share information fliers in multiple languages based on the actual languages of new Mainers (refugee and immigrant populations) in Maine. However, Maine his identified that a best practice is to hire staff from within those populations who speak both English and their native language and/or multiple languages. The IB service providers and the State of Maine have made it a point to hire multilingual individuals from within those populations, the COVID DWG grantee in the Coastal Counties are of the state hired a group of individuals who spoke over five different languages, which expanded access to services to many who are uncomfortable using translation lines for regular communications. The Maine JobLink identifies every registrant's preferred language, data which guides the investments into translation of informational fliers and brochures into those languages.

IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

Maine has the benefit of being relatively lean regarding staff and programs which makes regular coordination with partners a common occurrence.

The core partners, local workforce boards and State Board staff meet monthly to monitor the implementation of the State Unified Plan. In addition to monitoring the implementation, this provides the opportunity to collaborate and share information on activities within the plan and emerging opportunities and events across the state.

Local collaboration happens between the core partners, local workforce boards and service providers on a regular basis through local board meetings, committee work, and local initiatives and events.

In addition to these, there is a Statewide Action Team (SWAT) which meets quarterly to network, share resources and discuss systemic issues. It is facilitated by various partners and moves location to allow the opportunity for statewide partners to attend.

Core partners also participate in a variety of projects and initiatives such as MaineSpark where ongoing collaboration happens with workforce system partners, higher education, employers, and non-profits.

Workforce system partners are also on the regular mailing lists for the State Workforce Board to keep them apprised of the work happening there. Additionally, SWB staff are on the invite list for local board meetings and regional training activities. Local board directors and State staff often participate and attend each other's meetings.

V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;	Yes
2. The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;	Yes
3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;	Yes
4. (a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administrating the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public; (b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;	Yes
5. The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;	Yes
6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);	
7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable;	Yes
8. The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;	Yes
9. The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;	Yes
10. The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);	Yes
11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and	Yes
12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor.	Yes

VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B

A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

General Requirements (1) Regions and Local Workforce Development Areas:

Regions: With the assistance of the State and Local Boards and Chief Elected Officials, Maine identified three planning regions; 1) Coastal Counties Region – made up of York, Cumberland, Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox and Waldo Counties; 2) Central Western Region – made up of Androscoggin, Franklin, Oxford, Somerset and Kennebec Counties; and 3) Northeastern Region – made up of Aroostook, Washington, Piscataquis, Penobscot and Hancock Counties.

The three local areas in Maine coincide with the three planning regions. Historically, Local Boards have been actively engaged in regional planning with their economic development district and community development counterparts. The Local Boards play a significant role in the development of each district's Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The following elements were taken into consideration in identifying three distinct regions for the State:

- Equal distribution of Maine's seven economic development districts
- Equal distribution of WIOA formula funds
- Equal distribution of post-secondary education institutions
- Inclusion of a major urban hub
- Similar labor force distribution and commuting patterns
- Equal share of Maine's traditional industry sectors
- Equal distribution of emerging and technology-based industries
- The fact that regional partnerships have already been formed and active for the purpose of
  workforce, economic and community development

The three-region configuration is beneficial on a number of scales, not only for the above considerations, but also because of long-standing relationships between workforce development, education and economic development stakeholders. Policy PY15-09 Establishing WIOA Regions identifies the requirements for establishing regions.

Local Areas: The Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment consulted with local boards and chief elected officials regarding the requirements for initial and ongoing designation as a local area under WIOA. The process for requesting initial and ongoing designation is outlined in Policy PY15-01Initial Designation under WIOA as follows:

As required under the WIA Section 116 and under WIOA Section 106 (b) and as iterated in the State Strategic Plans, the substantive requirements for initial and continued designation of a local workforce development area are as follows:

- The local area is consistent with local labor market area
- The local area has a common economic development area
- The local area has the Federal and non-Federal resources, including appropriate education and training institutions, to administer activities under WIOA subtitle B

A request for local area designation by any unit of general government may be approved at any time provided the State Workforce Board determines that the local area meets the above requirements.

Any local area designated under WIA that has met the substantive requirements listed above and has performed successfully and sustained fiscal integrity, will be approved for initial designation under WIOA.

The term Performed Successfully – means that during the two program years prior to enactment of WIOA, the local area met or exceeded the common measures negotiated under WIA.

- The term **met performance criteria** means the local area attained at least 80 percent of the negotiated performance measure for each or any of the nine common measures categories under WIA
- The term **exceeded performance criteria** means the local area achieved more than 100 percent of the negotiated performance measure for each or any of the nine common measures categories under WIA.
- The term **failed performance criteria** means the local area did not achieve at least 80 percent of the negotiated performance measure for each or any of the nine common measures categories and continued to fail for each of the two years prior to enactment of WIOA.

***The term Sustained Fiscal Integrity* –** means that during the two program years prior to enactment of WIOA, the local area administered WIA funds in a manner consistent with uniform administrative requirements as promulgated in rules of the Federal Office of Management and Budget and in accordance with criteria identified in the MDOL Financial Policy Manual. Sustained fiscal integrity is based on any of the following:

1. **Misexpenditure of funds due to willful disregard of the requirements of the provision involved; which may include expenditure of funds**:

- For wage and salary costs of individuals whose salaries and fringe exceed the total compensation threshold identified in 2 CFR §170.330 Appendix-A paragraph e.5
- On any cost deemed unallowable per 2 CFR 200.420 thru 200.520
- In excess of allowable thresholds per WIA and/or State and/or Local Policy
- For costs identified as unallowed per 20 CFR 683.250 *(proposed*)

Willful disregard may also include Fraud, Nonfeasance, or Malfeasance. For an expanded definition of this component see page 57 of the MDOL Financial Policy Manual.

2. **Been deemed Grossly Negligent:** Gross negligence or gross mismanagement pertains to actions or situations arising out of management ineptitude or oversight and leading to a major violation of policy, process, regulations or contract/grant provisions. Such actions have the potential to: severely hamper accomplishment of program goals, waste government resources, and jeopardize future support for a particular project, including but not limited to un-auditable records, unsupported costs, highly inaccurate fiscal reports or program reports, payroll discrepancies, payroll deductions not paid to the IRS, and lack of good internal control procedures, per the MDOL Financial Policy Manual.
3. **Complied with Accepted Standards of Administration**: Accepted standards of administration pertain to local area adherence to standards of financial administration as identified throughout 2 CFR 200 and as identified in the MDOL Financial Policy Manual, which include:

1. <u>Financial Reporting</u>: Accurate, current, and complete disclosure of the financial activities of each grant awarded must be made as required by the terms of the grant. All allowable costs must be traceable to the accounting records. See Section B of the MDOL financial manual for additional reporting requirements.
2. <u>Accounting Records</u>: Records must be maintained that identify the source and expenditure of grant funds. The records must contain information pertaining to the award and authorization, obligations, unobligated balances, assets, liabilities, outlays or expenditures, and income. The records must be maintained in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.

3. Internal Control: Effective controls and accountability must be maintained for cash, real and personal property, and other assets. All such assets must be adequately safeguarded and used solely for authorized purposes.

4. Budget Control: To ensure that overspending does not occur, actual expenditures or outlays must be compared with budgeted amounts for each grant award. Financial information must be related to performance or productivity data, including the development of unit-cost information when specifically required in the grant.

5. Allowable Costs: The subrecipient must determine what costs are allowable in accordance with OMB cost principles; grant regulations, and the terms of the grant award. In addition, no grant may pay more than its fair share of the costs (allocability). See Section E of the MDOL Financial Manual for further information on cost principles and Section F for further information on allowable costs.

6. Source Documentation: Accounting records must be supported by source documentation such as cancelled checks, invoices, purchase orders, paid bills, payrolls, time and attendance records, and award documents. The source documentation must relate directly to the costs claimed on the drawdown requests and quarterly financial reports.

7. Cash Management: Procedures for minimizing cash-on-hand must be established by each subrecipient. See Section D of the MDOL Financial Manual for cash management requirements.

8. Adherence to Contract Requirements: Subrecipients must adhere to all requirements delineated in the contract/grant including Federal and State requirements as laid out in each Rider of the contract/grant.

Any local government entity that requests but is not granted initial designation, may, within thirty days of denial, submit a written request for appeal to the State Workforce Board. Appellants must submit the appeal in writing and include a copy of the original request for designation, a copy of the denial letter, and provide sufficient evidence to establish that it meets the requirements for local area designation under WIOA. Appeals must be submitted via certified mail to: the current State Workforce Board Director, 120 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333-0120. Once the SWB director receives the appeal the formal appeals process is initiated, which is comprised of the following steps:

1. A hearing will be scheduled with an impartial hearing's unit within 45 days of receipt of the appeal, during which the additional evidence in support of local area designation will be reviewed and considered.

2. A formal response to the appellant will be provided by the hearing's unit via certified mail, within 45 days of the hearing. The formal response will cite the criteria considered in either approving or denying the appeal for local area designation.

3. If the appeal does not result in local area designation, the local board may appeal to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor as follows:

4. Appeals to the Secretary must be filed, via certified mail - return receipt, no later than 30 days after receipt of notification of denial by the State Workforce Board and must be submitted to: Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20210, Attention: ASET. A copy of this request must be submitted simultaneously to the State Workforce Board.

5. In the appeal to the Secretary, the appellant must establish that it was not accorded procedural rights under the appeal process set forth in the State Policy/Plan and

establish that it meets the requirements for designation in WIOA Sections 106(b)(2) or 106(b)(3) and 20 CFR 679-250.

6. The appellant will also be informed that if the Secretary determines that the appellant has met the burden of establishing that it was not accorded procedural rights under the appeal process set forth in the State Plan, or that it meets the requirements for designation under WIOA, the Secretary may require that the local area be designated as a local workforce investment area. The appellant will also be informed that the Secretary may consider any comments submitted by the State Workforce Board in response to the appeal made to the Secretary.

7. The appellant will also be informed that the Secretary will issue a written decision to the Governor. The appellant will be informed that the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor, on behalf of the Governor, will abide by the decision of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor.

The State Funding Mechanism-Appeals Process is part of an overall infrastructure cost sharing policy that is now in the process of review by the State Board and expected to be approved at the June, 2020 meeting. See draft policy PY19-04 Infrastructure Funding Agreement – MOU Phase II, which has been vetted by the WIOA Implementation Policy Committee (WIPC) a subcommittee of the State Board that reviews and prepares WIOA policy for State Board Approval as required under WIOA.

When the local area has informed the State that they are at an impasse regarding infrastructure cost sharing negotiations, the State Funding Mechanism (SFM) will be applied.

Under the SFM, MDOL, in consultation with the chief elected officials, the local workforce board, and the State Workforce Board, will determine each required partner's proportionate share of infrastructure costs for that local area, using guidelines pertaining to the State Funding Mechanism, which will be put forth for the Governor's review and approval as a final determination.

A required partner may appeal the final determination because of a claim that:

- The Governor's determination is inconsistent with the proportionate share requirements of 20 CFR 678.735
- The Governor's determination is inconsistent with the cost contribution caps described in 20 CFR 678.738

1. An appeal must be made in writing within 21 days of the Governor's determination and must include specific evidence that the amount determined by the Governor is inconsistent with **a.** and/or **b.** above.

2. Written appeals must be submitted to:

Appeals

State Workforce Board

120 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333-0120

3. The appeal will be reviewed by the executive committee of the State Workforce Board, and within 30 days of receipt the appellant will receive a letter either denying or accepting the appeal.

4. If the appeal is found to be without merit, it will be denied, and no further action taken.

5. If the appeal is merited, the executive committee will make a revised determination. The executive committee may consult with the chief elected official and local board to attempt to negotiate a mutually agreed upon revised determination. The revised determination will be presented to the State Workforce Board for review and approval.
6. Upon full approval of the State Workforce Board, the revised determination will be considered final throughout the cost sharing agreement period of duration, until such time as local area cost sharing is renegotiated.

Questions pertaining to this appeals process may be addressed to:

SWB.DOL@maine.gov

207-621-5087

TTY users call Maine Relay 711

2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

With ever decreasing allotments of Title IB funds over the last several years, Maine set-aside funds have barely been enough to sustain required activities identified in 20 CFR 682.200. A significant portion of the funding goes toward the title IB case management and reporting system for which continuous programming has been necessary to accommodate additions to and changes in PIRL reporting requirements. The state has such limited set-aside funding with that it has been unable to afford to conduct an evaluation and will be requesting a waiver on this requirement. Set-aside funds are used primarily to support WIOA required activities as follows:

- Conducting rapid response activities
- Disseminating information on eligible training providers, local area performance, effective practices, and more
- Providing technical assistance to local areas and required partners on a variety of topics
- Carrying out fiscal and program monitoring activities
- Operating fiscal and management accountability information systems
- Administering Title IB adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs
- Providing technical assistance and supporting staff development of Title IB service provider staff and local board staff
- Supporting common intake and data sharing across core partners

And allowable activities such as:

- Funding State workforce board staff positions

There have been one or two special projects funded using set-aside funds, including an English language learning pilot, which was a collaboration between title IB service provider Goodwill Industries NNE and Portland Adult Education that developed and delivered training to two cohorts of WIOA eligible immigrants and refugees through an accelerated curricula designed to enable lower level English language learners to obtain English proficiency required to enter employment and helped a second cohort to expand proficiency levels to retain or advance in employment.

Rapid response funds have been used for layoff aversion. One project involved a feasibility study to identify whether an employee buyout would be a possibility for a statewide direct care provider and a second project would have assisted a rural hospital to train and retain nursing

staff, but which has been postponed due to COVID-19. Now that Maine is a small-funded state, it is unlikely that these funds will be used for special projects going forward.

Statewide Activities- Rapid Response is a shared responsibility between the State Rapid Response Team, the Dislocated Worker Program service providers, and other state and local stakeholders.

MDOL is responsible for developing components of statewide and local Rapid Response activities, which include: providing resources to deliver Rapid Response services at the local level, developing budgets, structuring the Rapid Response process, coordinating the development of National Dislocated Worker Grant Applications, negotiating alliance-based contracts that support Rapid Response capacity, and providing policy direction for Rapid Response delivery and its integration with Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and WIOA dislocated worker programs.

Regional Rapid Response services are coordinated by the Rapid Response Coordinator through the Bureau of Employment Services central office. At the local level, two full-time regional Rapid Response representatives and staff from local CareerCenters provide services to employers and workers affected by lay-offs and mass closures occurring throughout the state.

In addition to provision of policy direction and functional oversight, the coordinator also provides statewide staff development and training. Local Rapid Response staff make initial and follow-up contacts with employers, provide referral services to economic development agencies, document visits and communicate them to appropriate local and State agencies, conduct reemployment orientations and workshops, and facilitate transition into training and job development activities offered by the local one-stop system.

Regional Rapid Response representatives are responsible for coordinating all Rapid Response sessions and ensuing transitional services for the affected workers. However, the full team of representatives may be called upon to act as a statewide team and respond in partnership on behalf of any local area or region that requires expanded assistance with Rapid Response service delivery and initial worker adjustment services.

Early Intervention: Maine has built an extremely effective communication system for identifying and responding to potential and actual dislocations. Several avenues exist for identifying companies that may be impacted by downsizing, including:

- A confidential list that identifies companies from which UI has documented 20 or more initial claims
- Formal notices required by the WARN act or the Maine Severance Law that are submitted by the affected company to the Dislocated Worker Unit and the Bureau of Labor Standards
- Websites that monitor and package information about mergers, downsizing, development or investment in offshore facilities that affect the corporate parent companies of Maine subsidiaries are scanned on a regular basis, along with state and local press releases that provide similar information
- Credible rumors and disclosures are routinely followed up on
- Early information sharing from economic development and other business assistance entities at the state, regional, and local levels is also encouraged. They are usually the first to know when companies are facing issues that may result in job loss

- WARN notices and credible rumors, or any information generated from the above sources trigger an immediate contact with the affected company by the local representative, who gathers information about the nature and size of the layoff

A formal Plant Brief guides the initial interview with the company and collects information that prompts specific response steps, as follows:

- Gathering of general company information, including type and sector that is used to track industry patterns
- Reason for downsizing, which prompts a referral to one-stop system business assistance services
- If trade adjustment assistance for firms is warranted, a direct referral to NETAAC (A federal program that provides business assistance to trade-affected companies hoping to avert additional layoffs) may be triggered along with other services that may avert additional layoffs
- Affirmative responses to Trade Petition questions result in facilitation of a petition for trade certification
- Information regarding severance packages (i.e., number of weeks of vacation pay, average cost of health insurance and types of health packages to be offered by the company) provide guidance to prepare UI representatives for specific employee questions that may be fielded
- Demographic information is gathered about the workers who will be attending the session in order to customize each session to the particular worker audience (i.e., age and education levels, length of time with company, language or other barriers, and whether any affected are on active duty)
- Worker task statements are requested and used to scan for skill demand (or lack thereof) in the local labor market and to determine the anticipated retraining or skill development action steps that may be necessary for reemployment purposes
- Company is asked to facilitate a worker needs survey that is examined for coordination of transitional resources and need for allocation of financial resources

State Rapid Response staff determines the mix of appropriate responses. Businesses are informed of layoff aversion services and information, and assistance is offered on such strategies as: employee buyouts, skill retooling where appropriate for layoff aversion purposes, and access to other business services available at the State, regional or local level. Private-sector local board members and elected officials could be asked to facilitate resolution of problems when there may be an opportunity to intervene to avert a lay off or shutdown. Information from the first contact is also provided directly to the Governor's office for similar reasons. Finally, the information is used to develop a customized package of services from Rapid Response orientations and workshops to training and then job development.

Maine has incorporated a "Jump Start" approach to Rapid Response allowing workers to pursue immediate readjustment/reemployment pathways. At the close of each initial Rapid Response session, participants are encouraged to sign up for next steps.

For those who feel confident to immediately seek new employment, a series of workshops designed to support this goal is offered. This series explains the labor market and how individual knowledge, skills, and abilities transfer to jobs in demand. It also Informs the workers about where and how to look for job openings, how to complete applications, develop resumes, and how to excel at interviewing.

Outplacement is conducted almost immediately via referral to the jobs that have been identified through the initial labor market scan conducted usually by the Center for Workforce Research and Information and via customized job fairs. Often affected companies are inundated with calls from other companies wishing to hire their exiting workers. The affected company is usually too overwhelmed to coordinate such services. The CareerCenters have been instrumental in taking on this additional task by coordinating job fairs that bring interested employers into contact with the specific laid off workers. In several instances these have been offered right at the worksite of the affected company. These job fairs have proved successful with over 25 percent of employees gaining immediate reemployment and the company allowing affected workers to attend the job fairs and workshops while on company time. In a recent event over 75 percent of employees had found new employment prior to their actual layoff date.

The second transition pathway is targeted to those who may have greater difficulty dealing with job loss and/or have broader barriers to immediate reemployment. This pathway links workers to a series of workshops covering such topics as coping with job loss, career decision making and understanding labor market trends, and gaining perspective through individual assessments leading to opportunities and resources for skills upgrade and retraining. These will prepare them for in-demand occupations.

Individual needs surveys are used to customize and schedule all Rapid Response services prior to layoff, and employers are encouraged to allow affected workers to complete the surveys in advance. Many companies have provided long term advance notice; in cases like these, the Rapid Response team is able to work with the company and affected workers on an ongoing basis to provide info sessions, workshops and/or TAA briefings at appropriate times. These are generally on company site and on company time.

The model also allows for exceptional information gathering in the event a National Dislocated Worker Grant is needed, and provides opportunity to collaborate with economic development to identify companies who may be in need of the specific workforce and be willing to relocate to the affected area to hire and train affected workers.

Affected workers from smaller layoffs are offered similar service pathways, but may be referred to existing workshop series offered on an ongoing basis by their local CareerCenters. If the layoff occurs without our notification, each worker is contacted individually and invited to a formal Rapid Response info session or to an orientation to services offered on a regular basis by their regional CareerCenter. It is the goal of Maine's Rapid Response program to contact every laid-off worker regardless of size of company closure or downsizing; each will be invited to access the full array of available services.

In addition to reemployment related services, it has been the custom of Maine's Rapid Response team to link with the local community to launch or participate in Community Transition Teams on behalf of the affected workers. The activities of these teams include the following:

- Production of resource booklets that feature local community programs and services, printed and provided to each of the affected workers
- Coordination of resource fairs that provide an opportunity for affected workers to access a range of services from heating and housing assistance to small business development assistance all in a one-stop location
- Coordination of fundraising events from dinners and barbecues to dances and auctions from which the proceeds can go toward an emergency services fund for affected workers
- Coordination of a variety of non-employment related workshops, such as consumer debt workshops offered by the regional credit union, to health clinics and stress management workshops offered by local health service providers.

Maine's congressional staffers have been outstanding partners in this effort, and recent collaboration between MDOL and congressional staffers has culminated in a formal plan for implementation of Community Action Teams across the state.

In the event of a natural disaster: In addition to utilizing community transition teams, the State Rapid Response lead and team members will work in collaboration with the Maine Emergency Management Association (MEMA), the State Agency with responsibility for lessening the effects of disaster on the lives and property of the people of the State through leadership, coordination and support in the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. MEMA currently has a system in place that includes year-round training of County level emergency management teams in emergency management techniques, processes and requirements. The Rapid Response team will deploy Rapid Response funds as appropriate for activities in support of MEMA, including outreach, response and recovery. Training funds will be deployed to hire temporary emergency workers as appropriate. Companies affected by the natural disaster will be provided with Rapid Response information and affected workers will be apprised of information on disaster unemployment assistance.

Coordination with Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA): Members of the Rapid Response team also implement processes to initiate Trade Adjustment services on behalf of affected firms and workers. Team members assist firms and/or affected employees in submitting trade petitions. Affected workers are provided with cursory information about TAA during regular Rapid Response sessions and are apprised of informational activities that will take place if the firm is certified for trade adjustment assistance. Rapid Response and CareerCenter staff members are trained to provide information and ongoing services to trade affected workers and to work collaboratively with staff of the Adult and Dislocated worker programs to coordinate services for trade eligible participants. Prospective participants are informed about timeframes, deadlines, and options for weekly TAA benefits and other services such as Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance, Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance and TAA Relocation Allowance.

Informational materials are provided directly to affected workers for whom a trade petition is pending. These materials explain what the Trade Adjustment Assistance program is and outline the prospective benefits the program can provide and the criteria that affected workers must meet to avail themselves of the services. Once their firm has been certified a series of forums are provided to affected workers to explain the program in full, answer questions, and schedule next steps. Firms that have been affected are also referred to employer trade adjustment assistance for firms and other services as appropriate.

Local areas in need of additional Rapid Response funds to serve affected workers while a trade petition is pending can make a formal request for additional funds using a process identified in Policy PY13-11 Rapid Response Additional Assistance Request. This policy identifies the requirements of the Rapid Response Additional Assistance (RRAA) funds which state that funds requested can only be used for program and not administrative costs, and that Local Areas must have expended at least 70 percent of local area DW funds and document that they have insufficient funds to serve the newly affected population. The RRAA funds may be used to bridge funding gaps pending approval of a trade petition. Local areas may also apply for RRAA funds when the local area has experienced a steady increase in the number of unemployed individuals within a 120-day period due to natural disasters, plant closings, mass layoffs, or other events that don't qualify for a Trade Petition or a National Dislocated Worker Grant.

B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Requirements: Work-based Training Models: Title IB service providers utilize all work-based training models available to them, including on-the-job

training (OJT), customized training (CT), work experience, internships (WE) and transitional jobs (TJ). Each local area has policies in place regarding how much participants are paid and amounts employers can be reimbursed to cover training costs. Providers have also used work-experience and on-the-job training in conjunction with occupational training to meet the needs of employers for new hire training.

Strategies to Ensure High-Quality Work-Based Learning

Local workforce boards and Title IB providers work closely with employers with openings in high-demand occupations, apprenticeship sponsors, trade associations and trade unions to properly identify the skills demanded by these occupations and to map out career pathways within specific industries so that service providers and participants are aware of the opportunities and expectations of these industries. Title IB service providers carefully assess prospective participants to identify current skills they can transfer into the work-based learning activity and to identify and clearly delineate the skills that they must practice on-the-job. In addition to the on-the-job learning component, industry members are asked to identify related instruction or specific coursework and/or occupational certifications the participants can pursue simultaneously or after they are established with the company through registered apprenticeship or company sponsored training.

Employers offering work-based learning activities such as on-the-job training, customized training, transitional jobs, work experience, and internships are carefully vetted to identify commitment to provide skilled supervision, the full range of skill learning and practice identified in the contract with the employer, safe work sites, adherence to equal opportunity requirements and most importantly commitment to hire participants who successfully complete training.

Many service providers negotiate a wage increase for the participant upon successful completion of training. Staff engage with employers and participants throughout the term of the training to ensure participant success and to identify any supports the participant or employer may require along the way.

New requirements under WIOA for youth work experience that must include both an occupational and academic learning component have resulted in expanded communication with employers providing work-based learning opportunities, better participant/employer matching, and improved outcomes for both employer and participant regarding necessary skill attainment.

Service providers have engaged in a greater number of collaborative partnerships with employers and education providers, including adult education and community colleges, to develop customized training programs that begin with participant assessment, clear on-the-job learning objectives, formal classroom skill development often resulting in an industry credential or courses leading to one and occupationally-focused work ready skills. Testimonials from employers engaged in this fully rounded approach to work-based learning are glowing and encourage additional employers to participate in similar collaborations with the one-stop system.

To ensure better alignment between MDOL administered workforce programs Maine has instituted a co-enrollment Policy. The purpose of the co-enrollment policy number PY20-03, is to provide guidance to program administrators and service providers regarding co-enrollment requirements and the mandate for co-enrollment of eligible TAA participants in the Dislocated Worker (DW) program. Background: Co-enrollment is a proven tool for integrated service delivery. Analysis of data tracked between PY09 and PY17 show significant improvements in the performance outcomes of TAA participants who were coenrolled in the Title IB dislocated worker (DW) program. Of TAA participants who were co-enrolled 74% participated in training, 67% completed training and 48% achieved a credential versus 50% participation in training

and 26% credential attainment of those who were not co-enrolled. Entered employment rates were higher for prospective TAA participants who were immediately enrolled in the DW program while TAA eligibility was being determined. As a result, recent amendments to the Trade Act have resulted in a final rule that mandates co-enrollment of TAA participants in the DW program (20 CFR part 618). Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) WIOA provides the basis for an integrated workforce system and defines a single set of outcome metrics for all federal workforce programs included in the Act. Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) is delivery of workforce services in a manner that aligns/braids program partner resources on behalf of shared customers. ISD supports more efficient use of system resources on behalf of job seekers and employers. Co-enrollment is not new in Maine, it has historically occurred between Labor Exchange customers and Title IB, Competitive Skills Scholarship Program (CSSP), and TAA customers. The shared portal for those services is Maine JobLink and all participants must self-register to create an account in the system.

Co-enrollment between Title IB and CSSP is already occurring for individuals who meet both program eligibility criteria. Co-enrollment ensures participants can continue working toward their initial employment and training plan when funds from one program or the other are restricted or fully obligated.

TAA Co-Enrollment Mandate and DW Eligibility To ensure the availability of a comprehensive array of services, trade-affected workers eligible for WIOA's dislocated worker program must be co-enrolled. A State must also make co-enrollment available to tradeaffected workers who are eligible for other one-stop partner programs to ensure that all necessary and appropriate services, including supportive services, are available to the worker. Trade affected workers may choose to decline co-enrollment in WIOA; however, the State cannot deny such a worker benefits or services under the TAA program solely for declining co-enrollment in WIOA. If a TAA participant declines to be co-enrolled, this must be documented in a case note entitled: TAA Participant Declines Co-Enrollment.

Most trade-affected workers meet the eligibility criteria of a dislocated worker defined at WIOA section 3(15). In certain circumstances, such as a general announcement of a closure, partially separated workers and adversely affected incumbent workers may meet the eligibility criteria as a dislocated worker under WIOA and must also be co-enrolled. TAA does not have a Selective Service compliance requirement; therefore, TAA participants who do not meet the Selective Service registration requirement will be exempt from the DW co-enrollment requirement. Both TAA and DW participants must be authorized to work in the United States. Referral for Co-enrollment Eligibility for TAA may not be known at the time rapid response services are being offered. Any dislocated worker who can benefit from, or who has requested, DW program services should be enrolled in DW while TAA petition determination is being reviewed. If a customer is found to be TAA eligible and has not been enrolled in DW program services, TAA staff will make a referral for co-enrollment to the appropriate IB service provider for co-enrollment into DW and any other appropriate workforce program.

Common Exit In addition to consideration of participant eligibility for program co-enrollment, it is also important to understand whether the program in which the participant is to be co-enrolled is a common exit program. Common exit means that the participant will remain enrolled in the program until 90 days has passed without a service from any other common exit program the participant is co-enrolled in. Common exit occurs for participants enrolled in:

- Employment Services (Wagner-Peyser)
- Jobs for Veterans State Grant
- Title IB Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Programs
- Trade Adjustment Act

- National Dislocated Worker Grants

The CSSP program is not a common exit program. When a 1B participant is co-enrolled in CSSP the IB provider must ensure support or other service end-dates align with those in CSSP in order to ensure the participant stays co-enrolled until all planned activities and services are complete, and employment and training outcomes achieved.

TAA Funds to be Applied First TAA co-enrollment requirement does not require use of DW funds. The primary purpose of co-enrollment with DW is to promote access to DW program services, including: career decision making and career guidance services, individualized occupational exploration, how to conduct labor market research and find local information, exploration of training options, training readiness, participation in dislocated professionals support groups and workshops offered by the DW program and provision of employment retention and career ladder guidance for RTAA participants that don't result in direct participant cost obligations. However, there may be need for direct supports that cannot be funded by the TAA program. Generally, the only support services TAA covers is travel outside the commuting area (20 miles one way) and job search or relocation assistance. Trade does pay for tools, uniforms, health insurance (if not covered and required by school) or any other item required of all students. All other support services needed by the participant to complete training would need to be covered by the DW or other program. Past TAA participants have depended on support services from Title IB programs to cover travel not covered by TAA, childcare expenses, car repair and any other emergency assistance required to enable the participants to successfully complete training.

Co-Case Management : Program leads may determine which agency will take the role of primary case manager of co-enrolled participants. Such determinations may be based on client rapport with a specific case-manager, staff capacity or expertise with a specific type of training plan, or, with customer approval, joint case management with shared case management responsibility may serve the customer best. Whatever transpires, it is important that services be customer-centric with topmost focus on the customer goals, services, and outcomes and not the program or funding stream.

Plan and Service Entry: It is not necessary to fully duplicate a participant plan. The co-enrolling agency can enter a plan referencing the original agency plan, adding services the co-enrolling agency will cover and outlining any additional requirements required of a plan in the co-enrolling agency's program. For example, if a DW participant is co-enrolled in TAA, the TAA case manager will reference the original DW plan, add the services to be provided by TAA and include information on the six TAA criteria that must be met to fund training. The original partner plan must be updated to reference the additional services to be provided by the co-enrolling agency and any updated plans must be signed by all parties and uploaded in the documents file.

If a participant is enrolled in occupational training under program A, and program B will be providing supports for that training, then program B must also enter a training service in MJL under their program to ensure training performance outcomes, such as measurable skill gains, will be tracked for performance reporting purposes and to ensure the training is from an eligible training provider, for an in-demand occupation. (Note: although TAA does not require a WIOA approved training provider, most TAA training providers are listed on the ETPL).

Data Access Permissions: Maine JobLink provides staff permissions permitting specific agencies and offices to view participant files from programs tracked under MJL. As required under the MJL confidentiality agreement, CareerCenter staff must only view the files of participants they are or will be working with and only with approval of the other program/agency. Per the confidentiality agreement, no staff may view participant files of individuals they are not working with directly, unless their position/role requires it for work-related purposes such as assigning cases or performance tracking and reporting functions. Both agencies must agree to

give case manager readaccess to participant data for co-enrollment purposes. For BES staff to provide permissions for staff from one agency to see files of participants from another program/agency, the agency requesting permissions must get approval from the agency in which the participant is to be co-enrolled via email and must forward that email giving permission to BES when requesting access for staff to view specific case files from the other agency. Agencies/programs must ensure participant releases are uploaded in MJL that document participant consent to co-enrollment and consent for staff from each program to share data and discuss customer plans and progress.

2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Registered Apprenticeship

The Maine Registered Apprenticeship Program continues to grow, Maine received a $5.9 million, four-year State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity, and Inclusion (SAEEI) grant that will:

- Expand apprenticeship in Maine and support development, modernization, and diversification of registered apprenticeship programs,
- Expand partnership and alignment with Maine's overall workforce investment system,
- Increase the number of registered apprentices from underrepresented populations,
- Include innovations in apprenticeship expansion efforts, including methods for program development and recruitment strategies,
- Focus on developing equitable and inclusive healthcare and infrastructure apprenticeship programs.

Funds have been allocated for education providers and sponsors to develop quality pre-apprenticeship programs targeting in-school and out-of-school youth ages 16 to 24 years old and will provide up to $1,200 worth of supportive services per pre-apprentice trainee. The emphasis of this program is advanced placement into registered apprenticeship programs.

Maine apprenticeship program has engaged the Maine Community College System, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Associated Builders and Contractors, and Associated General Contractors to develop new apprenticeship programs. Additionally, the Maine Apprenticeship program is working with State and local government agencies to expand apprenticeship to government occupations.

3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

Training Provider Eligibility Procedure:

Maine's eligible training provider list is housed in the ProviderLink section of Maine JobLink. The ETPL lists registered apprenticeship programs that have requested to be listed on the site, and by doing so open the door to partner with providers of Title IB services.

The procedure for initial eligibility remains the same, requiring that providers be accredited and/or other-wise endorsed, that they ensure accessibility to programs, that the programs of study offered prepare trainees to enter occupations in demand in Maine, and that programs only offered online provide access to a live instructor. Providers must complete all data requested on the application form and must sign a data sharing agreement assuring they will provide required performance data on all students participating in the approved programs.

The Center for Workforce Research and Information has created a streamlined process by which providers can submit the all-student data that conducts a wage match and converts the data into a format that can be linked with data in the ETPL portion of Maine JobLink to produce the annual Eligible Training Provider report required by USDOL.

Continued eligibility requires provider conformance with requirements for submitting all student data required for annual performance reporting. Continued approval of specific programs of study depend upon relevance to occupations that are still in demand in Maine. ETPL policy PY15-05 is currently under the process of revision to include new requirements pertaining to subsequent approval. Eligible training providers must now provide a data sharing agreement that addresses performance reporting requirements pertaining to all students in approved programs of study and which outlines the specific data on all students that must be provided annually in order to remain on the ETPL. The ETPL application, is housed in Maine's JobLink system under "Provider Link" the initial application requires that the provider submit all information regarding their own accreditation as a provider and full information about each program of study, including costs, locations and methods of delivery (classroom/online), credit hours, resulting credentials, whether or not the program was developed with input from employers or industry groups, assurance that the training is fully accessible and more. They must also identify at least two occupations the training will prepare the student to enter into, the level of pay the student can expect and the rate of employment of all students completing the course of study.

In addition to initial information, providers must submit reports on all students so that a UI wage match can occur to validate earnings and employment placement and that includes information on the level of completion and subsequent credential each student achieves.

The updated ETPL policy may be found below:

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
BUREAU OF EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
55 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0055

Janet Mills
GOVERNOR

Laura A. Fortman
COMMISSIONER

Policy Subject:	**Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)**
Policy No.	**PY 15-05 Change 1**
To:	Education and Training Providers Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors WIOA Title 1 Service Providers Local Workforce Development Boards
From:	Bureau of Employment Services
Issuance Date:	July 1, 2016
Reissued:	November 22, 2021
References:	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, §§ 107(g)(1); 116(b)(2)(I-IV); 116(d)(1-4) and (6); 122 (a) through (g); 134(c)(3)(F)(i-ii) and (G)(ii)(III) and (iii) Code of Federal Regulations: 20 CFR 677.230; 20 CFR 680.350; 20 CFR 680.420, 430, 450, 460, 470, 480, 490, and 500
Status:	APPROVED
Appendices:	Links to Resources in this policy SAMPLE Data Sharing Agreement for Eligible Training Providers

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PHONE: (207) 623-7981 TTY users call Maine Relay 711 FAX: (207) 287-5933

The Maine Department of Labor provides equal opportunity in employment and programs.
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

PURPOSE
This policy identifies the requirements and process by which education and training entities can request and maintain approval as Eligible Training Providers (ETPs) who are permitted to receive funds on behalf of WIOA (Workforce innovation and Opportunity Act) Title I-B eligible participants. Funds paid on behalf of Title I-B participants are referred to as Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

BACKGROUND
Eligible participants use the ETP-provided data to select a program that best meets their needs. WIOA participants receive guidance from career consultants on how to use the ETPL to compare training programs by cost, credential to be attained, rates of completion and employment and earnings outcomes.

Maine's ETPL site can be found at: https://joblink.maine.gov/training.

PROVIDER and PROGRAM APPROVAL PROCESS
Providers and programs are reviewed to identify if they meet the basic criteria, will prepare students for occupations that are in-demand in Maine, and will result in attainment of industry-recognized credentials. If approved, the program will remain on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) website for a period of one year. At the end of the initial year, the provider must reapply to keep the program active on the ETPL and must report specific performance information on all students exiting the program of study.

Eligible Providers of Training are providers per 20 CFR 680.410 that:
(a) Are listed as WIOA-approved on the Maine Eligible Training Provider List;
(b) Provide an approved program of training services as defined below; and
(c) Are one of the following:
1. An institution of higher education that provides a program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
2. An entity that carries out a program registered under the National Apprenticeship Act (29 U.S.C.501 et seq.)
3. A public or private provider of training services, which may include:
   i. A community-based organization;
   ii. A joint labor-management organization; and
   iii. Eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities, under Title II of WIOA, if such activities are provided in combination with occupational training as per 20 CFR 680.350.

(d) Have a physical location in Maine or New Hampshire and/or offer on-line training that provides student access to a live instructor

Providers must agree to share performance data on ALL students for each program of study and must submit performance data annually. See page 4, **Eligible Training Provider Annual Performance Reports**.

Approved Programs of Training per 20 CFR 680.420 are defined as one or more courses or classes, or a structured regimen, that provides occupational training and education services that lead to:
(a) An industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of a registered apprenticeship, a State or Federally recognized occupational license, an associate or baccalaureate degree;
(b) Employment in an occupation that is in-demand in Maine; and
(c) Measurable skill gains toward a credential described in (a) above.

INITIAL ELIGIBILITY per 20 CFR 680.450
Providers that have not previously listed programs on the ETPL must complete the ProviderLink application form on https://joblink.maine.gov/ada/r/training and provide:

1. A description of each training program and the CIP code (Classification of Instructional Programs);
2. The Occupational Information Network (O*Net SOC Codes) code for the occupation(s) the program prepares the student for;
3. A program description that aligns with an in-demand occupation and/or industry sector, including the provider's ability to offer in-demand industry-recognized certificates and credentials;
4. Complete information regarding:
    a. The occupation(s) the program prepares students to enter employment in;*
    b. The hourly wage of the occupation(s) that a student can expect;*
    c. Whether the program meets the requirements of a Federal or State educational licensing, accreditation, or approval agency;
    d. The cost of tuition, fees, books, labs, and other program costs;
    e. The location(s) the program is offered;
    f. Whether the program is offered via technology;
    g. The percentage of participants who successfully complete the program and earn a credential;*
    h. The percentage of participants who attain employment in the 2nd and 4th quarters after program completion;*
    i. The median earnings of participants who attain employment by the 2nd and 4th quarters after completion of the program;*
    j. Any state licensure requirements, and the provider/program's licensure status;
    k. Partnerships with businesses or industries in program development, approval, support;
    l. The level of demand by Maine employers for the occupations the program prepares students for;
    m. The type of credential, degree, diploma, certificate, or license the program prepares students for;*
    n. The degree to which individuals with disabilities or barriers to employment or those who live in rural areas of the State and/or who are employed, can access the program;
    o. The commitment, through a data sharing agreement, to submit accurate performance reports required for continued eligibility;
    p. Any additional information regarding the program that should be considered for approval purposes.

5. Other information required by the Governor - For online training providers, the program must include access to a live instructor through email, online chat, telephone, video conferencing, or other means. This should be included in the program description.
6. Access to training services must be statewide, including rural areas and islands. Access may be provided using technology and be in accordance with WIOA Section 188, 29 CFR Part 38, and Maine Workforce System Policy 17-01, *Accessibility, Equal Opportunity, and Nondiscrimination*.

*These are considered performance factors under federal regulations

When entering information for a new program, the ETPL includes a look up feature for both CIP codes and O*Net codes. When entering the median earnings information, the training provider should indicate historical information on the median earnings of the students who have completed the training provider's programs

Initial Approval Process Steps

1. Create an account on Maine JobLink site at: https://joblink.maine.gov/training and establish a user name and password.
2. Fill in all the data fields on the screen regardless of whether there is an asterisk by the field and submit for approval.
3. Upload any documents that confirm the provider's state licensure or licensing status, if applicable.
4. The MDOL approval review process may take from 1 to 15 business days. Inquiries may be forwarded to ETPLInfo.DOL@maine.gov.
5. The provider will receive approval or denial status information via email.
6. If a program is not initially approved, the provider may:

a. Consult with the Bureau of Employment Services to identify extenuating circumstances that would support program approval at the local level.
b. File an appeal to the MDOL by following the appeal process defined later in this policy.

7. Agree to abide by a data sharing agreement as part of initial and ongoing eligibility. See Appendix A for a sample version of the data sharing agreement.

User Guide

The online ProviderLink Self-Service Guide assists training providers in opening accounts, adding or deleting programs, editing their information, and adding/deleting new account users

Adding or Removing Programs of Study

Once approved, an ETP may offer more than one program of study or training. Each program must be individually registered and approved on the ETPL. New programs may be entered for approval on the ETPL at any time. Training providers must remove programs from the ETPL that they no longer offer.

Cybersecurity and Log In

A training provider's log in credentials should be written down and kept on file. It is suggested that the credentials be available to at least one other individual in the organization should there be a change in personnel.

For security reasons, all inactive accounts are disabled every 180 days. To enable a disabled account, contact ETPLInfo.DOL@maine.gov.

CONTINUED PROGRAM APPROVAL 20 CFR 680.460(a)(1,2) and 680.490(a,b)
Continued program approval depends on whether the program of study is still deemed necessary to prepare students for jobs that are in-demand in Maine and the provider's ability to submit accurate and timely performance information on all students exiting the program of study as required below.

ETP performance reports are intended to provide critical information regarding the employment, earnings, and credentials outcomes attained by individuals in the approved programs of study. The purpose of these reports is to assist WIOA participants and the general public in selecting effective training programs and providers. The reports also benefit providers by widely disseminating information on their programs.

Continued program/provider eligibility is contingent on submitting the annual performance report. The data must be sufficient to assess WIOA performance indicators. To facilitate the process of compiling the indicators data, the training provider's annual performance report must include the information listed in the next section of this report. This information allows the Maine Department of Labor to match student outcome data with federal wage and employment information on the students' credential attainment, employment status in the 2nd and 4th quarters after exit from WIOA services and median earnings. 20 CFR 680.460(g)

Continued eligibility is always contingent on the overall quality of the program. Quality includes the ability to prepare students for in-demand employment opportunities, the type of industry recognized certificate or credential, post-secondary credentials (degree, diploma), or license the program prepares students. If local employers do not accept/hire students with a program's credentials/training, the program would be reviewed for continued eligibility. Other quality indicators may include the proportion of students who successfully complete the program, and physical and programmatic accessibility of the course of study.

In order to maintain continued eligibility, access to training services must be statewide, including rural areas and islands. Access may be provided using technology and be in accordance with WIOA Section 188, 29 CFR Part 38, and Maine Workforce System Policy 17-01, *Accessibility, Equal Opportunity, and Nondiscrimination*.

Providers and their programs must continue to meet initial eligibility requirements in order to remain approved on the ETPL. At least every two years, providers must update their program listings to update program costs, hourly wage information for occupations the program prepares the student for, any other relevant program changes, and contact information. Providers should not wait for a biennial update; information must be updated whenever a relevant change occurs. 20 CFR 680.460(h)(1)

Continued eligibility also depends on information that may be reported to the state by service providers, businesses, other agencies, or other reliable sources. EXAMPLE: There are credible complaints that a provider or program routinely fails to provide reasonable accommodations. If the Maine Department of Labor (in collaboration with the USDOL Civil Rights Center or the Maine Human Rights Commission), after investigation, finds that the complaints have merit, this provider may be removed from the ETPL. 20CFR 680.460(b)(1,2,3)

Eligible Training Provider Annual Performance Reports 20 CFR 677.230, 680.450(a), 680.460

For continued approval, providers must report the following accurate information due annually on August 1, on all individuals, whether WIOA supported or not, who have exited (completed, withdrawn from, or transferred elsewhere) each approved program of study listed on the ETPL during the most recent program year, July 1 through June 30:

1. Each exiting student's Social Security Number;
2. The CIP code for each student's program of study;
3. The students, who attained a recognized post-secondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
4. The number of ALL students who exited the program;
5. The credentials attained by each student;
6. The date of completion for each student who completed the program for the most recent program year.

NOTE: Providers must report on all programs of study approved on the ETPL, including programs of study that did not serve any WIOA participants during the reporting year. (20 CFR 667.230(a)(1))

Providers who substantially violate the requirement to timely and accurately submit all required information will be removed from the ETPL. 20 CFR 680.460(l)(2). Timely means "by the August 1 of each year." Accurate means "the data are verifiable. Data submitted by eligible training providers is matched and corrected if errors or omissions are discovered while matching data for annual submission to USDOL."

In general, if a provider submits the annual performance report and there are no issues that cause concern, it will remain approved on the ETPL.

Providers who are unable to submit the annual performance report due to exceptional circumstances beyond the provider's control, such as natural disasters, unexpected personnel transitions, or unexpected technology-related issues, should immediately contact the Bureau of Employment Services. The Bureau will offer technical assistance and work with the provider to agree on a plan to submit the data as soon as possible. 20 CFR 680.460(l)(1), 680.480(b,c), and 680.490(d)(3)

Out of state providers must submit annual student performance data to remain on the ETPL. If an eligible training provider is submitting annual student performance data in another state AND their data submission includes ALL MAINE STUDENTS enrolled in their listed training programs, the training provider may request a waiver exempting them from also submitting their data to Maine. The training provider must submit documentation from the state in which they submitted their data. The documentation must be approved by the State of Maine in order to grant the waiver. The waiver must be requested annually, along with proof of reporting in another state.

Assistance with Annual Performance Reporting
Performance reporting requires a match with unemployment insurance data. MaineEarns is the secure web-based portal for providers' performance data reporting. MaineEarns is administered by the Center for Workforce Research & Information (CWRI), which provides the mechanism for conducting wage match criteria and produce the required reports for eligible providers. The MaineEarns site also provides information reported by programs of study not connected to Title IB of WIOA. To request more information on this process and the required data-sharing agreement please contact ETPLInfo.DOL@maine.gov.

CWRI provides a Resource Page for ETP Reporting, which includes the data sharing agreement, guidance on opening a data sharing account, sample data files, and an organizational code lookup are available.

The requirement for performance data may be waived by BES upon showing good cause. If needed, the Maine Department of Labor may provide technical assistance to providers. 20 CFR 680.460(k), 680.490(d)(3)

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS (RA) 20 CFR 680.470
Apprenticeship Programs registered with the USDOL or the MDOL are automatically eligible to be included on the ETPL provided they remain registered or until the program sponsor notifies the State they no longer want to be included in the list. RA programs can be included on the ETPL upon the sponsor's request. RA programs must be on the ETPL in order to access WIOA funds. (See next paragraph.) 20 CFR 680.450(b) and 680.470(a)

Although automatically eligible to be on the ETPL, RA sponsors must provide the following information before approval:

1. The sponsor's name and address
2. Sponsor's RA number
3. Sponsor's corresponding NAICS code
4. Sponsor's mailing address
5. Sponsor's primary contact name and contact information
6. Occupations contained in the RA program
7. The Related Instruction provider's name and address
8. Location of related instruction if different from the RA sponsor's
9. Method and length of instruction
10. Number of active apprentices

Programs will be reviewed by the Maine Apprenticeship Council every two years to ensure they are still registered. Registered Apprenticeship programs that are deregistered, no longer active, or who wish to be deleted will be removed from the ETPL. 20 CFR 680.470(b)

RA programs are not required to follow the performance reporting requirements that apply to other ETPs. However, RA programs are encouraged to voluntarily submit performance data.

For a WIOA eligible individual to utilize WIOA Title I-B training funds toward the cost of apprenticeship training, the Registered Apprenticeship program must be listed on the ETPL. WIOA participants may use Title I-B training funds toward the cost of:

a. Tuition for required related instruction courses;
b. Supportive services to enable the individual to participate in training activities; and
c. Costs of work-based training options such as partial wage reimbursement for initial On-the-Job Training.

20 CFR 680.470(d)

Per federal regulations, the Maine Apprenticeship Program contacts sponsors annually to encourage them to register their programs on the ETPL and confirm consent to remain on the ETPL. 20 CFR 680.470(a)

Apprenticeship program sponsors who no longer wish to have their programs listed on the ETPL can submit a request for removal from the list to ETPLInfo.DOL@maine.gov. 20 CFR 680.470(a)

Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs)
Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs do not receive the same exceptions as RA programs. IRAPs seeking addition to the ETPL must follow the same process requirements as other training providers.

STATE and LOCAL ROLES 20 CFR 680.400(b);680.430; 680.500; 680.510
The Maine Department of Labor is responsible for approving new training providers and programs in coordination with Local Workforce Development Boards. The Bureau of Employment Services is the designated agency for administering the ETPL, including approvals, denials, revocations/removals, and reviews of providers and programs.

DENIAL/LOSS OF ELIGIBILITY (REMOVAL) Per 20 CFR 680.480:
Programs may be denied if they do not meet the definition of an "Eligible Provider" or if it is determined the program of study will not result in employment in an occupation that is in high demand in the State or Local Area.

Providers that have intentionally supplied inaccurate performance information or that have substantially violated any WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38, will be terminated from the list. The provider must comply with Workforce Development System Policy 17-01, Equal Opportunity, Nondiscrimination, and Accessibility, as well as all WIOA regulations.

OUT OF STATE and INTERNET-BASED TRAINING PROVIDERS and PROGRAMS
Out of state, internet-based programs will only be considered for inclusion on the ETPL only if the program includes access to a live instructor.

THIRD-PARTY TRAINING VENDORS
When an eligible training provider offers a program that is delivered by a third-party training entity, the program credential or certificate of completion must be issued by the eligible training provider, or jointly issued by the eligible training provider and the third-party vendor. The eligible training provider is responsible for submitting annual performance data for any training they offer through a third-party vendor that is not an approved provider.

Example: An Adult Education program that is actually delivered by an online training provider must assure that the program provides access to a live instructor, the credential or certificate of course completion is issued by the Adult Education provider or jointly issued by the Adult Ed provider and the training provider that actually delivered the program.

Regardless, all eligibility criteria must be met in order to approve the program.

ETPL APPEAL PROCESS 20 CFR 683.630(b)(1); 680.480(d)

Programs that have been denied WIOA eligibility may appeal in writing to the contact person listed below within 30 days of the denial. The appeal must provide specific documentation on how the provider and/or program meet requirements for eligibility and inclusion on the ETPL laid out in this guidance. The Bureau of Employment Services must hold a hearing within 30 days of receipt of the appeal and render a decision within 15 working days from the date of the hearing.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For general questions or assistance: ETPLInfo.DOL@maine.gov

For appeals contact:

Virginia Carroll, Division Director virginia.a.carroll@maine.gov

Appendix A: Data Sharing Agreement Language

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN TRAINING PROVIDER AND THE MAINE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

I. PARTIES:

The parties to this agreement are the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) and the training provider submitting this request for approval as an Eligible Training Provider under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act **Sections 116 and 122, the Code of Federal Regulations** 20 CFR 677.230 **and** 20 CFR 680.400 through 680.520, **the** Competitive Skills Scholarship Program Governing Rule **Section 6. No. 5, and** Maine Department of Labor Policy 15-05.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Agreement is to document the terms under which a training provider may release to MDOL personally identifiable records required to meet Federal performance reporting requirements and with which MDOL will create aggregated performance reports.

1. Data Transferred
   a. As a condition of approval, the training provider is required to report information about every individual who participates in an approved program of study and completes training or exits training without completing. The training provider will submit files containing:
      i. Social security number (SSN), unique student identifier, training provider code, CIP code, program description, credential attainment, and completion status of all individuals.

2. Data will be aggregated and published to promote consumer choice, conduct research, and evaluate the performance of training programs funding under WIOA Title I-B.

The file format for submission of the data can be found here: https://www1.maine.gov/cgi-bin/online/cwri/start

III. AUTHORITY

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Public Law 113-128, its associated federal rules and regulations, and state policies, require reporting of data related to the performance of training providers eligible to receive WIOA funds to cover training or education costs.

This activity falls within the exception to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as outlined in 34 CFR §99.31(a)(3) and is consistent with Unemployment Compensation Regulation 20 CFR §603.10 and Vocational Rehabilitation Regulation 34 CFR 361.28.

MDOL represents that they are authorized to bind to the terms of the Agreement including requirements for confidentiality, maintenance, publication, and destruction or return of data, and all related or associated institutions, individuals, employees, or contractors who may have access to the data, or may own, lease, or control equipment or facilities of any kind

where the data is stored, maintained, or used in any way.

IV. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

To achieve the transfer of data and information that is subject to state and federal confidentiality laws and to ensure that the required confidentiality of personally identifiable information shall always be maintained, MDOL agrees to:

1. Use data shared under the Agreement for no purpose other than the purpose described above.
2. Require all employees, contractors, and agents of any kind to comply with this Agreement and all applicable provisions of federal and state laws with respect to the data and information shared under the Agreement. MDOL agrees to require of and maintain an appropriate confidentiality agreement from each employee, contractor, or agency with access to confidential data pursuant to the Agreement.
3. Securely handle and store all personally identifiable information sent and received pursuant to the Agreement. Establish procedures and systems to ensure that all confidential data processed, stored, and/or transmitted under the provisions of this Agreement will be maintained in a secure manner that prevent further disclosure of the data, including the interception, diversion, duplication, or other unauthorized access to said data.
4. Not disclose data contained under the authority of the Agreement in any manner that could identify any individual or employer to any entity other than authorized employees, contractors, and agents working as authorized representatives under this Agreement. No data shall be released to anyone not otherwise authorized if there are fewer than three individuals in a category.

V. RELATED PARTIES

The MDOL Center for Workforce Research and Information (CWRI) will function as custodian at MDOL for the purposes of this agreement, matching records to employment records residing in the MDOL warehouse and aggregating the resulting wage outcomes for use.

VI. TERM

This Agreement expresses the entire agreement of the Parties and shall not be modified or altered except in writing in a manner consistent with applicable State and Federal laws. It shall remain enforced as long as the Training Provider **remains on the ETPL, and** meets the requirements referenced in Workforce System Policy PY15-05. The parties may unilaterally or mutually terminate this Agreement at any time.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

There is no administrative fee imposed on the training provider.

Name of Training Provider: _____

Name of Provider's Authorized Contact: _____

Contact's Signature: _____

Date: _____

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4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PRIORITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS, OTHER LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF WIOA SEC. 134(C)(3)(E), WHICH APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES FUNDED BY THE ADULT FORMULA PROGRAM

Priority of Service: Policy PY15-03 Adult Priority of Service requiring priority of service for participants of the Adult program has been implemented as follows:

As stated in WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(E), with respect to provision of individualized career services and training services funded with WIOA Title I -Adult funds, priority of service must be given to:

1. Recipients of public assistance
2. Other low-income individuals
3. Individuals who are basic skills deficient

The following sequence of priority will apply:

1. **First priority** will be provided to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient in the local area who are covered persons with respect to veterans' priority. Per 683.230 when past income is an eligibility determinant for a veteran, any amounts received as military pay or allowances by any person who served on active duty and certain other specified benefits must be disregarded for the veteran and for other individuals for whom those amounts would normally be applied in making an eligibility determination for the purpose of determining if the veteran or covered person is a low-income individual.
2. **Second priority** will be provided to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals and individuals who are basic skills deficient who are not covered veterans.
3. **Third priority** will be covered persons with respect to the veterans' priority, those covered persons not considered to be recipients of public assistance, low-income or basic skills deficient - who meet one or more of the barriers to employment identified as a priority by the local area, as defined in local board policy.
4. **Fourth priority** will be with respect to non-veterans, who are not recipients of public assistance, low income, or basic skills deficient but who meet one or more of the barriers to employment identified as a priority by the local area, as defined in local board policy.
5. **Fifth priority** will be with respect to adults with other barriers as identified in Local Board policy.

Priority of service does not apply to the dislocated worker or youth populations.

For the purpose of establishing income eligibility for priority of service, people with disabilities are considered a household of one. As outlined in WIOA Section 3(36)(A)(vi), a person with a disability can be considered a low-income individual under the priority of service if the individual's own income meets the income requirement described in WIOA Section 3(36)(A)(ii), even if the individual is a member of a family whose income exceeds the poverty line or is 70 percent of the Lower Living Standard Income Level.

Individualized career services and training services, outlined in WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(A)(xii), are subject to priority of service. Basic career services, outlined in WIOA Section 134(c)(2)(A)(i)-(xi), are not subject to the priority of service as they must be made available to all.

The Local Board has discretion to identify populations in the local area who are not low income, basic skills deficient, or recipients of public assistance but who are individuals documented as having other barriers to employment. Local Boards must establish local policy regarding the determination and implementation of a priority of service specific to the local area.

5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

Criteria for Transfer of Funds:

The State has implemented policy PY15-04 Change 1 Transfer of Funds on transfer of funds between the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs, as follows:

WIOA final regulation 20 CFR 683.130 stipulates that the Governor must establish written policy that identifies criteria that will be used for approving a request to transfer adult or dislocated worker employment and training funds. Local areas must still meet the negotiated performance levels of the program from which the funds are being transferred. This policy-revision identifies the criteria that will be considered in approving a request for transfer of funds.

Funds transferred from one program to another adopt the eligibility requirements of the program into which they are placed; for example, DW funds transferred for use in the Adult program adhere to Adult priority of service and eligibility requirements.

The Bureau requires additional information regarding the amounts of funds being identified for transfer at the service provider level. To accommodate this, the Request for Transfer of Funds Form has been revised. Upon Governor approval, WIOA Section 133(b)(4) allows a Local Board to transfer up to 100 percent of the formula funds allocated to the local area for Adult program services and up to 100 percent of funds allocated to the local area for Dislocated Worker formula program services for a fiscal year, between:

1. Adult employment and training activities
2. Dislocated Worker employment and training activities

On behalf of the Governor, MDOL's BES will review and approve requests from a Local Board seeking to transfer funds between the Adult and Dislocated Worker formula programs. Such requests will be reviewed upon receipt, and unless there are extenuating circumstances, notification of approval will be provided within ten business days or less. Local Areas may not transfer funds to or from the Youth formula program.

Criteria for approval of a local area transfer request:

In order to approve a request for fund transfer the local area must establish they have met one of the following criteria for making the transfer:

1. The local area has significant discretionary funding targeted to serve one population over the other; for example, ample Trade Act and Dislocated Worker Grant funds are available to serve DWs, but only formula funds are available to serve Adults.
2. The local area has fully expended funds in one program that still has unmet need yet has ample unobligated funds in the other program.
3. Other: The local board may explain the rationale for the transfer request, identify the situation necessitating the need, and articulate the benefits that will result from the transfer. Such rationale should be supported by the Local/Regional Plan and include assurance that the target group from which funds will be taken will not suffer negative consequences as a result.

Local Boards seeking to transfer funds must submit the request to the Bureau using the transfer request form and must attach minutes of the local board reflecting local board approval of the transfer request. The policy clarifies that a transfer of funds does not require a fiscal amendment to the contract and explains how transferred funds are to be reported on the quarterly fiscal report.

C. WITH RESPECT TO YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AUTHORIZED IN SECTION 129 OF WIOA—

1. IDENTIFY THE STATE-DEVELOPED CRITERIA TO BE USED BY LOCAL BOARDS IN AWARDING GRANTS OR CONTRACTS FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AND DESCRIBE HOW THE LOCAL BOARDS WILL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE ABILITY OF THE PROVIDERS TO MEET PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES BASED ON PRIMARY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE YOUTH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 116(B)(2)(A)(II) OF WIOA IN AWARDING SUCH GRANTS OR CONTRACTS.[11]

Criteria identified by the State to be used by local boards in awarding grants to providers of youth services is articulated in policy PY16-03 Youth Service Provider Criteria as follows:

1. For the purpose of identifying appropriate youth service elements and career pathways for each youth participant, the youth provider must be able to **conduct an objective assessment of each youth that includes an evaluation of**:

- Academic and literacy levels, including English language proficiency
- Pre-employment competencies and employability skills
- Prior work experience and transferrable skills
- Occupational skills, aptitudes (including occupational interests, work preferences, and aptitude for and interest in non-traditional occupations)
- Developmental needs
- Supportive services necessary to successfully participate in all aspects of the youth program
- Barriers to transition to employment or post-secondary education
- Need for each of the fourteen youth service elements
- Need for comprehensive counseling and coordinated referrals to programs and services such as:

Mental health services
Substance abuse counseling
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
Housing and homeless assistance programs
Programs that address juvenile recidivism
Programs providing assistance to individuals with disabilities
Parenting and childcare programs
Programs that provide guidance to youth whose parent/guardian is incarcerated or affected by addiction or mental illness

2. Must show evidence of ability to provide services that are age-, needs-, and ability-appropriate, including provision of suitable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

3. In partnership with the youth participant, development of youth employment plans articulate goals, benchmarks, activities, and service elements that will launch the youth on a defined career pathway and that will result in the youth meeting or exceeding locally negotiated performance measures. Such plans must include identification of short- and long-term goals, including goals for measurable skill gains, credential attainment, employment, and/or transition to post-secondary training or education.

4. Document active involvement of family members, community service members, and others who play a critical in the youths' success, as part of program service design.
5. Demonstrate how opportunities for youth to practice leadership and citizenship skills, including providing peer mentoring, project leadership, and community service activities are provided.
6. Demonstrate strong business/employer involvement including specific examples of long-term relationships with employers who provide:
    a. Work experience opportunities that include regular assessment of work readiness and employment competency skills
    b. Opportunities for job shadowing or informational interviewing
    c. Occupationally specific internships or On-the-Job Training opportunities
    d. Practice employment interviews that result in constructive feedback for youth
    e. Adult mentoring
    f. Actual employment opportunities
    g. Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities
    h. Participation in youth career exploration events and job fairs
    i. Participation in youth committees and other youth advisory boards
7. Demonstrate an atmosphere of inclusion, appreciation of diversity, and commitment to youth advocacy through examples and anecdotal evidence of such.
8. Demonstrate significant relationships with, and ability to package the services of, a variety of community organizations that serve at-risk youth through formal memoranda of understanding, contracts, or other formal agreements that provide evidence of such relationships, including relationships with Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, the juvenile justice system, DHHS, post-secondary education providers, financial aid providers, employer organizations, and others.
9. Demonstrate the ability to offer work-based learning experiences that stress the connection between academic knowledge and work activities, through provision of examples of work-site agreements.
10. Provide evidence accessible facilities, programs, technology, and ability to provide appropriate accommodations for youth with special needs.
11. Demonstrate ways in which the youth program establishes high expectations for youth participants, including evidence showing most youth participants who enter the program participate in and complete the activities identified on the youth employment plan, and showing the program meets identified performance measures.
12. Documentation of ability to connect youth participants with all fourteen required youth service elements, either through direct provision or through partnerships, MOUs, or other methods, to include provision of:
    a. Tutoring and/or Study Skills
    b. Access to drop out recovery programs or alternative education
    c. Work-based learning
    d. Occupational Skills Training

e. Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as occupational training

f. Leadership development

g. Adult Mentoring

h. Support Services

i. Follow-up Services

j. Comprehensive guidance and counseling

k. Financial Literacy

l. Entrepreneurial Skills/ Training

m. Career guidance and counseling, including provision of local and state labor market information and information about how to prepare to enter occupations that are in demand in the local area and in Maine

n. Activities that prepare youth for entry into post-secondary education

13. Evidence of employment of professional staff, including requisite credentials and experience and demonstration of a commitment to staff development that prepares staff to deliver the services identified above.

2. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL USE TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH AS DESCRIBED IN 129(A)(1)(B), INCLUDING HOW IT WILL LEVERAGE AND ALIGN THE CORE PROGRAMS, ANY COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN, REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS, AND ANY OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE.

Service providers conduct extensive outreach to identify eligible out-of-school youth for enrollment. They rely on partner agency referrals and strategically place youth staff at outreach posts, such as housing authorities, immigrant welcome centers, community colleges, Job Corps centers, homeless shelters, new parent programs, programs serving homeless youth and county jails where eligible youth participants are accessing other services. Relationships with these agencies to jointly serve, co-enroll and braid resources to better serve youth, have grown significantly as a result.

Youth retention in program activities has always been a challenge with the out-of-school population, partly because of Maine's vast geography, rurality and lack of public transportation but also because of the fleeting nature and caprice of this population. The geography makes it difficult to offer programs to cohorts of youth who can bond with each other through the experience, support their peers through challenges and share in celebrating achievements. Successful cohort approaches have the most significant outcomes, not only in terms of performance but in building personal esteem and providing opportunities for civic engagement. Cohort approaches expand opportunities for team building and life skill attainment such as understanding diversity and social justice.

The agency partnership group approach is also strongly encouraged to ensure youth complete all activities identified in their individual service plans. Involvement of system and community partners in developing and implementing the cohort experience, particularly the agencies that jointly serve youth, such as staff from homeless shelters, mental health and substance programs, mentoring programs and employers have also proven to result in greater numbers completing the program and successfully transitioning to next steps.

In rural areas where group engagement is not possible, service providers are encouraged to keep youth participants fully engaged by packaging a full-time program in which work experience, career counseling and life skills preparation, academic and occupational skill development are all occurring simultaneously. Whenever possible this approach should bring youth participants into group experiences periodically, such as attendance at workshops with other participants in their age category to understand financial literacy.

Clearly outlining goals and the steps to achieve them, then formally celebrating when steps are accomplished and outcomes achieved, keeps youth connected. Formal recognition of achievements can be in the form of public recognition through program newsletters, incentives that reward specific accomplishments, and/or ability to move onto another much needed service, such as driver education.

Collaboration and close relationships with other providers serving the youth, such as adult education, rehabilitation, and employers providing work experience sends a message to youth that the program is formal, connected and focused on their individual success.

3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT ALL 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2) ARE MADE AVAILABLE AND EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS UNDER THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ELEMENT. [12]

A key way of determining whether youth have access to all 14 service elements is through file review and annual monitoring. Monitors review youth files for results of comprehensive assessment and how these are used to develop the youth service plan. Plans are reviewed to ensure that they incorporate appropriate youth service elements and how these are offered to youth. Each local area may approach provision of service elements differently, with some offering most services through direct program staff and others braiding the services of multiple local providers.

Two areas that service providers have had difficulty offering are adult mentoring (to the level required under the act) and entrepreneurship training. State agency staff provide technical assistance to local boards and their service providers and have brainstormed ways these services can be offered. Most areas utilize youth case managers as adult mentors, and many have built mentoring by employers into work experience activities. Again, the rural and vast geography make a formal program of adult mentoring a challenge.

Entrepreneurship training is being included in service plans only if the youth has expressed a specific interest. Technical assistance has been provided to encourage broader understanding among youth service staff of what can be included in entrepreneurship training which doesn't require a youth to be interested in self-employment per se, but that can incorporate entrepreneurial skill development in other ways.

All current youth service providers have formal relationships with providers of mental health and substance use counseling to which youth with these needs are referred. Attendance is supported and monitored by youth staff. Many service providers have hired what they call a service navigator, usually a licensed social worker who can provide some level of counseling and who has the expertise to connect youth directly to appropriate services.

All youth service providers offer work experience opportunities, including paid work-experience that includes academic and occupational skill development, internships, on-the-job training and ensuring young women are aware of nontraditional occupations that pay wages that are significantly higher than traditional female occupations and of apprenticeship as an occupational skill development pathway.

The Maine apprenticeship program accepts youth ages 16 and older and as such most out of school youth can enter apprenticeship directly without the need for pre-apprenticeship

training. However, the Maine Apprenticeship Program has recently engaged in collaborations between the secondary Career and Technical Education Centers (CTEs) and trade associations and trade unions to brainstorm possibilities for formal pre-apprenticeship programs for in-school youth seeking to enter apprenticeable occupations in Maine. Both sponsors and educators are cautious, as prior pre-apprenticeship programs haven't always resulted in a direct pathway to registered apprenticeship. Employers must be willing and able to take on the liability of younger workers which is often the key barrier to employer's partnering to provide pre-apprenticeship.

Finally, statewide youth service provider staff attend training to get a clear understanding of each of the youth service elements, how they can be provided, how they must be built into a youth service plan and how they must be documented in Maine JobLink.

4. PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

Criteria for use and documentation of this eligibility component is articulated in policy PY16-05 Youth Requires Additional Assistance. The purpose of the policy is to provide guidance to local boards regarding youth eligibility under the youth barrier for a "Low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment" as stated in WIOA. This requires the State or Local Boards to establish definitions for additional youth barriers pertaining to youth most-in-need and places a limitation on the percentage of in-school-youth for which this barrier can be used for eligibility purposes. The policy states eligibility using the locally-defined barrier not to exceed 5% of all ISY enrollments.

For in-school-youth the barrier must pertain to low-income students who require additional assistance to complete an educational program.

For out-of-school-youth the barrier must pertain to low-income youth who require additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, *or* to secure and hold employment. To accommodate these WIOA changes, local boards must:

- Rescind or revise existing policy to create a new policy for "Low-Income Youth requires additional assistance…" ensuring that the local definition does not duplicate any youth barriers already identified under WIOA and that it identifies barriers faced by youth in the local area
- Title the policy "**Local Definition of Youth Requires Additional Assistance"** and not the "sixth barrier" as it is no longer a sixth barrier
- Clearly define the specific barrier(s) and list the documentation to be used to validate the barrier
- Clearly articulate that the local barrier can only be used as an eligibility barrier for up to 5% of all In-School Youth (ISY)
- Establish a method for tracking ISY enrollments under this barrier to ensure that the 5% limitation is not exceeded
- Provide a copy of the new policy to the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Employment Services, once it has been reviewed and approved by the Local Board

- Provide evidence that local area youth service provider staff have been made aware of the new/revised policy, that they understand the limitation on its use for eligibility for in-school-youth, and they are able to implement it accordingly

Each of the three local areas have revised this policy and identified specific criteria that is not duplicative of WIOA, have identified methods for validating the barriers they have identified and have provided assurance that youth staff understand how this barrier is to be used for eligibility purposes and restrictions for use for in-school-youth.

5. INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION, AS DEFINED IN LAW, FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND ATTENDING SCHOOL AS SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(I) AND SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(I). IF STATE LAW DOES NOT DEFINE "NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL" OR "ATTENDING SCHOOL," INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE AND PROVIDE THE STATE POLICY FOR DETERMINING WHETHER A YOUTH IS ATTENDING OR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL.

The Maine Department of Education does not have a definition entitled: not attending or attending school; however, under State Statute Title 20-A, Part 3, Chapter 211, Subchapter 1, Section 5001-A compulsory attendance is defined as:

"Attendance at school shall be required of person in the State as follows:

1. Requirement - Persons 7 years of age or older and persons under 17 years of age shall attend a public day school during the time it is in regular session.
2. Exceptions- Attendance at school shall not be required of the following:
    a. A person who graduates from high school before that person's 17th birthday
    b. A person who has:
        i. Reached the age of 15 years or completed the 9th grade
        ii. Permission to leave school from that person's parent
        iii. Been approved by the principal for a suitable program of work and study or training
        iv. Permission to leave school from the school board or its designee
        v. Agreed in writing with that person's parent and the school board or its designee to meet annually until that person's 17th birthday to review that person's educational needs. When the request to be excused from school has been denied pursuant to this paragraph, the student's parent may appeal to the commissioner.
    c. [2003, c. 688, Pt. H, §3, (AFF); 2003, c. 688, Pt. H, §2 (RP).]
    d. A person who has matriculated and is attending an accredited, post-secondary degree-granting institution as a full-time student. An exception to attendance in public school under this paragraph must be approved by the commissioner.
    e. A person enrolled in an online learning program or course

<u>YOUTH PROGRAM WAIVERS</u>

<u>The Maine Department of Labor requested and was granted two youth program waivers.</u>

<u>The first, a waiver of Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410 which requires state and local areas to spend not less than 75 percent of youth funds for out-of-school youth. This waiver permits flexibility to use up to 50% of youth funds for services to in-school youth. The request was based on evidence identified by the Maine Children's Cabinet that students engaged in paid</u>

work activities while in high school have better graduation outcomes and are more successful in the workforce. Also, because Maine's rural nature creates challenges in finding, engaging, and staying connected with youth who have already disconnected from school. Considering these facts and the goals and priorities below, Maine would like the flexibility to use additional WIOA funds to engage youth while they are still in school. By doing so, WIOA can affect high school completion and successful career attainment by connecting these individuals with meaningful career information and development, work-based learning, paid work experiences, and other activities and supports leading to successful outcomes. Maine must employ strategies to increase numbers in the labor force in order to meet workforce needs of employers. This includes maximizing opportunities and supporting all youth in completing high school, obtaining credentials of value, and transitioning to work and careers.

Goals for requesting this waiver include:

1. Alignment with Maine's newly reconstituted Children's Cabinet. A main goal of the Cabinet is that all Maine youth enter adulthood healthy, connected to the workforce and/or education" with defined key indicators including that Maine youth leave high school with some sort of paid work experience and an increased awareness of careers, career pathways, and access points to postsecondary education and training programs.

2. Development and expansion of quality youth apprenticeship programs, in collaboration with Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools and community colleges, that provide youth with a paycheck and structured on-the- job learning that allows them to apply relevant and affordable classroom training that results in dual credit toward high school graduation and an associate degree.

3. Maine's residents and businesses will have economic opportunity and contribute to the growth of Maine through a responsive, networked and coordinated workforce development system across public and private sectors. All components of the workforce development system will be provided seamlessly, resulting in increased educational and employment attainment for residents with a focus on careers, not just jobs, and support Maine's business sectors with skilled and qualified workers.

4. Maine's untapped labor pool will enter employment and advance into high-demand occupations of their choice through private and public investment in training, education, and supports. Youth is one population of the untapped labor pool.

5. Current and future workers will be equipped to meet industry talent needs, with the goal that 60 percent of Maine's workforce will hold a credential of value by 2025.

6. Create a networked, aligned and demand-driven workforce system across public and private partners and fosters the growth of Maine's economy while supporting equitable, safe, productive employment opportunities.

7. For Maine's economy to flourish, employers must have a ready supply of capable and skilled workers. Maine's strategic objectives begin with the recognition that the system must place business and residents at the center and construct programs designed to support them, rather than placing programs at the center and requiring business and residents to manage the programs. Projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver; Allow strategies to address challenges of at-risk youth whether in-school or out, and encourage strategies to address student retention, engagement, and immediate transition to post- secondary, meaningful employment, and/or the military. Expected outcomes for youth participants include an increase in the:

    a. Number that attain a measurable skill gain; • Number that attend postsecondary education

b. Number that participate in occupational skills training • Number of ISY that participate in work experience opportunities

c. Number that earn an industry-recognized credential 3 Individuals, groups or populations benefitting from the waiver; Maine Youth, Employers/Businesses, Maine Families

The State will monitor any expanded in-school-youth enrollments to determine whether/how the waiver has resulted in achieving intended goals and outcomes. This waiver is applicable through to 2023.

The second waives the limitation under 20 CFR 681.550 of use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for out-of-school youth only, permitting flexibility to provide ITAs to in-school-youth who are enrolled in post-secondary education that will result in attainment of an industry recognized credential, degree or diploma in high demand occupations. Per a recent study completed by Educate Maine, Maine's overall secondary school graduation rate is very good, at 87% for all students and 78% for economically disadvantaged students. While 50% of economically disadvantaged Maine high school graduates go on to enroll in college within the first year of graduation, only 40% of economically disadvantaged students complete their program. The limitation on use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school-youth who have applied for, or are attending, post-secondary education has created an impediment to ensuring the success of Maine youth with barriers who require significant supports to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. Many Maine high school seniors register for but never actually enter postsecondary education and many of those who do enter leave within the first year due to lack of necessary supports. Flexibility on the use of ITAs for in-school-youth attending post-secondary education will permit service providers to better work with educational institutions to determine how federal financial aid resources and WIOA IB youth funds can be used. This flexibility will ensure youth with barriers to education and employment have the resources necessary to subsist, manage academic life, and succeed at completion of educational objectives that will result in attainment of recognized postsecondary credentials, degrees, diplomas and occupational certifications. State strategic goals and Department of Labor priorities supported by the waiver: We believe approval of this waiver request will expand access to and engage youth most in need of WIOA youth service elements to succeed in transition to and retention in post-secondary education and achievement of postsecondary credentials and which will support the following goals

- Ensure current and future workers will be equipped to meet industry talent needs, with the goal that 60 percent of Maine's workforce will hold a credential of value by 2025
- Increase access to and engagement of youth in need of education, training and supports necessary to succeed in the labor market and meet current high-growth industry demand in Maine through acquisition of a degree or diploma
- Support the alignment of the Title IB youth programs with other workforce system programs serving younger workers with barriers to employment in Maine

Unfortunately, the use of in-school ITAs by local area service providers has been scarce and this waiver will expire June 30, 2022; therefore, it is unlikely Maine will reapply for this waiver.

6. IF USING THE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION WHICH MUST FURTHER DEFINE HOW TO DETERMINE IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS UNABLE TO COMPUTE OR SOLVE PROBLEMS, OR READ, WRITE, OR SPEAK ENGLISH, AT A LEVEL NECESSARY TO FUNCTION ON THE JOB, IN THE INDIVIDUAL'S FAMILY, OR IN SOCIETY. IF NOT USING THE PORTION OF THE DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE.

The State Workforce Board has implemented policy PY19-02 Expanded Definition of Basic Skills Deficient as follows:

Background: WIOA Sec. 3(5) defines Basic Skills Deficient as follows:

The term "basic skills deficient" means, with respect to an individual –

1. who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade* level on a generally accepted standardized test
2. who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family or in society

Standardized tests now use Educational Functioning Level (EFL) scores for the purpose identifying basic academic skill levels. ESL scores are also used to quantify skill gains through post-testing.

Purpose: As required by 20 CFR 681.290(e) this policy further defines the phrase "*Are unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society"* and identifies ways service provider staff may determine and document whether a person meets this definition.

Policy: Determination of whether an individual is basic skills deficient (BSD) may be done using assessment instruments that are valid and appropriate for the target population, such as assessments that determine whether reading, writing, or computing skills are at or below an 8th grade level. System partners must use federally approved, standardized testing instruments to determine educational functioning level (EFL) gains. As applicable, WIOA partners must follow and apply accommodation procedures outlined in the assessment instrument. Certain standardized assessment instruments may be more appropriate dependent upon an individual's unique characteristics such as culture, disability, and/or income level. Qualified individuals with a disability must be able to receive reasonable accommodations upon request.

In addition to standardized assessments, alternative measures may also be used to determine whether an individual meets the definition, including, but not limited to:

- Alternative evaluations (participation in try-out employment or work experience)
- Observation of individual while participating in program activities
- Conversation with individual or his/her family, educators, and/or service providers
- Review of work history with demonstrated deficiency in identified areas

When using alternative evaluations such as those listed above, staff must document the individual's inability to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society, by citing specific examples of how it was determined that the person has such deficiency.

For example: "Individual was provided a simple two step instruction (take handouts and find a seat in the room) and was unable to follow the instruction successfully; at one point during the workshop, the individual went to the restroom and was unable to find his/her way back to the room independently even though the room was just down the hall."

Reasonable accommodation – Testing accommodations are changes to the regular testing environment and auxiliary aids and services that allow individuals with disabilities to demonstrate their true aptitude or achievement level on standardized exams or other high-stakes tests. Testing results must accurately reflect the individual's aptitude or skill

achievement the assessment purports to measure. Accommodations should not fundamentally alter the assessment.

D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)

3. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

N/A.

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

N/A.

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

N/A

6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

N/A

7. HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.

N/A

8. COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

N/A

E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

YOUTH PROGRAM WAIVERS

The Maine Department of Labor requested and was granted two youth program waivers.

The first, a waiver of Section 129(a)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 681.410 which requires state and local areas to spend not less than 75 percent of youth funds for out-of-school youth. This waiver permits flexibility to use up to 50% of youth funds for services to in-school youth. The request was based on evidence identified by the Maine Children's Cabinet that students engaged in paid work activities while in high school have better graduation outcomes and are more successful in the workforce. Also, because Maine's rural nature creates challenges in finding, engaging, and

staying connected with youth who have already disconnected from school. Considering these facts and the goals and priorities below, Maine would like the flexibility to use additional WIOA funds to engage youth while they are still in school. By doing so, WIOA can affect high school completion and successful career attainment by connecting these individuals with meaningful career information and development, work-based learning, paid work experiences, and other activities and supports leading to successful outcomes. Maine must employ strategies to increase numbers in the labor force in order to meet workforce needs of employers. This includes maximizing opportunities and supporting all youth in completing high school, obtaining credentials of value, and transitioning to work and careers.

Goals for requesting this waiver include:

1. Alignment with Maine's newly reconstituted Children's Cabinet. A main goal of the Cabinet is that all Maine youth enter adulthood healthy, connected to the workforce and/or education" with defined key indicators including that Maine youth leave high school with some sort of paid work experience and an increased awareness of careers, career pathways, and access points to postsecondary education and training programs.

2. Development and expansion of quality youth apprenticeship programs, in collaboration with Career and Technical Education (CTE) schools and community colleges, that provide youth with a paycheck and structured on-the- job learning that allows them to apply relevant and affordable classroom training that results in dual credit toward high school graduation and an associate degree.

3. Maine's residents and businesses will have economic opportunity and contribute to the growth of Maine through a responsive, networked and coordinated workforce development system across public and private sectors. All components of the workforce development system will be provided seamlessly, resulting in increased educational and employment attainment for residents with a focus on careers, not just jobs, and support Maine's business sectors with skilled and qualified workers.

4. Maine's untapped labor pool will enter employment and advance into high-demand occupations of their choice through private and public investment in training, education, and supports. Youth is one population of the untapped labor pool.

5. Current and future workers will be equipped to meet industry talent needs, with the goal that 60 percent of Maine's workforce will hold a credential of value by 2025.

6. Create a networked, aligned and demand-driven workforce system across public and private partners and fosters the growth of Maine's economy while supporting equitable, safe, productive employment opportunities.

7. For Maine's economy to flourish, employers must have a ready supply of capable and skilled workers. Maine's strategic objectives begin with the recognition that the system must place business and residents at the center and construct programs designed to support them, rather than placing programs at the center and requiring business and residents to manage the programs. Projected programmatic outcomes resulting from implementation of the waiver; Allow strategies to address challenges of at-risk youth whether in-school or out, and encourage strategies to address student retention, engagement, and immediate transition to post- secondary, meaningful employment, and/or the military. Expected outcomes for youth participants include an increase in the:

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The State will monitor any expanded in-school-youth enrollments to determine whether/how the waiver has resulted in achieving intended goals and outcomes. This waiver is applicable through to 2023.

The second waives the limitation under 20 CFR 681.550 of use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for out-of-school youth only, permitting flexibility to provide ITAs to in-school-youth who are enrolled in post-secondary education that will result in attainment of an industry recognized credential, degree or diploma in high demand occupations. Per a recent study completed by Educate Maine, Maine's overall secondary school graduation rate is very good, at 87% for all students and 78% for economically disadvantaged students. While 50% of economically disadvantaged Maine high school graduates go on to enroll in college within the first year of graduation, only 40% of economically disadvantaged students complete their program. The limitation on use of individual training accounts (ITAs) for in-school-youth who have applied for, or are attending, post-secondary education has created an impediment to ensuring the success of Maine youth with barriers who require significant supports to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. Many Maine high school seniors register for but never actually enter postsecondary education and many of those who do enter leave within the first year due to lack of necessary supports. Flexibility on the use of ITAs for in-school-youth attending post-secondary education will permit service providers to better work with educational institutions to determine how federal financial aid resources and WIOA IB youth funds can be used. This flexibility will ensure youth with barriers to education and employment have the resources necessary to subsist, manage academic life, and succeed at completion of educational objectives that will result in attainment of recognized postsecondary credentials, degrees, diplomas and occupational certifications. State strategic goals and Department of Labor priorities supported by the waiver: We believe approval of this waiver request will expand access to and engage youth most in need of WIOA youth service elements to succeed in transition to and retention in post-secondary education and achievement of postsecondary credentials and which will support the following goals

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- Increase access to and engagement of youth in need of education, training and supports necessary to succeed in the labor market and meet current high-growth industry demand in Maine through acquisition of a degree or diploma
- Support the alignment of the Title IB youth programs with other workforce system programs serving younger workers with barriers to employment in Maine

Unfortunately, the use of in-school ITAs by local area service providers has been scarce and this waiver will expire June 30, 2022; therefore, it is unlikely Maine will reapply for this waiver.

MDOL applied for and was approved two youth program waivers, the first was waiver of the requirement to spend 75% of youth funds on out-of-school youth and the second was waiver of the requirement that only out-of-school youth can use ITAs for occupational training.

Maine will **not** be requesting a continuance of either waiver until it has compiled evidence to support continuation of the waiver requests. Once this has been completed, Maine will submit a renewed waiver request outside of this plan modification.

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient;	Yes
2. The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;	Yes
3. The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;	Yes
4. The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);	Yes
5. Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;	Yes
6. The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;	Yes
7. The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);	Yes
8. The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;	Yes
9. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;	
10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.	Yes
11. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);	Yes

ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	69.1%	69.1%	70.0%	70.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	65.8%	67.4%	66.9%	67.5%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$6,599.00	$6,599.00	$6,750.00	$6,750.00
Credential Attainment Rate	66.2%	67.2%	67.0%	68.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.9%	47.9%	48.1%	48.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter	72.0%	74.0%	73.0%	74.5%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
After Exit)				
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	76.4%	76.4%	77.0%	77.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$8,900.00	$7,800.00	$8,950.00	$8,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	65.5%	66.0%	66.0%	66.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	55.5%	55.5%	56.0%	56.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	67.6%	67.6%	68.0%	68.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	69.3%	70.5%	70.0%	71.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4,000.00	$4,000.00	$4,050	$4,050.00
Credential Attainment Rate	55.9%	56.5%	56.0%	57.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0%	50.0%	51.0%	51.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

Although recent guidance provides for flexibility now, the State will continue to utilize State, merit-based employees of the Maine Department of Labor to provide Wagner-Peyser Act funded services.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

Employment Service Professional Staff Development:

The Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment (MDOL,BES) services has established a formal staff-development initiative for all new and existing Wagner-Peyser staff members to ensure staff have an understanding of the requirements of WIOA and the basic and individualized services that are offered by employment services staff to job seekers, workers, and employers.

A formal training curriculum is delivered over several days, that covers:

- Bureau of Employment Services Workplace Culture and Expectations
- Overview of Labor Exchange and provision of Career Services
- Introduction to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- Overview of the Unified Plan (Plan) and the role of employment services
- Introduction to Maine JobLink (MJL, Maine's labor exchange and case management system
- Introduction to ReEmployME, the Bureau of Unemployment Compensation (BUC) claims system and how to provide support to individuals seeking to file unemployment insurance (UI) claims
- Career information and expectations, including overview of career information tools from labor market and occupational information to career decision making tools.
- Overview of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act and Training Readjustment Act
- Understanding rapid response and layoff aversion
- Understanding WPRS and RESEA reemployment services. Maine had to stop the RESEA program for a couple of years due to lack of federal funding. However, the program recently underwent extensive changes at the federal level and Maine is in the process of updating and restarting the RESEA program in FY 2020. This is a partnership program between the BUC and the Bureau of Employment Services.
- Introduction to standards of procedure in one-stop information centers
- Overview of veteran's services and referral requirements
- Migrant and seasonal farmworker program outreach and partnering with the National Farmworker Jobs Program

- Intro to training programs (Maine Apprenticeship, Competitive Skills Scholarship, Title IB Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth programs, Job Corps, YouthBuild, and more.
- Overview of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and Federal Bonding Program

3. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

Strategies supporting training and awareness across core programs and U.I.: The BUC and the BES (Wagner-Peyser, Trade, Veteran Program, and State Monitor Advocate) staffers have a strong working relationship.

A minimum of two front-line staff as well as the employment services' CareerCenter manager in each one-stop are fully trained on UI eligibility and UI issue identification as a result of intensive Worker Profiling Reemployment Services (WPRS) and Re-Employment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA)/Re-Employment Eligibility Assessment (REA) staff training.

Designated one-stop staff have received training on Maine's UI web portal and are experienced in assisting individuals with filing for UI and accessing their accounts through the portal. In addition, Maine's BUC has five UI related videos on their website that one-stop staff have access to and are encouraged to view.

The State will develop a training plan to ensure one-stop staff members are familiar with UI basics as well as the UI work requirements and penalties of noncompliance. Training will also be developed to ensure that UI workers are familiar with one-stop services and can make appropriate referrals at the time of initial or subsequent claims.

At the onset of the COVID pandemic all employment services staff received training on the UI claims system as they were required to support the UI claims staff directly to assist hundreds of thousands of claims and assist claimants with password resets and understanding eligibility and criteria for the many COVID related UI programs and relieving the back log of claims. Title IB partners, while not directly acting as BUC claims staff were also educated on the nuances of the regular, PUA, and other unemployment insurance programs resulting from the pandemic and as such are able to provide meaningful assistance to UI claimants for both COVID related UI Programs and regular UI claims.

In March of 2020, MDOL sponsored weekly partners meetings, with core partners (Title IB, Adult Education, Employment Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation to explain the various programs, how to understand COVID-related UI program FAQs and assist claimants requesting this information. These meetings continue on a monthly basis today and has expanded sharing of program information to other partner programs, including Education, Health &Human Services, and Corrections.

B. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

One-stop provision of meaningful assistance in filing claims for unemployment compensation: Maine will meet the needs of customers requesting assistance with UI claims in a two-pronged approach. Appropriately informed one-stop staff will provide unemployment claim information and assistance in the one-stop by answering basic UI questions, assisting customers with creating a ReEmployME account to file initial and continued benefit claims online, and filing weekly certifications via phone through Maine's interactive voice response system. Additionally, one-stop staff will be able to access and provide individualized

unemployment information and explain how the individual can manage their UI account through the UI web portal. If an individual is unable to file a UI claim due to significant barriers (such as language or disability) that prevent the use of online tools, the customer will be assisted by one-stop staff or be directed to a phone line dedicated to serving the individual needs of the customers.

The BUC has dedicated specific staff of the day who can be contacted through each one-stop about a specific UI issue and who will then contact with the customer within 24 hours if not immediately available to address the issue.

C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Strategy for providing reemployment assistance to UI claimants and other unemployed individuals: A major component of Maine's employment services focuses on the UI population. Maine's BUC and BES are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that unemployed workers are treated as job seekers and not just claimants. Claimants are required to register for Maine's JobLink (Maine's labor exchange system). When a claimant files an initial claim for UI benefits through the ReEmpoyME system, the claimant is automatically registered with the MJL through an interface connection if no such prior registration exists. This provides the UI claimant with broad access to a wide variety of job opportunities to assist in their work search and efforts to attain new employment.

Through the MJL claimants and other job seekers will develop a resume as part of their registration for labor exchange. The resume will be printable for use in job search and will be added to a resume bank available to employers to search for potential employees. This feature will ensure claimants and other job seekers start their efforts with a professional looking resume and an automatic connection to employers in need of workers.

Maine is implementing a common triage process to ensure that all visitors to a one-stop are given individual attention, made aware of available services, and referred to appropriate information and/or services. This process centers on information that a one-stop staff will gather from each visitor. Answers to questions will trigger what information, services, and/or referrals are immediately offered. Staff across the state will use the same staff interview guide which was developed with suggestions on how to respond to needs identified during interview.

All customers will be informed of the menu of services available to them including information on:

- Upcoming job fairs,
- Job search workshops,
- Job search tools,
- Self-employment,
- Training/college options/opportunities,
- Apprenticeship,
- On the job training information and referrals,
- Veterans services,
- College financial aid information & FASFA workshop referrals,
- Vocational rehabilitation,
- Housing,

- Child care,
- Unemployment compensation,
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),
- Preparation for Hi-Set exam,
- Health care/Affordable Care Act, and
- General assistance program information and referrals.

The BUC and BES work closely together to ensure unemployed workers return to work, reduce the overall length of unemployment, lower exhaustion rates, reduce improper unemployment compensation (UC)payments, improve employment outcomes and earnings, and result in a higher re-employment rate for those receiving reemployment services through the one-stops than for those who do not. These collaborative efforts provide Maine's unemployed claimants an entry point to reemployment services and other workforce system programs early in their collection of UC benefits.

Reemployment services are provided through WPRS using Maine's profiling model for selection. Career services are delivered to those claimants profiled as "most likely to exhaust" their benefits. Maine incorporates the WPRS profiling model in selecting participants for the RESEA program model thus satisfying the WPRS requirements while delivering reemployment services to a broader audience.

Claimants must first meet Maine's profiling model and then will be randomly selected for participation by the local American Job Center (AJC) area. All claimants selected are required to participate in RESEA career services. BES provides selected claimants with relevant reemployment services and assessments to help minimize the length of unemployment and encourage timely reemployment.

BUC will notify identified claimants who will receive notifications of their selection that clearly articulate the requirements, benefits, and consequences of noncompliance with failure to attend. Selection notifications are sent within two business days of selection by the United States Postal Service (USPS), with a simultaneous notification issued through the claimant's provided e-mail address. Selected claimants are given 7 days from the date of their selection letter to self-select a RESEA appointment time. After 7 days of selection, if the customer has not chosen an appointment time, the customer will then be automatically scheduled for a date and time for their one-on-one session with a RESEA Consultant.

Claimants will have 18 days from the date of the selection letter to complete their one-on-one session. Claimants can request a rescheduling appointment at any time within those 18 days, but requests are subject to staff availability. Selected claimants will receive a confirmation letter with the date and time of their selected or assigned session. Claimants will have the opportunity to reschedule their session through contact with the RESEA Consultant once. If, as a result of extenuating circumstances, the agency is forced to cancel and reschedule sessions, that rescheduling will not count as the claimant's one opportunity to reschedule on their own. Claimants will receive a written notification letter with the date and time of the rescheduled session. After that point claimants will be referred to staff to discuss their availability to attend.

RESEA Consultants meet individual participants one-on-one to identify service needs and the best mix of services to address the claimant's needs. The one-on-one interview and assessment are the foundation for an introduction to a variety of reemployment service options, sharing of local labor market information, development of the IRP, and relevant referrals to many of our workforce system partner's program services and resources. Upon conclusion of the initial RESEA session, claimants acknowledge and accept their relevant referrals based on their specific needs and receive a copy of their IRP including the next steps leading to employment.

After the initial (required) session, the RESEA Consultant will be offered two "check-ins", intentionally creating the opportunity for the identification of and connection to resources to address any additional service needs and new referrals on behalf of the claimant. The model ensures that the RESEA consultant is available as a resource to the claimants to help ensure access to the needed services from workforce system partners.

All participants gain an introduction to a broad spectrum of career services, including:

- Staff assistance in acquiring needed reemployment and training services,
- Counseling in career decision-making and exploration of higher learning,
- Common intake and eligibility determinations for WIOA programs,
- Access to computer-based online and job search programs and applications,
- Job search and placement assistance including labor market information and in-demand occupations,
- Information on how to access supportive services, orientations to training, and all other programs offered by WIOA and partners,
- Access to Maine's JobLink and general internet access, and
- Core assessments that link vocational aptitudes and abilities to jobs.

The structured format design of RESEA utilizes active engagement in the development of individualized reemployment plans, enabling participants to independently activate/update their MJL profile. Reemployment services consultants work with individual participants to address and define needs and services. Upon comprehensive conclusion of the RESEA, claimants acknowledge and accept their individual needs based on "relevant referral" (next steps to their reemployment goal) and complete this portion of the RESEA session.

Each RESEA participant will receive at a minimum:

-
    - An unemployment compensation eligibility review including review of work search activities,
    - Relevant and individualized local labor market information, including live use of Maine's Center for Workforce Research and Information (CDWRI) website,
    - Enrollment in Wagner Peyser Act funded employment services,
    - Development, review, and recommendations on an individualized reemployment plan (IRP),
    - Individualized and relevant referrals to services, jobs, other agencies, and additional reemployment resources as needed,
    - An introduction and orientation to all the services the CareerCenter has to offer, including self-directed options and specific program eligibility,
    - Enhanced job matching and referral profile assistance in Maine's JobLink
    - Participation in reemployment services at levels appropriate to meet individual participant needs may include the following:
        -

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    - Access to job hunting in Maine guide,
    - Tools, tips, and strategies on conducting a successful job search,
    - Information on how to obtain further skill assessments and individualized job search services,
    - Introduction to USDOL's online assessment and job search, tools, such as MySkills MyFuture™, O*NET tool, and My Next Move (aka Career Profiler), and
    - Coordination of activities with other programs and services.
- At least one of the following career services based on need:
    - Referral to training or other workforce activities including WIOA,
    - Labor exchange-in-demand industries,
    - Information on the availability of community-based or WIOA support services,
    - Financial aid resources outside of WIOA,
    - Financial literacy services, and
    - Career readiness including resume writing and interviewing.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

Use of Wagner-Peyser funds to support UI claimants: Maine requires all UI claimants to register for Maine's JobLink. Once registered, job seekers will receive notification of job matches, browse for jobs, upload their resume, and receive job referrals. In addition, JobLink registrants are sent email blasts notifying them of job fairs, special recruitments, critical need jobs, and other job search related information. UI call centers are regularly informed of job orders on the JobLink and use this information during claim calls to steer claimants toward immediate job openings and one-stop services.

Claimants visiting one-stops can partake of self-service activities by using resources such as computers and phones to conduct job searches, respond to employment opportunities, and manage their UI claim through Maine's UI portal. In addition to self-service options, claimants can also receive staff-assisted services, such as: job search workshops, assistance accessing and navigating Maine's JobLink and the UI web portal, individualized labor market information, referral to veterans services, and referral to education, training, and supportive services.

There is a dedicated auto-dial UI phone in each one-stop that is monitored by UI staff and available to claimants who have specific UI issues that cannot be addressed by one-stop staff. Maine's one-stop workers provide the public face-to-face interaction for MDOL. Because Maine's UI system is web and call-center based, claimants who desire or require in-person interactions or assistance will visit a one-stop. Wagner-Peyser field staff provide a great deal of UI assistance such as: answering basic questions, supplying written UI information, assisting claimants in creating their UI web portal accounts, filing a claim, using computer or phone to contact the claims center, sorting out paperwork to send/fax to claims center, and providing hope and encouragement to claimants.

In addition, BUC and BES have a strong working relationship. BUC and BES staff are familiar with each other's programs and often communicate on strategies, program-specific issues, and questions. Select UI staff members have privileges to the staff-side of Maine's JobLink.

Maine Revised Statutes Title 26, Chapter 13, Subchapter 6, Section 1192, sets requirements for UI claimants to be registered for work with the employment office as evidenced by the following excerpt from Statute:

"Has registered for work: The individual has registered for work at, and continued to report at, an employment office in accordance with rules the commission adopts, except that the commission may, by rule, waive or alter either or both of the requirements of this subsection as to individuals attached to regular jobs and as to such other types of cases or situations with respect to which the commission finds that compliance with the requirements would be oppressive, or would be inconsistent with the purposes of this chapter. A rule under this subsection may not conflict with section 1191, subsection 1.

The individual must actively seek work each week in which a claim for benefits is filed unless the individual is participating in approved training under subsection 6 or work search has been waived in accordance with rules adopted by the commission and provide evidence of work search efforts in a manner and form as prescribed by the Department of Labor. Failure to provide required work search documentation results in a denial of benefits in accordance with section 1194, subsection 2 for the week or weeks for which no documentation was provided unless the department determines there is good cause for the individual's failure to comply with this requirement."

Administration of the work test for State UI system: Claimants are required to register with Maine's JobLink (Maine's labor exchange system). When a claimant files an initial claim for UI benefits through the ReEmployME system, the claimant is automatically registered with the MJL through an interface connection if no such prior registration exists. Claimants receive an email with their login details and how to proceed to their MJL profile to edit and add information.

Employment Services (ES) staff are trained in basic unemployment insurance (UI) requirements, including identifying work test issues ensuring that an individual whom a State determines to be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits is able to work, available for work, and actively seeking work in accordance with 20 CFR §652.210**,** the State's unemployment compensation law or assisting in resolving UI claimant problems in coordination with our UI partner team members. Able and available issues are reported timely and appropriately to Unemployment Compensation.

Job Finding and Placement Services ES staff understand acceptable work search methods to expand the claimants understanding of the many options to actively seeking work but also to encourage a more robust job search that will result in new employment. Active work search methods reviewed with claimants include; contacting an employer directly about a job, having a job interview, submitting a resume or application to an employer or to a job website, using a public or private employment agency, job service, placement firm, or university employment center, contacting a job recruiter or head hunter, placing or answering a job advertisement and checking union or professional registers or seeking assistance through social networks. In addition, claimants receive career services suitable to their reemployment needs including standard labor exchange-based job matching and referral services.

Provision of referrals and assistance with access to tand education programs: All customers visiting the one-stop centers have access to available resources including training and education. Information is available in orientation packets passed out to customers, printed materials stocked in information centers, software, web-links, and documents available on information center computers and Maine's CareerCenter website. A new triage process is being

implemented that makes immediate referrals to services and asks the customer to register in Maine's JobLink. Currently, the JobLink registration uploads into the State's one-stop operating system and provides the beginning of a WIOA Title I application. Customers complete an initial application that registers them for Maine's JobLink job bank and case management system, determines eligibility for WIOA Title I programs, and creates a resume. Workshop curriculum includes orientation to CareerCenter services and an opportunity for referral to one-stop and other community services.

E. AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED. AN ASSESSMENT NEED DESCRIBES THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

Maine's migrant seasonal farm workers (MSFWs) cycle through various labor-intensive crop harvests including blueberry, broccoli, diversified vegetable crops, apple, and poultry industry operations during Maine's short agricultural production season (primarily June-September). The blueberry harvest begins in late July early August, broccoli and diversified vegetables August through late September and apples in October. During peak agriculture months, blueberry, diversified vegetable crops, apple, broccoli, and cauliflower operations in Androscoggin, Oxford, Washington, Aroostook, and the mid-coast counties see the bulk of independent MSFWs and Foreign Labor H-2A workers in Maine. MSFWs also work off-season as it relates to holiday wreath making and seafood processing. MSFWs that generally do farm work during the agricultural season in Maine and the Northeast, head for the wreath making operations in Washington County to work in production from early November to mid-December. Due to the success of two large wreath making operations, wreath making operations employ approximately 750 temporary workers, most of whom are MSFWs, most who originate from out of state. In late October to mid-December SWA outreach efforts focus on these workers.

The chart below shows the number of MSFWs that were provided with some level of service during 2018-19. This assistance includes job referral information, answering questions on worker wage deductions, provision of housing standards information and working conditions requirements, and issues pertaining to discrimination.

Services Provided to Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers 2018-2019

2018-2019	**Registered In MJL (self-identified)**	**Referred to jobs**	**Provided Services**	**Referred to Supportive Services**	**Case Management Counseling**	**Received Job Development Contact**	**Contacted by SMA Outreach**
July-Sept 2018	4	0	4	3	4	0	334
Oct-	1	0	1	1	1	1	181

2018-2019	Registered In MJL (self-identified)	Referred to jobs	Provided Services	Referred to Supportive Services	Case Management Counseling	Received Job Development Contact	Contacted by SMA Outreach
Dec 2018							
Jan-Mar 2019	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
April-Jun 2019	1	1	1	1	1	1	8

The numbers above are based on service transactions provided to job seekers who register and self-identify as a MSFW and are active on the Maine JobLink (MJL). Job seekers on the MJL that do not receive services for 90 days become inactive. Returning job seekers who reactivate their accounts count as new registrants with new service transactions. Total number of services is always equal to or greater than the number of individuals served. The quarters above are 'rolling-quarters' in that services reported each quarter are an accumulation of the quarters preceding the reporting period.

Summary of Agricultural Activity in the State; Maine's agricultural sector is large and diverse, contributing significantly to Maine's overall economy. Data in the 2017 Census of Agriculture by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service lists 7,600 farms in Maine managing over 1.3 million acres with the number of farms decreasing by 7 percent since 2012. Most Maine farms are small family-operated enterprises employing few people beyond family members. The average size of farms is 172 acres, with forty-seven percent less than 50 acres in size. The 2017 census indicates 29 percent of Maine farms hire farm labor for a total of 9,324 workers (hired farm labor excluding contract workers). A total of 9,807 unpaid workers (agricultural workers not on the payroll who performed activities or worked on a farm or ranch) reflect the number of family members working on farms. In 2017, 2,191 migrant workers, including contract workers, were hired.

The demand for farm labor remains consistent in an economic climate of low unemployment and a general shortage of workers overall across most industries. From small to large scale farm operations, and across a diversity of types of agricultural products, labor shortage emerges as a dominant concern among agricultural employers. A gradual decline in the numbers of migrant workers only exacerbates the labor challenge for Maine farm operators.

Bureau staff assess the needs of farmworkers in a variety of ways, beginning with review of all former and additional H2A and regular farmworker job postings per season per produce type, including planting, growing, and harvest seasons. Outreach staff meet with consortia of partners and agencies, including the University Cooperative Extension program who conduct a needs survey with farm owners, gather economic and seasonal farm work data form the Center for Workforce Research and Information, the Maine Farm Bureau and Maine Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources as well as through direct discussions with farmers and crop agencies, such as the Maine Potato Board and similar agencies.

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE

GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE

Factors Affecting Agricultural Activity by Crop:

Increasing mechanization and reduction in managed acres in some areas of the state continues to impact the annual number of MSFWs needed [CVA1] [AJA2] blueberry harvesting sector, shifting workers to the freezing/packing plants. Broccoli producers' labor needs remain constant, projecting a need for additional labor in the future. Apple orchards and packing houses continue to report flat numbers and do not foresee increasing labor need. The larger apple producers use the H-2A program for harvest purposes and rely on returning local seasonal and permanent help in the packing houses. Throughout the state, a select number of growers of diversified crops, including vegetables, use foreign H-2A labor in small quantities to supplement the available returning local seasonal field help. Overall, there has been an uptick in worker numbers as more farms are requesting H-2A workers for longer periods of time. These workers start in the field during growing season and later transition in the fall/winter to the packing houses of the farms. There is evidence of the conversion of family and larger farms continuing to turn to 'agro-tourism' and 'pick-your-own' systems as a strategy to sustain farms. The conversion to 'pick-your-own' also makes it unnecessary to plan for additional labor needs, with farms able to rely on a small static number of permanent and local seasonal labor. Overall, the improved economy has influenced the number of workers interested in and available to work in agriculture specific jobs. Farm operations are challenged to find workers when so many alternative job opportunities exist for traditional seasonal and migrant workers looking to transition to a full-time, year-round position. With the impact of COVID-19 sweeping across the country and the state of Maine, we anticipate this health crisis, though it remains to be seen, will negatively impact the viability of migrant workers making the sometimes long trip to Maine to work, contractor and employer capacity to provide transportation to and from the job site-often provided in vans and buses, locating or adapting safe housing that traditionally is bunk style living arrangements, and provide safe day to day work conditions that are often not easily accessible to critical health care when needed. Already, some northern Maine farms are deploying available young people, dismissed early from their secondary school responsibilities due to the crisis, to help with early growing season preparation.

Blueberries continue to see a decrease in hand rakers due to mechanization and over the last two years COVID. Also, some large land holders are shifting to H-2A workers even in the freezing / packing plants. Broccoli is seeing a slight increase in the 2022 season [AJA3]

2: Projected Maine MSFWs by [AJA4]

Labor Intensive Crops	**Projected MSFWs 2020 Agricultural Season** **April - November**
Blueberries	750
Broccoli/Cauliflower	425
Seafood processing	35
Apple	190

Labor Intensive Crops	Projected MSFWs 2020 Agricultural Season April - November
Diversified Crop, mixed vegetable	315

3. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWS IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

Unique needs of farmworkers:

The unique needs of MSFWs in Maine is based on review of the annual and historical delivery of services by multiple agencies working in long term partnership to assist this population during the harvest season. The projected needs are anticipated to remain consistent for the next four years for farmworkers working in each of the primary crop and geographic areas with agricultural activity. Consistently, workers need support navigating a host of local, state and federally sponsored services. This is often due to language challenges, a lack of awareness of certain services or physical access to services. Services such as: general health, dental and eye care; basic education service including child care for young family members while the parent or guardian works long hours; transportation services to and from the job site or the next out of area job often depending on contractor provided transportation or undependable personal vehicles; auto repairs and maintenance; wage or working condition issues, safe and suitable housing; referral to the next job, or need for education and training to assist the worker secure full time agricultural work or regular-stable non-agricultural employment. These are long standing, and evidence-based needs recognized by the Farmworker Resource Network members, American Job Centers and other service provider partners including the National Farmworkers Jobs Program operator. Peak agricultural work season in Maine is July-September and the approximate number of MSFWs in the State is much lower due to COVID hovering around 1000 or under. Low season, which is January through April, the approximate number is 150 to 200 and most of these are workers are employed by farmer owned packing houses and apple cider pressing operations.

PathStone, the grant operator of the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP) in Maine (WIOA Section 167), was awarded PY 2021 funding to help address the myriad of critical issues faced by farmworkers and their families. The previous grant operator, Eastern Maine Development Corp. served 59 NJFP participants between MSFWs between 7/1/2019 and 9/30/2021. The NFJP is a required partner of the one-stop delivery system and is responsible for making the full range of services available to farmworkers.

To ensure that all services are focused on the customer's needs, services are provided through a case-management approach. Services received may include basic and individualized career services, training services, and support services including emergency assistance. Key issues negatively impacting this population are lack of education; poverty; unstable employment; access to housing, transportation and/or healthcare; and limited English proficiency.

Individuals who have earned more than 50 percent of their income from agricultural labor are encouraged, along with their dependents, to apply for services.

4. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Outreach activities:

Services provided to migrant and seasonal farm workers and agricultural employers will be supported by Wagner-Peyser Act merit staff and strong long-standing partnerships in the communities where MSFWs live and work. The State Monitor Advocate, along with soon to be hired outreach [AJA1] who will be trained to [AJA2] a full range of services through the American Job Centers (CareerCenters) and geographic areas of primary agricultural activity throughout the state. Wagner-Peyser Act funding is used to support the State Monitor Advocate position, and soon to be hired outreach staff who will provide services to MSFWs, other agricultural workers, and agricultural employers through Maine's one-stop system of CareerCenters, known nationally as American Job Centers.

Maine, as compared to many states, has a very low number of migrant and seasonal farm workers operating in distinct geographic pockets of the state. The State Monitor Advocate position effectively conducts the core State Monitor Advocate functions and responsibilities as defined by USDOL (20 CFR 653.108). The State Monitor Advocate (SMA) also conducts H2-A related pre-occupancy labor housing inspections and provides consultive services to BES staff processing H2-A related clearance orders.

The chart below shows the number of MSFWs projected to receive services in the next two years of the plan. Farmworker and MSFW numbers have continued to decline slowly over the last several years. It is anticipated that the number of MSFWs will continue to remain static with no anticipated change over the next few years. American Job Centers (aka Maine CareerCenters) throughout the State are the primary source for provision of Wagner Peyser services to the MSFW population. Examples of these services include registration with the Maine JobLink (MJL), orientation to and information about workforce system services, job referrals, job counseling, and referrals to supportive services.

Maine has been working with the agency that provides the Maine JobLink system, that manages job matching, case management, reporting and more for employment services participants. The way in which the system was asking prospective participants to identify themselves as MSFWs was complex and did not appear to be identifying the actual numbers. Now that the issue regarding how customers identify as MSFWs in the Maine JobLink has been resolved, Maine expects to see a higher number of MSFWs overall in the coming two years. The definition of MSFW was recently updated throughout the system and a new method for searching MSFWs and a new report from which outreach workers can identify MSFWs from self-service registrants his currently in development and also anticipated to improve outreach worker ability to identify and connect MSFWs with program services and partner program services.

3: Wagner-Peyser Service Goals for **2022-2023**

MSFW Service Activity	JUL-SEP 2022	OCT-DEC 2022	JAN-MAR 2023	APR-JUN 2023
Registered in Maine JobLink	27	22	4	17
Referred to Jobs	4	4	4	4
Provided Enrolled Services	14	11	4	8

MSFW Service Activity	JUL-SEP 2022	OCT-DEC 2022	JAN-MAR 2023	APR-JUN 2023
Referred to Support Services	1	1	1	1
Received Career Counseling	4	4	4	4
Received Job Development	1	1	1	1
MSFW Workers to be contacted by BES Outreach Workers	250	120	23	32

Contacting farmworkers and improving outreach:

Outreach activities will be consistent with 20 CFR Part 653.107 and will serve to implement strategies aimed to identify, document, and track MSFWs as they access the full range of employment and training services within the one-stop centers. Historically, the SMA conducted the majority of the MSFW outreach to workers and agricultural employers. The SWA is working to broaden outreach through hire of an outreach specialist who will train multiple outreach staff to conduct employer and worker outreach in their regions during active planting and harvesting seasons. and the SMA requirements detailed in 20 CFR 653.108. A minimum of three full time [AJA1] to meet employer and farmworker needs during high peak agricultural activity and reduced to part-time on-demand capacity during low agricultural activity. Outreach will focus on locating and contacting farm workers not reached through normal intake activities and will include field visits and routine follow-up with agriculture employers and posting of public and other social media notices to community organizations and networks such as the Farmworker Resource Network partners about services available. The outreach efforts will implement compliance requirements in providing qualitative equivalent and quantitatively proportionate service delivery to MSFWs

The State Workforce Agency will coordinate MSFW outreach plans with the SMA and local employment service outreach workers serving the greater areas of agricultural activities relative to the crop's peak season. Employment Service outreach workers and the SMA will contact MSFWs during the agricultural peak harvest season of blueberry, apple, and broccoli while conducting field visits in Androscoggin, Oxford, Washington, and Aroostook counties. These counties see the bulk of Maine's MSFW population. Additional outreach may take place in other counties based on employer needs and the influx of workers into those areas, particularly those areas with H-2A local offices whose neighboring agricultural employers file H-2A job orders and may have referrals to those orders. For H2A, the local office outreach workers are encouraged to conduct active referrals until the employer's H2A workers depart for the work site (at least two days before the employer's set start date for work on the job order). During outreach and field visits worker rights and support services informational brochures in Spanish, English, and Haitian Creole are distributed. Information on agricultural employment and referrals to services such as health, education, and legal, are made available to the workers and their families as needed. Table 4 shows the SWA outreach schedule for field visits during PY 2019-2020 and the number of MSFWs estimated to be contacted. These numbers are expected to remain stable over the next couple of years.

Table 4: Outreach Field Visit Schedule

	July September	October – December	January - March	April –June	Total
Field Visits	30	18	0	20	68
# MSFWs contacted	275	110	0	60	445

The number of MSFWs to be contacted each year over the next four-year term is estimated at 445 workers. These contacts occur during outreach and field checks, including random unannounced visits to labor camps and work areas where MSFWs may be present. Outreach staff and the SMA look to identify issues that may include apparent violations in working conditions, the proper display of mandatory/informational posters, wages, housing standards, water quality, and more. The number of worksites visited locations and supervisor contact names are recorded. Field reports also record the time of the visit, observations made, available services discussed with MSFWs, number of MSFWs contacted, names of MSFWs requesting services, and follow-up arrangements established. A copy of the field report is filed at the administrative office of the Bureau of Employment Services.

Technical assistance to outreach workers:

Outreach functions are tied to the service delivery areas where farm workers and agricultural employers live, work, and congregate. Service delivery strategies aim to assist farm workers' efforts to achieve integration and self–sufficiency. Outreach workers are trained in and seek to provide a full range of American Job Center services and resources to the agricultural communities including, but not limited to; skills assessments, career guidance, basic skills remediation and vocational training, educational opportunities, job search assistance, and supportive services.

Outreach staff will gain extensive knowledge of farm work in order to ensure high levels of awareness and sensitivity to the socio-economic and cultural nuances that exist within the agricultural communities. With a majority of farmworkers working in isolated geographic pockets in Maine and Spanish being the primary language spoken among the farm worker population with an increase of Haitian speaking crews finding work in Maine's service delivery areas, Bureau of Employment Services staff will work [AJA1]

In accordance with Part 653.107 (k), outreach workers will be trained in local office procedures and in the services, benefits, and protections afforded MSFWs by the ES. They will also be trained in procedure for the informal resolution of complaints. The program for such training shall be formulated by the State Administrator, pursuant to uniform guidelines developed by the ETA, and each State's program shall be reviewed and commented in advance by the SMA. The SMA, who works in close tandem with outreach workers and American Job Center partners, annually attends training conferences on a national level offered by the office of the National Monitor Advocate and on a Regional level offered by the Regional Monitor Advocate. Both venues provide opportunity to engage with Federal agencies collaborating with MSFW activities, provide resource materials for reference, review statutory requirements and support development and updating SWA training materials and MSFW service delivery best practices.

Additional Training Considerations for Outreach Workers, Wagner Peyser and One-Stop partner staff:

- Sexual Harassment in the Fields

- Discrimination
- OSHA Compliance
- Apparent Violations
- Human Trafficking
- Food Safety
- Pesticides
- Field Checks and Cultural Diversity

Outreach staff professional development and training:

To ensure all staff, including dedicated MSFW outreach workers, have the professional skills necessary to provide services, the State Workforce Agency (SWA) evaluates and provides the professional development needed to ensure quality services to MSFW's. The SWA provides new and existing employee training on the wide range of state, federal and community-based services available to MSFWs, agency policies and practices, the Complaint System including identifying ES and non-ES complaints and, recording and reporting using proper complaint logs and forms. Wagner Peyser staff function as the primary interface with most job seeker participants entering the one-stop delivery system, whether entrance is through bricks and mortar facilities, virtual online, while conducting a field visit or through community events sponsored, supported, or attended by the SWA. Wagner Peyser funded outreach staff conduct initial triage and provide resource navigation and referral services. Staff are trained in job skill assessment, labor market information and research, resume writing and effective job search strategies, career pathway awareness and community resources. It is imperative that staff have the skills necessary to do this in a customer-centric manner in accordance with Section 188 and the requirements identified in the local area MOUs regarding referrals and access to system partner services. Staff effectively provide or relay all the required information such as that listed under basic career services.

staff will be trained in basic unemployment insurance (UI) requirements, including identifying work test issues, ensuring that an individual determined to be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits is able to work, available for work, and actively seeking work in accordance with the State's unemployment compensation law and will work in collaboration with the Bureau of Unemployment Compensation to resolve UI claimant problems. State merit staff are regularly educated on WIOA partner services specific to their local area to assist job seekers to prepare for and obtain employment, and to help employers fill job vacancies with qualified job seekers. [AJA1] become familiar with the recruitment and retention challenges the [AJA2] agricultural employer community faces, and be trained to provide the education, training and referrals needed to fill vacancies. Maine has an active statewide action team of partners from community colleges, adult education, rehabilitation services, economic development, WIOA Title IB service providers, workforce board members, and others, new outreach worker staff will be educated on those services, and involved in building solid working relationships at the state and regional levels, to better assess needs and identify resources to support MSFWs and agricultural and related business workforce needs.

As mentioned in response to Wagner Peyser a. 3. All BES staff (including outreach workers from each center) have been thoroughly trained on assisting any individual with UI Claims questions. Additionally, leads from each of the centers participate in the trainings provided by the regional leads for MSFWs on how to assist migrant and seasonal farmworkers to answer

questions workers may have regarding current employment, re-employment, unemployment and any other concerns or issues they may have including how to file complaints as appropriate.

See e.4.C

Collaboration and coordination of services:

The State Workforce Agency, the State Monitor Advocate (SMA) and outreach staff will partner with organizations and agencies serving MSFWs and the agricultural employment community to ensure that the needs and concerns of these workers receive consideration in the development and implementation of integrated service plans.

The SWA is fortunate to be a member of the Farmworker Resource Network, a highly successful and recognized best in practice multi-agency collaborative. During the next four years the SWA will continue to promote, engage and work to improve our collective effort to outreach and serve MSFWs at the highest level. The Farmworker Resource Network (Network), a collaborative including the SMA, members of a nearby one-stop centers, National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP),Maine Mobile Health Program at www.mainemobile.org, Pine Tree Legal Assistance[1], Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) food supplement program, Downeast Health Services' Women Infants and Children (WIC) program[2], and Maine Department of Education's Migrant Education Program[3] continues to coordinate a full array of critical services in support of Maine's migrant and seasonal farmworkers. The Network providers gather in the heart of the blueberry barrens to provide immediate services to arriving migrant workers, serve as an effective collaborative outreach mechanism, and host a series of small resource fairs during peak harvest to ensure workers receive the services and supports needed, such as educational, occupational, health, and social service supports. MSFWs may receive food assistance, gas vouchers, emergency auto repair, emergency lodging, tents, clothing and personal care items, job search services, and referrals to social services

National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), the SWA will continue to operate under an executed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with PathStone the new WIOA Sec. 167 Grantee for the NFJP. The MOU facilitates the exchange of data pertaining to services provided to MSFWs and ensures farmworkers receive the full complement of American Job Center services necessary to meet their employment, training, and support needs. A copy of the new MOU with PathStone is attached as Appendix G of the full plan.

In the coming year, the SWA will engage with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's (DACF) Agricultural Resource Development Division (ARDD). The goal is to join together to ensure the ARDD agriculture employer community accesses the employment and training services of the American Job Center partners, help advance services to MSFWs and promote the Agricultural Recruitment System through social media, direct outreach to employers and through the annual Agricultural Trades Show.

[1]Pine Tree Legal Assistance www.ptla.org

[2]Downeast Health Services' Women Infants and Children (WIC) program www.downeasthealth.org

[3]Maine Department of Education's Migrant Education Program www.maine.gov/doe/migrant/index.html

5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

Services provided to MSFWs and agricultural employers through the one-stop delivery system:

The full range of employment and training services delineated under WIOA Title I-B will be provided to MSFWs. One of the roles of the SMA and the WIOA 167 grantee is to make job opportunities available to workers. In addition to field visits, the SMA monitors the local offices for compliance with regulations in serving MSFWs. The table below shows the SMA's annual schedule for monitoring local offices.

5: State Monitor Advocate Local Office Monitoring Schedule

ES OFFICE	Monitoring Timeframe
Presque Isle	June-July
Calais, Machias & Bangor	August
Skowhegan, Wilton	September
Rockland	May
Brunswick	May
Portland	July
Augusta	June
Lewiston	September-October
Springvale	April - May
Norway	September

The SMA coordinates MSFW service plans with local offices nearest the greater area of agricultural activities relative to the crop's peak season. Staff members of the one-stop including designated outreach workers have full knowledge of local office procedures and the services, benefits, and protections to be afforded to MSFWs. Staff are trained during the annual scheduled one-stop office review by the SMA. Training includes review of the Judge Ritchey Court Order, definition, and identification of MSFWs, and basic outreach field methodology including making oral presentations to groups of MSFWs at their working, living, or gathering areas on the services available at the local one-stop. At their local office, staff are provided with laminated "At a Glance" fact sheets detailing the ES complaint system and identifying MSFWs and migrant food processing workers. Staff also have available printed American Job Center informational material to provide to MSFWs, log sheets to record contacts, and ES complaint information to inform MSFWs of their rights to file complaints. Staff work closely with non-governmental organizations providing services to MSFWs, as well as the NFJP 167 grantee. Several of those organizations utilize extra space at area American Job Centers to conduct meetings with MSFWs.

Merit staff and other one-stop partners who work with farmworkers will gain extensive knowledge of farm work in order to ensure high levels of awareness and sensitivity to the socio-economic and cultural nuances that exist within the agricultural communities. Merit staff of American Job Centers regularly attend trainings and are provided resources on the ES system across core programs, including the UI program. Due to Maine's low MSFW population, even during peak agricultural season, American Job Center staff work closely with the SMA to provide one-stop services to MSFW's and agricultural employers.

CareerCenter o[AJA1]

- Provision of a full range of employment services, benefits, and protections on a basis that is qualitatively equivalent and quantitatively proportionate to services provided to non-MSFWs,
- Access to, and use of, job order information effectively,
- Assistance in accessing self-assisted services via electronic technologies,
- Individual referrals to agricultural and non-agricultural jobs, occupational training,

support services, assessments and testing, career counseling, and other job development services,

- Provision of information on labor rights, protections, and responsibilities with respect to terms and conditions of employment,
- Assistance in the preparation and filing of employment and non-employment related complaints,
- Accepting and referring labor-related complaints and apparent violations in accordance with established policies and procedures,
- Referrals of individuals and family members to supportive services for which they may be eligible,
- Assisting with posting resumes on-line and conducting on-line job searches, and
- Facilitating communication between limited-English proficient individuals referred to jobs and employers.

: The Bureau of Employment Services (BES) implements the Employment Service (ES) Complaint System (per 20 CFR Subpart E §658.400 – 658.418) for retrieval of complaints that are filed at local one-stops and at the central office. The Employment Services Complaint Resolution Administrator (CRA) has direct responsibility for the Complaint System, however, the State agency official designated to manage MSFW complaints will be the SMA. The CRA and SMA will maintain records of all MSFW complaints as well as correspondence between parties and notes from all investigations for a period of three years. Within one month after the end of the calendar quarter the Employment Services office manager must transmit an electronic copy of the quarterly complaint system log to the SMA. The SMA will participate in and monitor the performance of the complaint system. The SMA reviews the Employment Service office's informal resolution of complaints relating to MSFWs and will ensure that the Employment Service office manager transmits copies of the complaint system logs, pursuant to part 658, subpart E, to the CRA. The CRA reviews these files quarterly to ensure compliance with appropriate complaint resolution processes and adherence to customer satisfaction principles. The CRA prepares and submits the Quarterly Complaint System Activity Report (Log) to the Employment Services Bureau Director.

Employer services and agricultural recruitment system:

Maine's American Job Centers will continue to help agricultural employers in obtaining workers to harvest their crops and referring job seekers to general agriculture and H-2A job orders Where U.S. workers must be given hiring priority. The range of services to agricultural employers extend beyond assistance with job orders and referrals and incapsulate the full range of American Job Center partner services. Employers are invited to participate in job fairs and to work with a CareerCenter business liaison to create recruitment plans, potential training opportunities, and use of the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to help recruit qualified

workers. The SWA intends to work closely with the Maine Department of Agriculture and agriculture employers to promote the use of the ARS to recruit and fill job openings. Maine's labor exchange system connects employers to workers, serving as a bridge between local office staff and employers, facilitating direct service provision for employer account management, job seeker resume review, or job order enhancement. Employer engagement creates the opportunity to assess the quality of services to the employer community. Employer feedback, forums, and satisfaction surveys help identify areas for continuous improvement.

The SWA will also provide technical services and convene informational meetings for foreign labor stakeholders, agricultural employers, and service providers interested in the American Job Center services including the H-2A foreign labor certification program. The SWA will provide assistance to agricultural employers during field visits by distributing informational brochures and required posters, assessing employer's labor needs, taking job information, and recommending the Agricultural Recruitment System (should local workers not be readily available).

H-2A local offices are those offices whose neighboring agricultural employers file H-2A job orders and may have referrals to those orders. The local office should conduct active referrals until the employer's H2A workers depart for the work site (at least two days before the employer's set start date for work on the job order). The SWA's Foreign Labor Specialist will oversee the foreign labor related activities pertaining to processing the Agricultural Clearance order ETA form 790 for H-2A. In addition, the Foreign Labor Specialist will be the liaison on this process with the US DOL Office of Foreign Labor Certification and related processing center. The Foreign Labor Specialist will also provide technical services and convene information meetings for foreign labor stakeholders, agricultural employers, and service providers.

When employers request foreign workers through the H2-A program the Foreign Labor Specialist oversees procedures described below to advertise the job opening. The H-2A is governed under US DOL ETA 20 CFR Part 655 and Wage & Hour Division 29 CFR Part 501, Temporary Agricultural Employment of H-2A Aliens in the United States; Final Rule February 12, 2010. The H–2A non-immigrant worker visa program enables U.S. agricultural employers to employ foreign workers on a temporary basis to perform agricultural labor or services.

In Maine, the H-2A related job orders are administered through the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) and the Bureau of Labor Standards (BLS) at the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL). Job openings intended for H-2A labor certification program are entered on America's Job Link through the Maine JobLink (MJL). These listings can be seen by potential workers in all 50 states. The FLC reviews the H-2A related Agricultural Clearance Order form ETA 790 for accuracy and compliance with the H-2A federal regulations before the job order is uploaded on the Maine JobLink by H-2A staff, and prior to employers forwarding a request for foreign workers to the USDOL ETA Office of Foreign Labor Certification H-2A National Processing Center. The jobs are also entered into the Interstate Clearance System to Florida, Vermont, and New Hampshire. These are supply states that often have workers who are willing to move to accept employment on a seasonal basis. The Interstate Clearance System is an agreement between states that have a shortage of workers and those states that have a surplus. The state with the shortage sends information on the job and what the employer is willing to provide in order to recruit workers. The surplus state informs local offices that have a surplus of agriculture workers of the job opportunities and see if any wish to relocate for the harvest season.

6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A. COLLABORATION

Collaboration and coordination of services:

The State Workforce Agency, the State Monitor Advocate (SMA) and outreach staff will partner with organizations and agencies serving MSFWs and the agricultural employment community to ensure that the needs and concerns of these workers receive consideration in the development and implementation of integrated service plans.

The SWA is fortunate to be a member of the Farmworker Resource Network, a highly successful and recognized best in practice multi-agency collaborative. During the next four years the SWA will continue to promote, engage and work to improve our collective effort to outreach and serve MSFWs at the highest level. The Farmworker Resource Network (Network), a collaborative including the SMA, members of a nearby one-stop centers, National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP),Maine Mobile Health Program at www.mainemobile.org, Pine Tree Legal Assistance[1], Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) food supplement program, Downeast Health Services' Women Infants and Children (WIC) program[2], and Maine Department of Education's Migrant Education Program[3] continues to coordinate a full array of critical services in support of Maine's migrant and seasonal farmworkers. The Network providers gather in the heart of the blueberry barrens to provide immediate services to arriving migrant workers, serve as an effective collaborative outreach mechanism, and host a series of small resource fairs during peak harvest to ensure workers receive the services and supports needed, such as educational, occupational, health, and social service supports. MSFWs may receive food assistance, gas vouchers, emergency auto repair, emergency lodging, tents, clothing and personal care items, job search services, and referrals to social services

National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), the SWA will continue to operate under an executed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with PathStone the new WIOA Sec. 167 Grantee for the NFJP. The MOU facilitates the exchange of data pertaining to services provided to MSFWs and ensures farmworkers receive the full complement of American Job Center services necessary to meet their employment, training, and support needs. A copy of the new MOU with PathStone is attached as Appendix G of the full plan.

In the coming year, the SWA will engage with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's (DACF) Agricultural Resource Development Division (ARDD). The goal is to join together to ensure the ARDD agriculture employer community accesses the employment and training services of the American Job Center partners, help advance services to MSFWs and promote the Agricultural Recruitment System through social media, direct outreach to employers and through the annual Agricultural Trades Show.

[1]Pine Tree Legal Assistance www.ptla.org

[2]Downeast Health Services' Women Infants and Children (WIC) program www.downeasthealth.org

[3]Maine Department of Education's Migrant Education Program www.maine.gov/doe/migrant/index.html

B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

The state solicited information and suggestions from the WIOA 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantee, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations in developing the Agricultural Outreach Plan. The State provided a proposed plan to the following entities: Maine Department of Education-Migrant Education Program, Maine Mobile Health Program, Maine Migrant Health Program, the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic Program, Maine Human Rights Commission, the University of Maine School of Law-Immigrant and Legal Advocacy Project, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Maine Farm Bureau, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Mano en Mano (migrant worker family center), Maine Family Planning, the National

Farmworker Jobs Program 167 grantee – Eastern Maine Development Corporation, and Pine Tree Legal (Farm Worker's Division). MDOL operates under an executed MOU with Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC), the 167 Grantee for the NFJP. The Memorandum of Understanding between MDOL and EMDC will facilitate the exchange of data pertaining to services provided to MSFWs. The SWA considered all comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP and informed all commenting parties in writing whether their comments were incorporated. For comments and MDOL response, see Appendix E Response to Comments Regarding2020-2023 Agricultural Outreach Plan.

Response to Comments Regarding the 2020-2023 Agricultural Outreach Plan

On February 10, 2020, the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) solicitated comments from interested parties on the four-year Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP). The Department received comments from one interested party during the thirty-day comment period ending March 11, 2020. Yvette Meunier, Promotional Coordinator from the Agricultural Resource Development Division of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry responded. The following includes the comments received and the Department's response to each.

Comment: "I will say that from a layperson's perspective, there is a lot of terminologies undefined or appear to be interchangeable (One-stops, H-2A local offices, American Job Center, CareerCenters). SWA and ETA acronyms were used but never defined. The ES acronym was used several times before being defined."

Department Response: The Department agrees the use of acronyms requires additional clarification. Acronym edits were made to the final draft of the plan including an updated appendix of acronyms and definitions.

Comment: "DACF was never mentioned in the plan, is there any interest in identifying areas we can collaborate with as part of their work? One potential area of assistance might be with promoting the Agricultural Recruitment System through social media and direct outreach to employers, as identified in the last sentence of the first paragraph under Assessment of Progress on page 5 of the plan. They could also mention ongoing outreach opportunities with the Farm Labor Link Network at the Ag Trades Show to reach out to farmers to promote the H-2A program."

Department Response: Although the plan does not specifically name or operationalize specific partners and services, we are fully committed to making sure that these relationships are a strong as possible. This will include working with the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and others in promoting the Agricultural Recruitment System through social media, and direct outreach to employers as well as outreach to farmers to promote the H-2A program at the Agricultural Trades Show.

Review and Public Comment The state solicited information and suggestions from the WIOA National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantee, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations in developing the Agricultural Outreach Plan. The State provided a proposed plan to the following entities: Maine Department of Education-Migrant Education Program, Maine Mobile Health Program, Maine Migrant Health Program, the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic Program, Maine Human Rights Commission, the University of Maine School of Law-Immigrant and Legal Advocacy Project, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Maine Farm Bureau, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Mano en Mano (migrant worker family center), Maine Family Planning, the National Farmworker Jobs Program 167 grantee Pathstone, and Pine Tree Legal (Farm Worker's Division). The SWA considered all comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP and informed all commenting parties in writing whether their comments were incorporated. For comments and MDOL response, see Appendix F Response to Comments Regarding2020-2023 Agricultural Outreach Plan.

The Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Employment Services, also referred to as the State Workforce Agency, is compliant with the requirements under proposed 20 CFR 653.111 as it does not have any significant Migrant Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) one-stop centers. However, Maine's one-stops do provide access to Spanish speaking staff and a multilingual service line in place to MSFW participants whenever necessary.

C. DATA ASSESSMENT

Data Assessment:

Over the last four years, the State focused on meeting goals to provide quantitatively proportionate and qualitatively equivalent services to MSFW's. Numbers of MSFW's registered in the Wagner-Peyser labor exchange system was remarkedly below planned goals. However, the services provided were qualitatively equivalent to the services of non-MSFW's. Farmworkers served through outreach were primarily migrant workers arriving and departing to the next harvest in Maine or in another state. Analysis of the online self-registration process yielded a lack of systems checks where registrants identify as a [AJA1] . This impacted the actual number of workers identifying as farmworkers, particularly seasonal workers who more frequently incorporate the American Job Center and the use of the labor exchange system in their employment search. The SMA has worked with America's Job Link Alliance (AJLA) to simplify and clarify farmworker identification requirements in the self-registration process of the Maine JobLink system to accurately capture the number of farmworkers receiving services from the one-stop system network. AJLA has since implemented a report and dashboard showing the equity ratio of services to MSFWs and all others accessing labor exchange services.

D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

Assessment of Progress:

During the last four years, Maine focused on five core objectives which remain key to improving MSFW and agricultural employer services for the next four years.

Increase the number of MSFW's who participate in labor exchange activities. Migrant and seasonal farmworker one-stop service activity varied between migrant and seasonal workers. Seasonal workers tend to use the American Job Center for assistance with employment and training services, whereas migrant workers receive services as a result of State Monitor Advocate and partner outreach at employer work sites and labor camps. Improvement in the number of workers who self-identify as either migrant or seasonal worker during registration for services continues to trend below expectation despite the past outreach model deployed in Maine and the results illustrated in Table 21. As a national trend, migrant workers are less likely to visit an American Job Center and access needed information and services through field visits and partner outreach. During the last two years, farmworker contacts increased due to outreach expansion efforts of the SMA however registration for services did not. In 2018, 523 farmworkers were contacted by the SMA. In 2019, 415 workers were contacted with a large influx of these contacts occurring in the third and fourth quarters of the calendar year as a result of MSFWs shifting to wreath making operations. Overall, Maine continues to see gradual decline over the last four years in MSFW workers. The SMA was transferred to a different bureau and has since ceased conducting outreach on behalf of the Bureau of Employment Services[AJA1] . Additionally, the onset of the COVID and high staff turnover at the CareerCenter level has hindered outreach efforts over the past two years. Significant efforts have been made by the Bureau of Employment services to hire an outreach worker specialist to take the lead on preparing regional staff to conduct MSFW outreach. Two excellent multilingual candidates have been hired and left within the last six months, the position will continue to be posted and in the meantime seasoned staff will take on training of outreach workers regions with the highest activity levels.

Increase the number of agricultural employers using the labor exchange services and promote the use of the ARS. Although agricultural employers are using all resources to fill positions, including the one-stop service system and requests for H2A positions increased in 2019, they continue to struggle to attract and find workers interested in farm labor opportunity. A marked increase in the use of the Agriculture Recruitment System was not realized given the challenge recruiting workers, especially when the economy was strong and alternative job opportunities were available. Despite efforts to encourage migrant workers to visit an American Job Center to receive services, registration for services did not markedly improve.

Encourage participation of MSFW's seeking transition to higher-wage jobs and permanent non-agricultural employment. The SWA believes farmworkers continue to receive services that lead to higher wage jobs and permanent non-agriculture employment. However, due to the significant numbers of farmworkers and specifically seasonal workers in Maine who do not identify as a "farmworker" when registering for services, assessing our impact on this goal is a challenge. The number of MSFW's who self-identify and engage in American Job Center services, is evident by the success of Eastern Maine Development Corporation, the former NFJP grantee and the WIOA Title-IB sub-recipient in transitioning workers to better paying jobs. The SWA supports the NFJP operator and encourages our outreach staff and our partners at all times to promote higher-wage agriculture and non-agriculture employment opportunities.

Enhance collaboration with the MSFW servicing organizations. Collaboration with our MSFW serving organizations remains strong and illustrates a best practice here in Maine.

Maine will ensure an adequate number of outreach staff stationed in high activity regions will be trained to conduct outreach to employers and farmworkers to explain and deliver one-stop services. New staff will be introduced to a broad community of farmworker service providers, known as the Farmworker Resource Network, to identify and represent the full breadth of services many of the farmworker population require to obtain, retain, or transition to continuing employment and/or better paying jobs. Maine will promote the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) through intra and inter-state clearance orders and promote one-stop services through both social media and direct outreach to workers, employers, and partners to fill seasonal, temporary, and permanent agriculture positions. As new outreach staff are hired and trained and as updates to the Maine JobLink system continue to be improved, Maine will expand ability of the one-stop system to identify seasonal and migrant users of American Job Center services and encourage expanded use of the system of services by migrant and seasonal farmworkers and farm owners who have not yet accessed the full range of employment services.

Over the next two years, Maine will focus on the following outreach objectives:

- Increase the number of MSFWs who participate in labor exchange activities,
- Increase the number of agricultural employers utilizing the labor exchange services,
- Promote the use of the ARS to agricultural employers through outreach and education,
- Encourage participation of MSFW's seeking transition to higher-wage jobs and permanent non-agricultural employment, and
- Enhance collaboration with MSFW service provider organizations.

E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

The State Monitor Advocate was provided the opportunity to review the AOP in its draft and approved the plan submitted.

WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time (sec 121(e)(3));	Yes
2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements;	Yes
3. If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser Act services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and	Yes
4. SWA officials: 1) Initiate the discontinuation of services; 2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued; 3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued; 4) Approve corrective action plans; 5) Approve the removal of an employer's clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days; 6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs' behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and 7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing.	Yes

WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	54.5%	55.5%	55.3%	56.0%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	56.8%	57.0%	57.3%	58.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5,950.00	$5,950.00	$6,000.00	$6,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS

Alignment of adult education curricula and instruction with state-adopted academic standards (the Maine Learning Results since 1997) is not new to Maine Adult Education. Providers that issue adult learners a high school credential must align with the required standards and learning outcomes of their corresponding high school. In 2011, the Maine Learning Results were updated to include Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and math and were implemented in the 2013-14 school year. This presented a challenge for adult education as the CCSS were not normed for adult learners.

In the spring of 2013, the U.S.D.O.E. Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE) released the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) for Adults. These research-based standards are drawn from those common core standards that are most relevant for adults to meet 21st century college and career readiness skills. Maine Adult Education adopted the CCRS and met its goal of statewide integration into instructional practice by SY2016-2017. Extensive professional development in the college and career standards for instructors in the areas of reading, language arts and mathematics has continued since it began in the spring of 2014.

To receive state and federal funding, CCRS implementation must be apparent in lesson plans and instructional delivery. Maine Adult Education also requires local providers to contextualize instruction and make use of research-based best practices in all content areas, including mathematics and reading, and in the implementation of Integrated Education and Training (IET) and Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE). CCRS training is ongoing for both veteran and new instructors.

The adoption and implementation of College and Career Readiness Standards for Adults and other valid, research-based practices has enabled all WIOA and state literacy funded providers to meet both the state and federal requirements for research-based, rigorous instruction that prepares adults for postsecondary education, training and employment. Implementation of CCRS also maintains alignment with State-adopted K-12 content standards and clarifies for

students, institutions of higher education, as well as employers, that Maine Adult Education is a research and standards-based pathway to postsecondary education, training and career.

Maintaining high standards of instruction resulting in improved learner outcomes includes rigorous, standards-based classroom instruction; distance, online, and blended learning instructional environments; dual enrollment in postsecondary; and project and community-based learning. The goal of implementing these strategies, combined with contextualized content relevant to learner needs should enhance learner engagement and attainment of goals.

Specialized support continues to be given to programs striving to integrate CCRS into English language acquisition courses. To determine if progress is being made, the Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (a research-based and validated model that allows English learners to acquire academic knowledge as they develop English language proficiency) is a part of Maine's College and Career Readiness Implementation plan.

Beginning in the late summer of 2019, Maine Adult Education adopted the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELP) prepared in October 2016 by American Institute of Research. These standards correspond to College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS). Training for instructors and administrators has begun and will be ongoing. In response to the growing numbers of immigrants being resettled in Maine in 2021 with more immigrants expected throughout 2022 and beyond, the need to serve English language learners has been spreading throughout the state. Steps to train English Language Acquisition teachers on the delivery of appropriate instruction and all staff on establishing inclusive and culturally sensitive environments are being accelerated steps

After the adult education state office received training on Teaching Skills that Matter in Adult Education, the decision was made to implement this into our programming expectations. The first cohort was trained in 2021.The goal of ongoing implementation is for Maine Adult Education to be known for integrating the following into all instructional practices and content areas as noted below.

The skills that matter are:

- Adaptability and willingness to learn
- Communication
- Critical thinking
- Interpersonal skills
- Navigating systems
- Problem solving
- Processing & analyzing information
- Respecting differences & diversity
- Self-awareness

The 5 topic areas are:

- Civics education
- Digital literacy
- Financial literacy
- Health literacy

- Workforce preparation

The 3 approaches that work are:

- Integrated & contextualized learning
- Problem-based learning
- Project-based learning.

B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

The Maine state office recognized that the adult education system at the time WIOA passed consisted of many small providers with limited services, staff, and other resources necessary to successfully meet WIOA requirements. That long-established method of having many providers (at one point over 100) working independently of each other was not an effective use of resources or improving learner outcomes.

Input from literacy providers and various partners, and a review of performance data led the adult education state office to the concept of grouping area adult education providers into education and career development hubs. To optimize efforts for collaboration within the hubs, criteria required that each hub contain a local workforce board, at least one career center, a University of Maine system site as well as a campus of the Maine Community College system, local libraries, and if possible, not split counties.

The result was the creation of nine hubs located within the boundaries of the three local workforce boards. Each hub, consisting of 5-11 local adult education providers, vary in population density, economics, workforce priorities, number of WIOA eligible learners and distance between programs.

The establishment of the hubs shifted the local providers away from long established patterns of programs working independently and competitively. Hubs are an opportunity to:

- Enhance communication among local providers
- Establish more efficient systems for maximizing resources, including staff expertise; expanding access for learners through use of technology for delivery of instructions and services to all programs within the hub, and developing authentic, reciprocal partnerships with multiple agencies
- Expect high levels of instruction, advising and academic rigor in all programs throughout the hubs and the state
- Promote an approach of collaboration and partnership among all current and perspective adult literacy providers by providing only one AEFLA grant per hub
- Expand the hub concept to include the state funded Maine College and Career Access program
- Use data reflecting the data within the Hub service area for programmatic decision making and problem solving

Section 231 (e) Thirteen Considerations

As required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Maine Department of Education Office of Adult Education conducted a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) to

award multi-year funding to eligible agencies for the provision of WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) Section 231. The initial grant cycle was for FY20-22 (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2021). Subject to continued availability of funding and demonstrated effectiveness as determined by outcomes, the Department may opt to renew the contract for two renewal periods, July 2021 through June 30, 2023 and July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

Maine Adult Education state office determined to use the AEFLA FY20-22 Competitive Grant Application to require, and then ensure through ongoing desk and on-site monitoring that WIOA fund recipients address the requirements of the 13 Considerations and the following adult education and literacy activities identified in Section 203 of WIOA including programs that provide such activities concurrently.

- *Adult education;*
- *Literacy;*
- *Workplace adult education and literacy activities;*
- *Family literacy activities;*
- *English language acquisition activities;*
- *Integrated English literacy and civics education;*
- *Workforce preparation activities; or*
- *Integrated education and training that—*

1. *Provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster, and*
2. *Is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.*

Each eligible provider must also adhere to the following Special Rule.

Special Rule. *Each eligible agency awarding a grant or contract under this section shall not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that such agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.*

As providers comply with these requirements, adult learners throughout the state will have access to high quality, rigorous programming that encompasses the adult education and literacy activities included in Section 203 of WIOA.

Section 231 (e) Thirteen Considerations

Below are the requirements applicants for the 2020-2022 AEFLA RFP had to address. Successful applicants are contractually obligated to:

(1) Be responsive to the regional needs identified in the local board plan and serve individuals identified as most in need of adult education and literacy services. How funded recipients will address the needs of sub-populations with barriers to employment as identified in the local plan had to be described.

(2) Serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities. The processes and procedures in place to assess an individual's current needs and ability; the delivery of programmatic and instructional strategies to provide access and services to learners with physical, emotional, mental and learning disabilities as well as collaborations with other agencies where learners may be co-enrolled had to be explained.

(3) Past Effectiveness. A demonstrated effectiveness form had to be completed that included: performance data from the past two consecutive years related to improving the skills of the target population in English Language Arts, mathematics, English language acquisition and other relevant subjects; and outcomes of participants related to employment, attainment of a high school credential or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training. The form also required evidence of past effectiveness serving eligible individuals who are basic skills deficient, and steps to be taken to meet the state targets each year of the grant.

(4) Extent the applicant demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan as well as the activities and services of one-stop partners. Alignment of activities and services with the strategies and goal of the local plan under WIOA Title I, section 108, as well as maintaining alignment with the activities and services of the one-stop partners had to be described. The local adult education providers had to focus on programs, activities and services that expand opportunities for education, employment, training and supports for WIOA eligible individuals. Local boards reviewed the applicants' responses for appropriate evidence of that type of alignment. Local boards, local providers and one-stop partners must work together during the period of this plan to move the activities forward to meet plan goals.

(5) Demonstrate that the program is of sufficient intensity and quality and based on rigorous research so participants will make substantial learning gains as well as use instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction. Grant recipients had to describe the evaluative methods used to ensure instruction is of sufficient intensity and duration to be effective. A description of program design including strategies for outreach, recruitment, retention; evidence-based research used to inform instruction and instructional strategies used to achieve substantial learning gains and how the CCRS for Adults are incorporated into the curricula had to be included. How integrated academics, skills and knowledge learners need to transition successfully to career and postsecondary and steps for the consideration of addressing special learning needs had to be explained. Instructional practices employed to include essential components of reading instruction that takes into consideration diverse learning needs and NRS levels were described. Examples of learning in real life contexts to ensure the learner has the skills necessary to compete in the workplace and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship were required.

(6) Deliver instruction in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics and English language acquisition that is aligned with the state-adopted College and Career Readiness Standards and based on best practices derived from the most rigorous research available. The scientific research upon which instruction is based to improve literacy skills needed to be described. How the success of such practices will be assessed needed to be included as well as how CCRS will be used to inform instruction, including how best practices will be integrated into classroom instruction.

(7) Describe activities that effectively use technology, services and delivery systems, including distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance. How the provider will support and ensure the integration of technology ***into***instruction, including how software and equipment will expand access to effective learning and increase a learner's digital literacy had to be described.

(8) Deliver activities that provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. How the provider will design and implement an Integrated Education and Training (IET) model that combines basic educational, employability and occupational skills had to be defined; including the proposed IET activities that enable participants to acquire skills needed for success in postsecondary education and training programs, employment and citizenship. A description of how the IET is the result of collaborations with workforce, employer and postsecondary partners was also required.

(9) Ensure that activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors and administrators who meet the minimum state qualifications and certifications, where applicable, and how access to high quality professional development, including through electronic means will occur. The number of employees, details regarding their duties, employment status (full or part time), weeks contracted to work, amount budgeted for position and location, certification and expiration date had to be provided. In addition, employees funded by WIOA had to be included in the applicant's plan for instructor and director professional development (PD). Applicants had to describe how PD participants will be identified, how information regarding PD opportunities will be disseminated, and how implementation of PD learning will be assessed. Applicants also had to identify the process for ensuring that each staff/instructor completes high quality professional development (in multiple delivery modalities) and how many hours of paid PD are provided.

(10) Coordinate activities with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, local workforce investment boards, one-stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways. The coordination with local resources to develop partnerships needed to be described. The process used to ensure timely and seamless referrals between partner agencies; coordinating with the local one-stop center, local businesses and industry; fulfilling one-stop WIOA requirements; ensuring the transition of learners into Maine College and Career Access programming and/or to postsecondary institutions; and a description of academic and career related counseling and other support services to improve retention and learner success had to be submitted.

(11) Provide activities that offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, State, and local support services (such as child care, transportation, mental health services, and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including individuals with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs. Examples had to be included of: how the needs of individuals, including those with disabilities and/or special needs will be determined and addressed; how coordination for support services will take place to address their needs; how an advisor will be used to assist learners with career planning and in identifying career pathways based on learner interests and aptitude; how barriers to program completionwill be identified and addressed; and how the referral process to support services to minimize barriers to learning will be implemented. Applicants also had to provide a sample of a flexible class schedule that enables participants, including those with special needs, to attend and complete programs and describe wrap around services to support participant success and increase completion rates.

(12) Maintain high-quality, accurate data of measurable participant outcomes (consistent with WIOA §116) in the state adult education managed information system and monitor program performance to demonstrate the ability to meet the goals outlined

here through a variety of data sources, including academic assessment scores, attendance, and activity data. The data collection process, quality controls, review of data procedures and how data will be used to improve performance, increase recruitment, and retention efforts had to be described.

(13) Deliver additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs in the local areas of demonstrated need. How data is used to describe the population and needs of English language learners in their service area; their experience providing English language acquisition and civics education instruction and services; and how their program model leads to high school completion, postsecondary training and unsubsidized employment had to be explained.

C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS

Maine Adult Education has a long history of collaboration with correctional institutions. Changes within the correctional system have altered the way literacy services are delivered in some facilities. While literacy programs and services are available in state prisons, county correctional institutions, local jails, youth facilities and reentry centers, some are now delivered by correctional staff with state correctional funds. Adult education programs continue to be the primary deliverers of services at county facilities and for pre-release. Regardless of who is delivering services, instructors are still included in professional development offerings, make use of the same assessment stools, and provide data to the state office. The inclusion of learner data in the adult education data system facilitates the continuity of services when a learner is transferred to another facility or released.

Adult education hubs with a correctional facility(ies) located within their geographic area included the facility in their 2019 AEFLA applications. Correctional learners were included in hub enrollment counts and performance measure targets for the funding formula to determine AEFLA allocations per hub to be used by adult education providers within facilities. Most of the services provided by adult education were stopped with the COVID-19 breakout. Facilities were closed to the outside. For those programs already making use of technology, participation of students was limited due to high infection rates and limits imposed on inmates to gather in computer labs. Moving forward, adult education and corrections must work together to enhance program offerings through technology.

In addition to the AEFLA criteria of "eligible providers" (WIOA §203(5), 34 CFR 463 Preamble) applicants proposing to deliver corrections education and education for other institutionalized individuals had to provide evidence of demonstrated past effectiveness in delivering corrections education. An eligible provider could demonstrate past effectiveness by providing two consecutive years of performance data showing their effectiveness in serving eligible individuals in correctional institutions. *(state requirement)*

AEFLA funds are used to provide educational programming to eligible corrections learners in the following areas: adult basic education, literacy, English language acquisition, adult secondary school completion and high school equivalency preparation, concurrent enrollment, college transition, integrated education and training, peer tutoring, workforce preparation and transition services. Individuals expected to be released within five years receive priority of service.

To better serve incarcerated individuals, Maine Adult Education AEFLA recipients are committed to making the partnership with corrections even stronger by focusing efforts on:

- Increasing support and attention to reentry activities. Priority will be given to those who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program. Of those currently incarcerated in local and county jails, 100 percent are scheduled to leave the facility within five years. For those in DOC facilities, 90 percent

were sentenced to five years or less. When all sentences to DOC are averaged, the average length of incarceration is 18 months.

- Increasing capacity to serve low level learners. DOC has recently undertaken the goal of administering the CASAS appraisal in math and reading as part of the intake process for all prisoners entering the system. Currently 76 percent of prisoners tested were below the CASAS score of 236 in math and below 236 in reading. There is a need for more intensive service and supports to enable these learners to advance to Adult Secondary Education (ASE low).
- Enhancing access to College and Career Readiness educational opportunities and workforce preparation activities.
- Expanding access to support services that enable these individuals to transition to full, productive members of our communities.
- Exploring ways to offer more options via technology.

Prisoners in Prerelease are served in five facilities that offer educational programming that includes the opportunity to earn a high school credential. Depending on the facility, there are also a variety of vocational programs. Building on the successful integration of educational services, attention will now be given to increasing advising and career pathways services. As part of those career pathways services, WorkReady, a standards-based employment skills program leading to a state recognized credential is presently offered in the Maine State Prison, Maine Correctional Center, Bolduc Correctional Facility, and the Southern Maine Reentry Center as well as six county jails. To reduce recidivism, the goals of the adult education and DOC partnership include a continued emphasis on an integrated and aligned approach to program services and skills training opportunities to ease the stress of transitioning back into the community, and to create a *gentle handoff* approach.

Maine Adult Education will also increase the integrated, professional development opportunities available to all workforce development partners, including corrections. At the same time, the Department of Corrections made the commitment to have its self-funded educational programs meet all the performance standards of an approved adult education program. Efforts to intensify the integration of professional development between adult education and corrections included a daylong Maine Corrections Education Forum. The forum brought together Corrections and Adult Education personnel and resulted in the establishment of several integrated working groups charged with improving the coordination of intake, assessment, and reentry efforts between the agencies. For the first time in memory, DOC also organized an Education Steering Committee to bring state staff together for planning and training. These efforts are now recognized as part of the way Maine Adult Education and Department of Corrections will work together.

Professional development offerings accessed by corrections personnel included training in College and Career Readiness Standards, Maine College Transitions, high school equivalency preparation, and use of MaineSTARS. The Department of Corrections has also contracted with local adult education programs to provide assessment services in two of its "unfenced" prerelease centers, with plans in place to contract for those services at the remaining centers. Corrections educational personnel also attend, and present at the Maine Adult Education Association Annual Conference.

To further establish successful alignment with adult education the Maine Department of Corrections Education Steering Committee also chose to use the Career Pathways Plan format and process as a strategic planning tool as they restructure educational programs for the State's correctional facilities.

The outbreak of COVID-10 highlighted the necessity of making the use of methods to deliver services technology a priority. Due to COVID-19, most of the services provided by adult education were stopped. Facilities were closed to the outside. For those programs who were making use of technology, participation of students were limited due to high infection rates and the limits imposed on inmates to gather in computer labs. Moving forward, adult education and corrections must work together to enhance program offerings through technology.

D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Section 243 of Title II AEFLA focuses on combining Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education with integrated education and training activities.

Specifically, section 243 states:

(c) Goal. Each program that receives funding under this section shall be designed to— (1) prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency; and (2) integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.

It is the purpose of Maine Adult Education under WIOA Title II Section 243 to provide Integrated English Literacy Civics Education (IELCE) and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs, activities and services that also align with the Strategic Priorities in the Maine Unified State Plan for 2020-23. Specifically, **Strategic Priority #2. Create a system of lifelong learning and employment connection for Maine residents** includes employment goals for New Mainers. This strategy is especially relevant to the work of AEFLA 243.

As required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Maine Department of Education Office of Adult Education conducted a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) to award multi-year funding to eligible agencies for the provision of WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) Section 243, Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education/Integrated Education and Training. The initial grant cycle is for FY20-22 (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2021). Subject to continued availability of funding and demonstrated effectiveness as determined by outcomes, the Department may opt to renew the contracts for two renewal periods, July 2021 through June 30, 2023 and July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

Beginning in FY18, the Maine Office of Adult Education established nine adult education and career development areas that aligned with the boundaries of the state's three local workforce boards. To encourage innovation and maximize efficiencies and resources, local adult education providers within these geographic areas were formed into hubs.As a condition of this award process (state requirement), the Maine Office of Adult Education anticipated no more than one award per Adult Education and Career Development Hub (AECDH) with demonstrated need.

The applications were reviewed and scored (using the state required consensus scoring model) by a team of adult education administrators from other states who possessed knowledge of Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education requirements. The appropriate local workforce board (LWB) also reviewed applications for alignment of proposed grant activities with the LWB plan.

Similar to the AEFLA application and award process, recipients of IELCE (243) funds were required to demonstrate their eligibility to apply, demonstrated effectiveness and need for IELCE/IET services to meet the demands of the grant. Demonstrated need, according to the

2012-2016 American Community Survey, is 50 or more individuals aged 18-64 in the service area whose English is a barrier to employment *(state requirement)*. Applicants determined to be ineligible because they did not meet the eligible provider of demonstrated effectiveness requirements were not considered for funding. Those applicants were notified in writing that they were ineligible and had appeal rights as outlined in the AEFLA 243 application, PART V, F. Refer to PART V, A for the eligibility review process.

Eligible providers are organizations who have demonstrated effectiveness in two consecutive years *(state requirement)* in providing adult education and literacy activities. Organizations eligible to apply included: local educational agencies; community-based or faith-based organizations; volunteer literacy organizations; institutions of higher education; public or private nonprofit agencies; libraries; public housing authorities; a nonprofit institution having the ability to provide adult education and literacy services to adults; and a consortium of agencies, organizations, institutions, and libraries described above; a partnership between an employer and an entity described in any of the categories listed above (WIOA §203(5)); and other organization types, even if not specifically listed above, to apply if they met the demonstrated effectiveness requirement (34 CFR 463 Preamble).

Eligible providers could demonstrate past effectiveness in two ways:

a. An **eligible provider** previously funded under Title II of the Act provided two consecutive years *(state requirement)* of performance to demonstrate past effectiveness in the areas listed below.

b. An **eligible provider** not previously funded under Title II of the Act provided two consecutive years *(state requirement)* of performance data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving basic skills deficient eligible individuals, including evidence of its success in achieving outcomes listed in the WIOA Title II AEFLA Federal Requirements. *(See WIOA Final Rules Subpart C, §463.24 and 29 U.S.C 3272(5))*

Applicants were also asked to provide data specific to English Language Acquisition, Civics Education, Integrated Educated and Training (and similar programs) and/or other relevant activities. If such data was not available, applicant were required to provide data related to an overall ability to provide Adult Education and Literacy activities as such activities are defined in WIOA, the Maine Unified Plan and in the next paragraph.

Evidence of demonstrated effectiveness included program performance data on its record to improve the skills of eligible individuals, in particular, individuals who are basic skills deficient in the content domains of reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition, and other subject areas relevant to IELCE services, information regarding its outcomes for individuals related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training. (34 CFR 463.24); and enrollment of learners in integrated education and training programs (and similar programs) and/or other relevant activities leading to industry-recognized credentials *(State requirement).*

In addition, funded applicants responded to the 13 Considerations (WIOA Title II, Subsection 3, Sec.231 e) with some adaptations in language to demonstrate how funds will be used to address the specific activities and programs required under WIOA Title II 243.

- Funded programs were required to provide programming of sufficient intensity and quality for eligible participants to achieve substantial learning gains, build on their existing knowledge and integrate academics, skills and knowledge the learners need to transition successfully to career, postsecondary education and a productive life. Instruction must be delivered in real life contexts to ensure that an individual has the basic English language and workplace skills needed to compete in the workforce and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This also included describing all factors considered in developing an instructional model that maximizes the

opportunities for learners, including those with degrees, professional certifications and work experience, to attend and make progress, and to describe how access to instruction and support services are provided.

- Funded programs also described how they will use the funds for expenditures that are allowable, reasonable and allocable as permitted by EDGAR, Uniform Grant Guidance, and by WIOA Title II, WIOA Title II Rule and Joint Rule. Funding must be used to support the development, planning, and operation of Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education/Integrated Education and Training programs to eligible individuals and across their adult education and career development hub *(state requirement)*.

Integrated English literacy and civics education in combination with integrated education and training 243 funding should be used for:

(a) co-enrolling participants in integrated education and training as described in 34 CFR 463.35 and 34 CFR 463.36 that is provided with a local workforce development area from sources other than section 243 of WIOA; or

(b) supporting integrated education and training activities as described in 34 CFR 463.35 and 34 CFR 463.36.

Co-enrollment will be enhanced by funding recipients as they design programs in collaboration with the local workforce development board, career center staff and other one-stop partners.

IELCE and IELCE IET programs were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Maine industries that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic were: retail, restaurant and hospitality, manufacturing, and healthcare. These are the same industries that employ many of Maine's ELA learners. Without prospects for employment, the number of ELA learners in IELCE and ELA classes dropped more than 20%. School buildings were closed and even when they reopened, the largest number who did not return were ELA learners. Their absence has been attributed to lack of childcare, working multiple low-wage jobs that did not leave time for schooling, and absence of devices and/or internet access for remote learning.

Using federal ARPA funds, the state office is working with employers in the most impacted sectors (as noted above) to collaborative on contextualized English courses and job training programs with employment available upon completion that will help bring ELA learners back to IELCE and IELCE IET programming.

E. STATE LEADERSHIP

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

(1) Required Activities

A. The alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and one-stop partners, including eligible providers, including the development of career pathways to provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities.

Due to Maine's geographic challenges and limited state and federal funding, educational, workforce system and support agencies rely heavily on collaboration, coordination and alignment of services. At the state level, adult education and postsecondary leaders recognize

the role adult education can play in addressing the challenge of adult education completion. Adult education participates in the Adult Promise and All Learning Counts (ALC) initiatives supported by grants from the Lumina Foundation. All partners, including representation from the Department of Labor, are working together to address the state goal of 60% of Maine's adults having credentials of value by 2025. The ALC, with its focus on in-demand micro-credentials of value is a means of forming career pathways into Maine's employment sectors. These micro-credentials can be especially effective in engaging learners who need to earn their high school credentials; need to accelerate their academic pathway through contextualized coursework, especially for English language learners; and for adults with some postsecondary credits but no credentials. Literacy assessments often reveal these learners need to improve foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

After three years of work, Maine Adult Education and the Departments of Labor and Vocational Rehabilitation decided not to implement W.O.R.K. Services. This integrated referral and registration system was intended to accessible to individuals seeking assistance in obtaining information to assist with education and/or employment. The system was also intended to enable the partner agencies to share participant information (with permission) to provide appropriate services and information in a coordinated and non-duplicative manner. Though it was ultimately determined that the proposed system was not going to meet the goals of the partner agencies, important lessons were learned that will now be incorporated into a new workforce system portal that will be more aligned with the state's needs. In addition, adult education is ready to launch an outward facing student portal that will facilitate the process for course search, selection and enrolment, and also work as a referral and case management site for adult education providers and partner agencies with appropriate permissions. The date for a soft launch is late spring of 2022. A full launch with the ability to include partners is set for fall, 2022.

Adult education representation on the state workforce board and on each of the three local boards also strengthens workforce development efforts. It facilitates communication by bringing decision makers together to work on program development that meets the needs of the state and local plans. They also work with partner agencies in the development and honoring of MOUs to support learner transition to college, career and employment.

B. The establishment and operation of high quality professional development programs to improve instruction provided pursuant to required local activities, including instruction incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults, instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners, instruction provided by volunteers or by personnel, and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such programs.

The goal of Maine Adult Education's leadership efforts is to provide Maine's adult educators with the skills and supports they need to assimilate new learning and effectively implement new content/strategies that result in learner outcomes as associated with WIOA. This type of continual learning environment supports instructors, staff and administrators in their development of professional and leadership skills that in turn, maximize the potential for success of the adults they serve. Technical assistance that is intellectually stimulating, builds confidence, and values the attendees encourages participation. To make the most efficient use of leadership funds, a variety of professional development formats and delivery systems are utilized, including:

- Implementing a teacher-trainer model that builds local capacity;
- Supporting a state office professional development coordinator who creates, delivers, brokers and shares professional development and training opportunities for both paid

and volunteer instructional staff. Contract providers are brought in as needed to provide specific areas of expertise;

- Offering a variety of delivery platforms to address the geographic challenges of delivering statewide training in a large, rural, state. These include webinars, video-conferences, blended learning formats, asynchronous courses, and regional meetings.
- Developing and supporting educational leadership in programs in order to build the capacity of administrators to effectively lead their staff and manage their programs;
- Exploring feasibility of enrolling program leaders in a leadership program designed specifically for adult education;
- Using the state's adult education listserv to disseminate information about regional and national training opportunities, articles of interest, and encourage discourse and sharing of best practice among practitioners; and
- Utilizing the Maine Professional Development Portal, a web-based tool used to list professional development opportunities, register participants and serve as a repository for participant transcripts.

Each year the state surveys local program staff to determine professional development needs. Survey results, as well as performance data are used to assess identified needs. The state office offers training in best practices to address areas of weakness evident from program monitoring and alignment with federal adult education initiatives.

Targeted professional development is planned to address CCR standards, implementation of English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards, distance learning and technology integration, IET, instructional strategies, use of data for program improvement and decision making, TSTM, college transitions, development of micro-credentials, IELCE, Ability to Benefit, and employability skills.

C. The provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities receiving funds under this title, including –

I. The development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs, distance education, and staff training;

Based on needs assessments of local program professional development surveys and compliance with federal and state requirements, Maine Adult Education will continue to offer training opportunities in rigorous and scientifically valid instructional practices and learning theories, data collection and management, assessment, academic and career advising, job skills, and college transition.

With the changing demographics of Maine, more local adult education programs are providing services to English Language Learners. For many programs this is a new area of work. The state team provides professional development to help programs and teachers serve them. These professional development opportunities help dedicated teachers of English Language Learners as well as content teachers who are finding an increasing number of ELL's in their classrooms. With the continuing increase in the number of immigrants needing services, the state office will be making the EnGEN ESL online program available as a tool to support teachers. Plans on currently underway to develop intensive, yet short-term units to develop new English language learners meet the ever growing demand.

Courses include:

- Introduction to the English Language Proficiency Standards
- Mathematizing ESOL
- Nexus of Rigor and ESOL Instruction

Technical assistance is also planned in:

- CCRS implementation as approved in Maine's CCR-SIA Sustainability Plan
- Research-based professional development in mathematics. Maine will repeat trainings in Adult Numeracy Instruction (ANI) and AR2. A team of adult educators participated in a year-long process at the request of the community college system to be involved with its math pathways work. Follow up work will be done to align adult education math courses to meet community college expectations of learners.

  Instructors will be exposed to recent research that has identified conceptual understanding in mathematics as a key concept in mastering the College and Career Readiness Standards. Technical assistance to address this will be provided to help instructors promote conceptual understanding with their students at all levels of mathematics.

  English language instructors will learn how to deepen their understanding of math and how to integrate math and numeracy into ESOL classrooms. The goal of this training is to offer strategies for making math accessible to all levels of ESOL learners.
- Research-based professional development in reading. Maine will continue to implement the Reading Apprenticeship Program (RAP), a research-based and research-proven instructional framework for improving adult reading. Through a train the trainer model, instructor capacity is built in the essential components of reading instruction or the explicit and systematic instruction including the following: phonemic awareness; phonics; vocabulary development; reading fluency, including oral reading skills; and reading comprehension strategies.
- Maine Adult Education will reach out to neighboring New England states to explore the creation of a regional approach to Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) training. This collaboration may enable Maine and the partner states to share the financial responsibility of expanding STAR and enable each state to increase both the number of certified instructors and the implementation of STAR.
- *The role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services* – The core partners are committed to cross agency professional development efforts at both the state and local levels. Steps will be taken to ensure that staff at all agencies is informed of partner services and able to help adults seamlessly access employment and workforce services. When COVID-19 caused some one-stop centers to close their doors or limit hours, adult education programs continued to provide referrals as necessary and provide technology assisted meetings for adults either unable to attend a physical location or who were without hardware or internet.
- And
- ii. *Assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.*

Maine Adult Education will continue to make use of technology to provide instruction and professional development. As part of the IDEAL consortium, the state office provides Distance Learning 101 and 102. These combined courses allow programs to become familiar with the characteristics of a successful blended/distance learning experience, learn about best practices for delivering distance education and develop a plan for how their hub/program will deliver

distance learning. Professional development is regularly offered to support programs in choosing/creating accessible, engaging distance content and supporting distance learners. Courses such as Learner Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning provide teachers with concrete tools to create/evaluate online learning. Instructors and staff are also provided with opportunities to enhance their own foundational digital literacy skills. This enables them to model/create/facilitate successful blended learning.

Both facilitated (synchronous and asynchronous) classes and already produced courses that were archived in the adult education learning management system were heavily enrolled during the early days of the pandemic. The professional development calendar continues to include instruction on developing and delivering technology assisted classes and services.

What began as weekly and then became monthly, TechTalks were offered on a variety of topics ranging from engaging learners in discussions to how to make use of Zoom. Facilitators were instructors with expertise in the use delivering engaging instruction through technology. These Tech Talks continue and part talks are archived in the learning management system.

D. The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of, and the improvement in, adult education and literacy activities and the dissemination of information about models and proven promises within the State.
Maine Adult Education implements a Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process for evaluating adult education programs. The monitoring process consists of three key components: on-going, data-based desk audits; educational program reviews; and on-site program monitoring. These are all guided by the goal of deepening relationships and understanding between the state office and local programs.

The demands of assisting local program meet the demands of adjusting to the impacts of COVID-19 made it extremely difficult to conduct thorough monitoring efforts and none were carried out in-person. The format of evaluations and desk-audits as outlined below were all conducted virtually. For any areas needing support, the state team offered direct instruction and assistance. In response to COVID-19 was the positive outcome of developing many helpful tutorials for program use. The state office data coordinator also instituted weekly office hours were extremely well attended and now continue twice monthly.

Annual Evaluations
The state office reviews each program for compliance with the Maine State Legislature's definition (LD 1780) of adult education as well as WIOA requirements. Programs that score high on the risk analysis for such things as having a new director, consistent late or incorrect reporting, not meeting objectives, or fiscal irregularities become priorities for monitoring. Programs that are not meeting their responsibilities and/or objectives are provided with additional technical assistance to help them to come into full compliance.

Data-based Desk Audits
Student performance data and other program information are reviewed regularly by the adult education state office data coordinator. This data review guides ongoing conversations with local programs. All programs receiving AEFLA or state funds must enter student data at least monthly into MaineSTARS, an NRS compliant managed information system. Local programs must collect and document student information regarding student goals, educational functioning level, progress and achievements. Programs review data at least quarterly to ensure completeness, accuracy and to determine their standing regarding projected outcome targets. MaineSTARS generates annual reports on student performance measures for submission to OCTAE. The state data coordinator creates and distributes program specific reports which compare local program data with state targets.

On-site Reviews
The state office is in the development stage of designing online tools for program reviews. This system will still contain the key benefits listed below, and will also allow, when appropriate, for shorter on-site visits. The key benefits of this monitoring strategy are:

Self-assessment by local programs,

Cross fertilization of information for best practices and strategies,

Development of baseline for program improvement, and

Staff development and technical assistance.

A more in depth review may also be triggered based on the Maine Adult Education Risk-based Monitoring System indicators.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

A. The support of State or regional networks of literacy resource centers.
Maine adult education leadership funds are used primarily to fund a state level professional development coordinator position and to implement the train the trainer model for required trainers. The state office has found this to be a much more effective system in terms of costs and use of resources than the former centralized literacy resource center. The current model will continue as it has demonstrated effectiveness in building capacity. Local adult education programs are also grouped into regional hubs. The state office also provides customized technical assistance for needs within specific hubs. In the last two years, the use of zoom and other online platforms has resulted in increased participation in professional development opportunities, and by overcoming the barriers of time and space promoted more equity in access, and resulted in cost savings.

To support in the sharing of information amongst the adult education system and workforce providers, an outward facing portal is being integrated into the adult education data management system. This portal enables potential and current learners to access course information by category, and with appropriate permissions, create a personal portfolio site and message other users. The added value for workforce system partners is the ability to enter into the portal to check on the availability of upcoming classes to aid in referrals of their clients.

B. The development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, or distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology.

Maine uses instructional technology as a conventional and standard modality for delivering professional development. Using an industry recognized learning management system, traditional professional development content is being translated into blended, synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. The state office is modeling effective integration of instructional technology and supporting training for practitioners ready to incorporate this modality into instructional practice. Additionally, the state office has partnered with the Center for Applied Special Technology, or CAST. CAST is a recognized leader in the field of Universal Design for Learning. This partnership involves consultation and training in creating and delivering digital learning experiences that expand access to learning for all individuals. The state office and local programs also partner with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

C. Developing and disseminating curricula, including curricula incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults.
Maine adult education continues to build capacity by training local teachers in the research-based program Reading Apprenticeship program. Because Maine is a local control state and

educational statutes assert it is the right of local school units and not the state to develop and/or adopt curricula, the adult education state office does not disseminate curricula, but does make recommendations and provide high quality professional growth opportunities.

D. Developing content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways.
Local programs are working with postsecondary partners and local workforce boards to determine appropriate alignment of educational pathways to career pathways. Their successes are shared with other providers. As part of the most recent AEFLA competition, each grant recipient is required to offer at least one IET. In addition, the small, but successful piloting of micro-credentials with the community college and university systems has helped providers see the possibilities of developing IET offerings as micro-credentials.

E) The provision of assistance to eligible providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve the objectives of this title and in measuring the progress of those programs in achieving such objectives, including meeting the State adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3).
State assistance is provided to local programs to address required data elements and to implement best practices that will ensure measuring progress accurately. Monthly data driven webinars will be conducted by the state adult education data coordinator as well as regular in-person trainings to address data professional development needs as necessary. Program monitoring is also conducted and includes local site visits and real-time desk audits. Required data reports identify problems as they arise to ensure timely assistance is given to eligible providers. Funding to eligible providers is based on program outcomes including overall educational gain percentages and employment and college placement outcomes as defined in WIOA section 116 (b)(3).

F) The development and implementation of a system to assist in the transition from adult education to postsecondary education, including linkages with postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education.

The goal of the Maine College Transition (MCT) program had been to transition adults into postsecondary without the need for remedial courses once enrolled. Local instructors were trained in the development of courses and experiences to address the areas of successfully integrating into the college culture, gaining sufficient levels of digital literacy, and financing postsecondary education and/or training in a responsible way. Topics are chosen in response to requests from postsecondary partners.

Without losing any of the MCT foundations, the program has been expanded to serve and engage learners on the career path. The MCT became Maine College and Career Access (MCCA). This rebranding is more than a name change. MCCA addresses the attainment of skills necessary to prepare adults to enter postsecondary and/or employment or training programs. Learners receive the foundational skills they need as well as academic advising and career planning services, financial aid assistance, employability skills, college planning and tours, ACCUPLACER testing and the World of Work Inventory (WOWI).

Local programs will continue to increase postsecondary collaborations. The community college system now provides a range of free classes to MCCA students with local MCCA providers offering supports for success, continuing articulation of coursework, implementation of ability to benefit in the summer of 2022, and the presence of adult education providers and success coordinators on higher education campuses.

G) Integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers.

The role of adult education providers in preparing English language learners for the workforce is expanding. In addition to providing direct instruction and advising, local programs connect learners with other state and local service providers. Both the state office and local providers are much more engaged in meeting with employers, trade associations, and chambers of commerce to learn employer needs and develop appropriate programming. English language learners are relocating to more areas of the state and workplaces. They arrive in Maine with a range of English language, academic and work skills. Some are highly educated professionals unable to gain meaningful employment due to a lack of English competency. Others need to start with the most basic introduction to the English language. Integrated English language, civics education, work skills and academic training help accelerate entry into employment.

As part of the Maine IELCE program, local providers are expected to integrate employability skills and those who receive 243 funds are to work with employers to develop integrated education and training opportunities leading to unsubsidized employment.

H) Activities to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities.
Maine adult education has offered a Department of Education WorkReady certificate since 2000. This 60-hours standards-based curricula was developed in cooperation with local workforce boards and employers. The core curricula can be enhanced with the addition of hard skills to fit the needs of specific employers. The program is offered by trained facilitators at locations such as adult education programs, career centers, correctional facilities, high schools, career and technical education sites, and social service offices.
The next areas of focus includes broadening the approach to focus on employability skills and the embedding of these skills in all instructional areas and implementing 21st century skills badging to support the work being done in the development of micro-credentials. Establishing working relationships with employers is also vital to create that pathway for our learners from academic preparation to job placement. Collaborations with workforce system partners are also growing to more effectively address the needs of adults and employers impacted by COVID-19.

Involvement with the University of Maine and Community College Systems in the creation of a micro-credential framework has increased the visibility and viability of adult education's ability to support Level 1 participants with foundational skills, deliver courses bearing college credits in Level 2 of the framework, and place participants in employer based work experiences. Adult education has participated with the partners in many state and national conferences to present on the framework. While micro-credentials are not new, the inclusion of adult education as an onramp is a new concept for many. Adult education is represented on the micro-credential steering committee to help guide the continued implementation statewide of the framework.

I) Identifying curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards that –

i. specify what adult learners should know and be able to do in the areas of reading and language arts, mathematics, and English language acquisition; and take into consideration the following: state adopted academic standards; the current adult skills and literacy assessments used in the state or outlying area; the primary indicators of performance described in section 116; standards and academic requirements for enrollment in non-remedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education supported by the state or outlying area; where appropriate, the content of occupational and industry skills standards widely used by business and industry in the state or outlying area.

In 2014, Maine Adult Education adopted the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) with the goal of statewide integration into instructional practices by SY2016-17. These standards focus on high-level reading skills, critical thinking, comprehension of concepts, and

applications to real world situations. In mathematics, this looks like mastering underlying concepts, procedures, and applications of math to real world problems. Math lessons are coherent as students develop skills, building on previous knowledge. In ELA/literacy, CCRS manifests itself in teaching for complexity, evidence and knowledge with more complex tests, confirming that students identify evidence in the text to support their ideas and responses. In English language acquisition, local programs are striving to support students in achievement of functional levels of literacy and numeracy that will enable them to gain employment and postsecondary training. Emphasis is on sustainability of CCRS concepts in programs where all teachers are trained and adept at integrating these standards into curricula and lessons.

In 2021, the first Maine TSTM cohort was formed. Maine will continue to use this approach as the foundation of professional development offerings for curricula design and implementation. It is the goal of Maine adult education to be recognized for the delivery methodologies and skills that matter.

All local adult education programs in Maine are required to use CASAS tools for student assessment of educational functioning level and diagnostics. CASAS pretesting and posttesting are used to document educational gain as described in Section 116 as a primary indicator of performance. Additional assessments include the CASAS Employability, ACCUPLACER and HiSET equivalency test to provide specialized diagnostic information for college and career readiness and high school equivalency.

Within the Maine Department of Education, the dialogue between adult education and Career and Technical Education has increased. Adult education and CTE will be part of a new team within the Department of Education. The Maine Unified Plan also points to partnerships and activities between adult education and the Maine Department of Labor that include cross agency professional development to enhance collaboration and alignment. Adult education has been working closely with the Department of Labor around healthcare initiatives and discussions on how the various navigators in our organizations will collaborate on efforts to serve individuals through enhanced understanding of partner programming, a stronger referral system, and client follow-up.

J) Developing and piloting of strategies for improving teacher quality and effectiveness.
Maine has updated an asynchronous online course, *Navigating the Waters of Maine Adult Education*, which offers a broad overview of the adult education landscape in Maine to new teachers, administrators and support staff. The state team is also working with the certification office to determine appropriate pathways to qualify teachers of adults to enter the field.

K) The development and implementation of programs and services to meet the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities or English language learners, which may include new and promising assessments tools and strategies that are based on scientifically valid research, and identify the needs and capture the gains of such students at the lowest achievement levels.
Partnerships are crucial in guaranteeing equal access to all learners and in providing high quality services to meet the needs of adult learners with disabilities and those at the most basic literacy levels. As core partners, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and Adult Education work closely to cross develop an effective referral system and train staff to use it appropriately. The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services has in the past and will continue to provide professional development for adult education providers.
The state office of adult education provides CASAS diagnostic training to help other eligible providers identify skill needs to determine targeted instruction and increase the academic gains of learners. Strengthening partnerships with Literacy Volunteers and the Barbara Bush Family Literacy Foundation will continue to be a focus to help local programs access both services and

professional development opportunities. Literacy volunteers provide one-on-one learner instructional support to eligible providers.

To better support the recruitment and training of new and incumbent instructors of English language learners, the state office will continue to provide professional development on the English language proficiency standards and on the use of platforms such as Burlington English and EnGEN. Due to the recent influx of immigrants to Maine, work is underway to develop an intensive immersion program to grow the number of ELA instructors in a condensed time period and then continue to provide support while in the classroom.

L) Outreach to instructors, students, and employers.
Due to its large geographic size and areas of low population density, Maine adult education will continue to expand its outreach to instructors, students and employers through increased uses of technology. The professional development portal which lists current and upcoming professional growth opportunities and training events has begun to attract non-adult education teachers who have discovered the quality of the offerings. Practitioners can learn about, register, and track their professional growth experiences through this digital interface. Work has also begun on the establishment of professional development pathways to increase teacher expertise in various program areas.
The Maine Adult Education listserv, moderated by the state team, is a communication board where upcoming events, professional discourse, and relevant news and articles are posted and distributed to practitioners. Members of the list-serv include adult education practitioners as well as employees of partner agencies.
Core partners continue to establish coordinated channels of communication to employers regarding common objectives. Local workforce development boards are key to coordinating the outreach efforts.

M) Other activities of statewide significance that promote the purpose of this title.
1. The state team special projects and workforce development coordinator sits on the one-stop centers service provider committee for each local workforce board. This step expands the partnership between the state office and the local workforce boards in sharing information and alignment of services on a statewide basis. This is in addition to the inclusion of a local literacy program director on the board of each local workforce area.
2. Active engagement of the state adult education office in the Maine Promise Committee. This committee is comprised of representatives from the university and community college system offices, philanthropy, industry and private groups. Its purpose is to increase the number of adults in Maine earning degrees and certifications. The Maine Promise will be working very closely with the All Learning Counts (ALC) committee as the goals of each are closely aligned. ALC is a means for adults to attain degrees and credentials of value.

F. ASSESSING QUALITY

Assessing quality of adult education and literacy activities happens at both the state and local levels.

The AEFLA contract with sub-grantees stipulates that instructors engage in at least 12 hours of professional development annually and to facilitate that happening, the state office provides training opportunities year-round in multiple delivery formats and locations. Meetings for local directors and a series of trainings for new directors, generally held in-person have continued as webinars. Though some elements of collegiality are lost in the online format, there have been benefits of cast savings and increased participation. Webinars on special topics appropriate for administrators, instructional, and administrative staff were provided mainly through technology and in some small face to face groups when safety protocols could be followed.

The state disseminates professional development information in a variety of ways. An annual calendar of high-quality professional development offerings to develop or enhance quality of instruction in the required, and many of the permissible leadership activities, is created and distributed prior to the start of each school year and updated as necessary. Local providers are also notified of upcoming trainings and resources through the Maine Adult Education listserv. Maine's professional development portal is utilized to advertise, collect registrations for each training, verify number of professional development hours earned, and create transcripts. It is interesting to note that in addition to adult education practitioners, instructors from the K-12 and community college systems, as well as from partner organizations have been in attendance at many of the trainings.

To ensure the trainings meet intended outcomes, participants are required to complete an evaluation at the conclusion of each state sponsored professional development event. The evaluations are used to assess effectiveness and determine any necessary changes. The comments on evaluations often inform the state regarding topics for follow-up trainings. Also taken into consideration in the planning and delivery of these trainings are the results of the professional development needs assessments completed by local providers.

In addition to the calendars and professional development portal, the use of a managed learning system assists in assessing quality. The system provides a means to gather information on instructor, staff and administrator participation in online resources, levels of engagement in facilitated communities of practice, and quality of outcomes. These communities provide the state with valuable information on areas in need of additional training. The listserv, professional development portal and managed learning system provide the means for widespread dissemination of information on proven or promising national, state and local practices.

In terms of assessing quality at the local level, providers are expected to meet the quality for instructional standards and outcome targets established in the AEFLA RFP. How well providers meet these expectations is determined through a variety of methods, including: participation in professional development; meeting performance goals; monthly expenditure reports to ensure grant funds are only used for eligible activities and as allocated in approved budgets; timely submission of reports; and program monitoring. Annually, each local provider is required to submit a year-end narrative as well as a data and budget report. Depending on the severity, budget reports that reflect inappropriate expenditures or variances from the approved budget will be requested by email or phone to make appropriate budget adjustments, renegotiate the budget, or have funding halted until the matter is reconciled. Quarterly reports that contain performance outcomes or targets that are below 90%, must submit a plan that includes improvement strategies and timeline for implementation and improvement. Examples of targets include post-testing rates, transitions to employment/postsecondary and/or employment, advancement in educational functioning level, and data match percentage. Technical assistance is provided to each provider in response to their submitted plan.

When following the steps above does not result in acceptable levels of improvement, the local provider will need to specify within 30 calendars how the findings will be addressed in a correction action plan. Once the plan is approved, the corrective steps can occur.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	Yes
2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
program;	
3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	Yes
4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	Yes
5. A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	Yes
6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	Yes
7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	Yes
8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	Yes

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding the supplement-not-supplant requirement);	Yes
2. The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	Yes
3. The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not "eligible individuals" within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA;	Yes
4. Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of	Yes

The State Plan must include	Include
participation in the program.	
5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303).	Yes

AUTHORIZING OR CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE

APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION	**Enter information in this column**
Applicant's Organization	Maine Department of Education
PRINTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE	**Enter information in this column**
First Name	A. Pender
Last Name	Makin
Title	Commissioner of Education
Email	Commish.DOE@Maine.gov

SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA)

GEPA Section 427

Under the direction of the Maine Department of Education, the Adult Education State office will provide training to local grant recipients on the requirements of the United States Department of Education's General Education Provisions Act (GEPA), Section 427. The office will also examine each project in the AEFLA RFP responses to determine whether the projects include any barriers that impede equitable access or participation such as gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. Should such barriers exist, a description of the steps taken to ensure equitable access to, and participation in, the project for students, teachers, and other beneficiaries with special needs must be included in the project description.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	34.0%	34.0%	35.0%	35.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	32.0%	33.0%	33.0%	34.0%
Median Earnings	$ 4,250	$ 5,275	$ 4,300	$ 5,300

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
(Second Quarter After Exit)				
Credential Attainment Rate	32.0%	34.5%	33.0%	35.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	36.0%	38.0%	37.0%	39.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

Goal 1 - Objective 1.1

SRC Comment: Add a strategy regarding staff retention. This seems to be a contributor to early exits. Maybe something related to ongoing mentorship? Development of supervisor cohort?

Goal 1 – Objective 1.2

SRC Comment: Update regarding the changed timeframe – (Peer Mentoring) starting in Feb 2022 as a result of COVID associated delays.

Goal 1 – Objective 1.3

SRC Comment: No changes needed

Goal 2

SRC Comment: This should be modified to reflect the addition of Order of Selection Priority Category 4.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.1

SRC Comment: Since W.O.R.K. services are no longer available; this should be amended.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.3

SRC Comment: It would be worthwhile to identify details of the partnership (with the Office of Aging and Disability Services); is there a written plan for how to do this?

SRC Comment: Is the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop different than the standard Career Exploration Workshop protocol?

SRC Comment: Should a strategy be added to reflect the proposed co-location of OADS staff in VR offices?

Goal 2 – Objective 2.4

SRC Comment: Can a strategy be added to support the development of more employment specialists/job coaches/providers doing this work? Maybe include a strategy regarding developing internal positions in Washington County to address this gap?

Goal 2 – Objective 2.5

SRC Comment: Keep all strategies

Goal 3 – Objective 3.2

SRC Comment: Maintain objective

Goal 3 – Objective 3.3

SRC Comment: Add a strategy re: youth exiting corrections, role of VR in that process

Goal 3 – Objective 3.6

SRC Comment: What are the barriers that remain are to making progress on this strategy (collaborating to better serve individuals with a mental health condition)?

SRC Comment: Same as above, what is the barrier to this (delivery of joint staff training on employment for people with a mental health condition)?

Goal 3 – Objective 3.8

SRC Comment: What are the barriers here (collaboration to better serve individuals with a history of substance use)?

Goal 3 – Objective 3.9

SRC Comment: Is this where more can be added about DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)?

SRC Comment: Add language related to the internally developed training by Kim Desso

Goal 3 – Objective 3.10

SRC Comment: What actions are being done (related to serving those with TANF benefits)? This is an important objective, but there are so many objectives within this goal

Goal 4

SRC Comment: This goal does not read well – what is DVR being provided?

Goal 4 – Objective 4.1

SRC Comment: How often is this (common referral form) used? How can someone access this form?

Goal 4 – Objective 4.2

SRC Comment: What is happening in regards to categories 3 and 4 in this respect (referral to CareerCenter partners)?

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

Goal 1 – Objective 1.1

SRC Comment: Add a strategy regarding staff retention. This seems to be a contributor to early exits. Maybe something related to ongoing mentorship? Development of supervisor cohort?

DVR Response: DVR appreciates this feedback and will add a strategy concerning staff retention. Please also see the CSPD section for more information on strategies to promote staff retention

Goal 1 – Objective 1.2

SRC Comment: Update regarding the changed timeframe – (Peer Mentoring) starting in Feb 2022 as a result of COVID associated delays.

DVR Response: DVR will update the timeframes concerning Peer Mentoring implementation.

Goal 1 – Objective 1.3

SRC Comment: No changes needed

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the feedback

Goal 2

SRC Comment: This should be modified to reflect the addition of Order of Selection Priority Category 4.

DVR Response: DVR will add Order of Selection Priority Category 4 to this Goal

Goal 2 – Objective 2.1

SRC Comment: Since W.O.R.K. services are no longer available; this should be amended.

DVR Response: DVR will update the reference to W.O.R.K. services to reflect current strategies

Goal 2 – Objective 2.3

SRC Comment: It would be worthwhile to identify details of the partnership (with the Office of Aging and Disability Services); is there a written plan for how to do this?

DVR Response: There are additional details that may be found in Section F of the plan.

SRC Comment: Is the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop different than the standard Career Exploration Workshop protocol?

DVR Response: Yes, the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop is a version of the curriculum that is designed for those with lower literacy. Collaboration with the self-advocacy group Speaking Up For Us (SUFU) provided additional feedback on related new virtual modules during this past year that will be used to help reach individuals in community programs who have not had access to VR and employment supports.

SRC Comment: Should a strategy be added to reflect the proposed co-location of OADS staff in VR offices?

DVR Response: Yes, DVR will add a strategy referencing that upcoming collaboration.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.4

SRC Comment: Can a strategy be added to support the development of more employment specialists/job coaches/providers doing this work? Maybe include a strategy regarding developing internal positions in Washington County to address this gap?

DVR Response: Yes, DVR will develop a strategy to reflect these needs and associated efforts underway.

Goal 2 – Objective 2.5

SRC Comment: Keep all strategies

DVR Response: DVR is in agreement and appreciates the feedback.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.2

SRC Comment: Maintain objective

DVR Response: DVR will maintain the objective but will update language to tie the objective to MDOL/DVR's Disability, Equity and Inclusion efforts.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.3

SRC Comment: Add a strategy re: youth exiting corrections, role of VR in that process

DVR Response: DVR has a strong juvenile justice presence and will better reflect that in strategies in this section

Goal 3 – Objective 3.6

SRC Comment: What are the barriers that remain are to making progress on this strategy (collaborating to better serve individuals with a mental health condition)?

DVR Response: DVR has a close working relationship with the Office of Behavioral Health. Renewed efforts to address Employment First recommendations as well as the awarding of a vendor for the Employment Workforce Development System will continue to strengthen staff capacity as well as increase focus on the specific needs of this population.

SRC Comment: Same as above, what is the barrier to this (delivery of joint staff training on employment for people with a mental health condition)?

DVR Response: As above, DVR has a close working relationship with the Office of Behavioral Health. Renewed efforts to address Employment First recommendations as well as the awarding of a vendor for the Employment Workforce Development System will continue to strengthen staff capacity as well as increase focus on the specific needs of this population.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.8

SRC Comment: What are the barriers here (collaboration to better serve individuals with a history of substance use)?

DVR Response: One barrier to collaboration has been the lack of understanding on the part of community providers about how and when VR services can be added to other supports to assist individuals in recovery to enter or re-enter employment. Grants to the Maine Department of Labor and other workforce system partners have helped to build collaborations across CareerCenter partners.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.9

SRC Comment: Is this where more can be added about DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion)?

DVR Response: Yes, this is one place where DEI can be added.

SRC Comment: Add language related to the internally developed training by Kim Desso

DVR Response: DVR appreciates the feedback and will add information on the in-house developed DEI trainings.

Goal 3 – Objective 3.10

SRC Comment: What actions are being done (related to serving those with TANF benefits)? This is an important objective, but there are so many objectives within this goal

DVR Response: Please see Section P – Evaluation of Progress for more information on this objective

Goal 4

SRC Comment: This goal does not read well – what is DVR being provided?

DVR Response: DVR appreciates this feedback and has tweaked the wording to improve readability.

Goal 4 – Objective 4.1

SRC Comment: How often is this (common referral form) used? How can someone access this form?

DVR Response: A common referral form has been drafted for use but COVID has delayed its roll-out. This will be a priority of WIOA collaborative work across the partners in the coming year.

Goal 4 – Objective 4.2

SRC Comment: What is happening in regards to categories 3 and 4 in this respect (referral to CareerCenter partners)?

DVR Response: DVR provides information on CareerCenter resources and services to all individuals found eligible in closed Order of Selection Priority Categories (currently 3 and 4). Additional information is provided concerning CareerCenter resources during annual outreach to those on the waitlist.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

Maine DVR does not reject any of the Council's input or recommendations.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;

This agency has not requested a waiver of Statewideness. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation can provide Vocational Rehabilitation services statewide under an Order of Selection. Therefore, the waiver request is not necessary.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

See above (a)

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

Requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

see above (a)

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) works with other state agencies and many Councils and Committees whose focus is on individuals with disabilities. Once approved, all agreements and Memoranda of Understanding are considered to be in effect until replaced or discontinued according to the terms of each agreement. At a minimum, DVR reviews MOUs at least annually to determine those that are in need of updating or replacement. DVR convenes teams with broad stakeholder participation to work on MOUs according to the needs of the particular agreement.

DVR has a long-standing relationship and works very closely with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Presently, DVR and DHHS have two memorandums of understanding (MOU); one MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), which serves individuals with developmental disabilities; the other MOU is with the Office of Behavioral Health -formerly the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services - (DHHS-OBH) which serves individuals who experience mental health disorders . Additionally, DVR, OADS and DHHS-OBH have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state. DVR, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI), OADS and DHHS-OBH continue to develop a joint MOU that will develop a cost sharing plan to address current WIOA regulations.

The current MOU's address the combined efforts that DVR and DHHS have initiated and clarify roles to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. • DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and DVR/DBVI MOU (updated June 2014) "This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through a system change planning process for the purpose of implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities".

DHHS Office of Behavioral Health and DVR MOU (updated August 2013) "This Memorandum is intended to guide the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Behavioral Health (DHHS-OBH), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities."

Through these strong partnerships with OADS and DHHS-OBH, DVR has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers.

• Interagency Support of Benefits Counseling

DVR continues to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine's benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DVR applicants and eligible clients. DVR currently administers a single contract with Maine's approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center's Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Office of Behavioral Health, and Office of Aging and Disability Services.

The contract's scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Center's Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services.

•Memorandum of Understanding with PJCC (Penobscot Job Corps Center)

In 2021, Maine DVR updated a Memorandum of Understanding with PJCC. The purpose of the agreement is to set forth the commitments of PJCC and the Maine DVR to meet the needs of students and young adults with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition to employment. Cross-training opportunities are held annually.

• Veterans Administration and VR MOU

A Memorandum of Understanding between the Maine Department of Labor – Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services was finalized and signed in November 2011.

"The purpose of this MOU is to set forth the commitments of BRS and VA–VR&E to cooperate to meet the needs of veterans with disabilities... Through the efforts outlined in this agreement, BRS and VA–VR & E will strive to minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referral, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations."

Maine DVR held its annual meeting with the Veterans' Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services on April 14, 2021 . Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resources were not able to be dedicated to updating the MOU. It is anticipated that this should be able to be accomplished in Spring 2022. Maine DVR has identified staff that operate as veterans' liaisons in each office

• Department of Corrections and VR MOU – Procedural Guidance

The Maine Department of Labor– Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, DVR/DBVI and the Maine Department of Corrections (DOC) have worked together to establish procedural guidance on collaboration between the agencies. Work thus far has resulted in two procedural directives outlining how the agencies will work together to best meet the needs of individuals who are currently incarcerated or on probation and may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Employment has been identified as one of the most important factors in reducing recidivism among individuals who are exiting the criminal justice system.

In Maine, there are many individuals who may be eligible for VR services who are currently incarcerated and who could potentially benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation services to obtain

and maintain employment upon their release. The Department of Corrections through its prisons and probation systems are committed to working collaboratively with DVR to promote appropriate referrals, as well as the exchange of information and needed documentation to support VR eligibility determination.

In each of the larger offices, a DVR staff member has been identified who serves as the liaison to the correctional facilities in their region.

DVR corrections liaisons typically meet as a group on a quarterly basis with DOC staff to share updates and best practices- however this was disrupted due to COVID -19 Corrections liaisons sit on juvenile justice regional care teams. The DVR Assistant Director has represented DVR and Maine Department of Labor on Juvenile Justice Advisory Councils.

• Workers Compensation Board and DVR MOU

During 2012, representatives of the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) and Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation worked together to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was completed and signed, effective November 2012. DVR and the WCB are committed to working together to improve services and employment outcomes for individuals who, as a result of injury need vocational rehabilitation services to return to employment. Through the efforts outlined in the MOU, DVR and the WCB will strive to maximize employment opportunities for injured Maine workers, minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referrals, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations.

The Memorandum of Understanding is due to be updated in Spring of 2022.

• Collaboration to Support Clients who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late-Deafened

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened is part of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and provides programing and services to people who are deaf, hard of hearing, and late deafened. DVR continues its joint effort with DBVI providing services for co-enrolled clients by coordinating with the University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind, and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project, (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects, and provides technical assistance for students until the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. Although the program, "Independence Without Fear" has discontinued, the collaboration has expanded to include the Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and a Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire.

Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication and other services for people with significant dual sensory needs. HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population. DVR/DBVI are currently working on accessing the training needs of Community Rehabilitation Providers and coordinating with HKNC to provide training to dual sensory loss clients.

Dual sensory clients are also being provided Support Service Providers (SSP) through a program with USM. SSP's are Linguistic students that provide home/community services for college credit.

2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

Assistive technology services and assistive technology devices are provided to individuals with disabilities as determined by an individual's vocational goal and appear as prescribed services

on the respective individual's signed IPE. DVR works closely with Maine cohorts, Alpha One, ALLTECH and Mainely Access and Maine CITE, assistive technology organizations which provide assistive technology technical assistance services, as well as assistive technology devices. Maine CITE is the assistive technology grantee for the state of Maine through the Administration for Community Living. Maine DVR has a seat on the Maine CITE advisory council. Maine DVR does not currently have a Cooperative Agreement in place with Maine CITE but with the recent hire of a new Maine CITE Director - development of an agreement that details how the agencies work together - including through training and services to clients - will be a priority during 2022.

3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

DVR supports staff involvement in the USDA's AgrAbility project. Maine AgrAbility is administered by Alpha One and the University of Maine. DVR has an identified liaison to the project ensures that DVR staff is knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources. Current efforts are also looking at incorporating AgrAbility into Pre-Employment Transition Services and work-based learning to support increased interest in farming and agricultural careers in Maine. DVR also makes referrals to AgrAbility for clients who wish to remain farming but have need for assistive equipment or support services to do so. In those cases, AgrAbility provides a report which includes recommendations to assist the client. DVR does not have a formal agreement with AgrAbility. Current availability of funding for AgrAbility does not require DVR to establish a fee for service structure for services - however should AgrAbility's funding change, DVR will work with AgrAbility to establish a reasonable and appropriate fee structure.

4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

DVR recognizes the often significant needs of out-of-school youth with disabilities. Within Maine's CareerCenters and each Local Workforce Board, WIOA partners (including DVR) have signed MOUs that establish how all partners will work together to provide services to many populations - including out-of-school youth. This may include through referral, co-enrollment, and blending and braiding of funds.

The DVR Director participates in the Governor's Children's Cabinet's Staff Meetings. The work of the Cabinet is supporting opportunities for out-of-school youth through targeted initiatives - including the distribution of grant funds to support Career Exploration for youth who come from communities that have traditionally been marginalized. The Director's participation promotes inclusion of the needs of out-of-school youth with disabilities.

5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

DVR follows State of Maine Procurement policies and procedures to contract with qualified organizations to provide employment support services for DVR clients. Services procured include: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Job Seeking Skills, Job Skills Training, Job Development and Placement Services; Job Coaching and Supported Employment; and Business Engagement. These services are paid on a fee per service unit cost. DVR also contracts with Maine's sole Center for Independent Living, Alpha One.

The State of Maine holds Master Agreement contracts for a number of services including ASL interpreting, Temporary Staffing - and soon to be CART transcription - among others. These Master Agreements allow DVR to develop Delivery Orders with these pre-approved vendors if and when needs arise.

D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

1. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AS WELL AS PROCEDURES FOR THE TIMELY DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE STUDENTS

1.DVR has a strong partnership with the Maine Department of Education (DOE). This has been demonstrated through collaborative efforts on Employment First legislation, data sharing, joint training and technical assistance and the launch of interagency efforts, such as the Cross-Agency Council for Transition. A DOE staff member serves on the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the DVR Director serves on the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

On March 21, 2022, the Rehabilitation Services Administration issued a final Notice of Interpretation (NOI) concerning Pre-Employment Transition Services. While the Cooperative Agreement between the SEA and Maine DVR has not yet been updated since the NOI's issuance, the flexibilities and interpretations set out within it, have been adopted in DVR's practices. During regular standing and transition-focused interagency meetings, DVR conveys updates - including current interpretations to guide practice. DVR is currently at work on developing procedural guidance concerning Driver's Education that reflects RSA's instruction on when Driver's Education may or may not be reasonably understood to be allowable under Pre-Employment Transition Services.

The Cooperative Agreement between the Maine Department of Education, Special Services and Maine DVR – and Maine DBVI - was updated in 2018 and now includes language to support implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. The Agreement was developed using technical assistance available through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) and the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC).

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR/DBVI to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. DOE and DVR/DBVI are committed to the belief that all youth with disabilities can work and that they should have the opportunity to prepare to enter competitive integrated employment through participation in work-based learning and other career preparation activities before high school graduation or exit.

The Designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency: DVR will assist in transition planning and in the development of each student's individualized education program (IEP). For students eligible for services with an agreed upon vocational goal, DVR is expected to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) before the student leaves the school setting.

In providing transition services, DVR will facilitate the use of available and appropriate community–based services. Services will be provided in the most cost-effective manner. In recognition of the importance of promoting information sharing and in order to ensure an effective and timely system of referrals for DVR services, DVR requests that school personnel adopt the following process: When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) begins the transition planning process prior to entering ninth grade, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive general information about VR services, including those Pre-Employment Transition Services available to Potentially Eligible students. This information will

introduce VR and will inform the parents/guardians when it is appropriate to make a VR referral. When the student to be referred is within two years of school graduation or exit, the services offered by VR should be re–introduced at the student's IEP or 504 meeting. Both the student and the parents/guardians should have an opportunity to receive materials outlining VR services and to ask questions concerning the referral. If during or after the meeting, they (or the adult student) are interested in having a referral made for services the school will assist in doing so.

Provide information on the formal interagency agreement with the state educational agency with respect to consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

The purpose of the Cooperative Agreement is to set forth the commitments of DOE and DVR to cooperate to meet the needs of students with disabilities and to better coordinate the process of student transition. The Agreement also sets forth that consultation and technical assistance will be provided to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services.

The mission of the MOU is to help students with disabilities achieve full participation in society by ensuring equal opportunity and access to education, employment and community. To achieve this mission: • People will work together for the student's benefit • Students and families will be included and respected • Regular and meaningful communication will be established • Personnel Development will be collaborative • Data will be shared to improve outcomes. The parties shall agree on methods to maintain updated information about best practices and resources related to the transition of students, including the use of Dispatches and maintenance of a copy of the Agreement on the agencies' websites. Consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post–school activities, including VR services; DOE and DVR will work together to inform the following entities about the existence and intent of this Agreement: • Superintendents of Schools • Directors of Special Education • Parent Training & Information Center • DVR Regional Managers, Supervisors, and Transition Counselors • Directors of Career & Technical Education • Directors of Adult Education • Client Assistance Program • Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) • State Special Education Advisory Panel Effective implementation requires ongoing communication and sharing of information between the parties.

A student with a disability is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and 21 who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or homeschooled, among other settings)

Under the WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, a youth with a disability may be defined as an individual with a disability who is between the ages of 14 and 24 and who is or is not enrolled in an educational program.

It is especially critical that any changes in resources, regulations, policies and procedures that affect students served jointly by DOE and DVR/DBVI be immediately communicated and that coordinated efforts are made to mitigate any negative impact that may occur as a result of those changes. DVR will provide schools with an orientation video, brochures, and PowerPoint presentation on services for transition–age youth and a representative to serve as a member of the Maine IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel.

DVR will also support VR counselors with transition caseloads to join Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC) and participate in regional and state meetings and training. DVR will provide technical assistance to DOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. DVR will provide technical assistance and training as requested to DOE and school districts on the Americans with Disabilities Act in conjunction with the State ADA Coordinator. DOE will notify DVR of issues of mutual interest identified during monitoring or as a result of a special education due process finding.

For students who have applied for VR services, DVR staff work closely with students, parents and the LEA to collect and share information (with a signed release) that allows for timely determination of eligibility (60 days) and development of the Individualized Plan for Employment (90 days). Current postsecondary goals identified on Individualized Education Programs often present excellent starting points for development of the IPE. Training to LEA staff as well as DVR staff helps to reinforce the importance of collaboration to create a coordinate set of activities to promote transition opportunities for the student.

1. **PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES**

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies are required to set aside 15% of their federal grant funding to provide a new set of "Pre-Employment Transition Services" to eligible or potentially eligible students with a disability. Pre-Employment Transition Services must be available statewide to all students with disabilities who need them. Services begin once a request has been made and a Pre -Employment Transition Services registration form has been completed along with documentation of disability.

There are five required services and nine authorized services (that may be provided if funds remain after the required activities are provided) along with pre-employment transition coordination. Pre-Employment Transition Services are to be delivered in conjunction and collaboration with schools and are designed to assist students with identifying career interests.

The required *Pre- Employment Transition Services* are:

- Job exploration counseling
- Work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after school opportunities, experiences outside of the traditional school setting, and/or internships
- Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs
- Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living
- Instruction in self-advocacy

If funds remain, VR agencies may provide the following nine *authorized Pre-Employment Transition Services* to improve the transition of students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education or an employment outcome:

- implement effective strategies that increase independent living and inclusion in their communities and competitive integrated workplaces;
- develop and improve strategies for individuals with intellectual and significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education experiences, and obtain and retain competitive integrated employment;
- provide training to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition staff, and others supporting students with disabilities;

- disseminate information on innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to implement Pre-Employment Transition Services;
- coordinate activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under IDEA;
- apply evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel;
- develop model transition demonstration projects;
- establish or support multistate or regional partnerships that involve States, local educational agencies, designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or others; and
- disseminate information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of those who are traditionally unserved.

Funds reserved for pre-employment transition services may be used for the required, authorized, and Pre-Employment Transition Services coordination activities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services coordination consists of:

- Attending individualized education program meetings for students with disabilities, when invited;
- Working with the local workforce development boards, one-stop centers, and employers to develop work opportunities for students with disabilities, including internships, summer employment and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year, and apprenticeships;
- Working with schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614(d) of the IDEA, to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services;
- When invited, attending person-centered planning meetings for individuals receiving services under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

Eligibility and Registering for Pre-Employment Transition Services

Potentially Eligible

In addition to authorizing new services, the WIOA amendments also now allows students with disabilities who are "Potentially Eligible" to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services without needing to apply and be found eligible for VR services. Potentially Eligible students are those who meet the definition of a "Student with a Disability" (see below) and who have not yet applied and been found eligible (or ineligible) for VR services. In the event that there is a waitlist for VR services, individuals who have been found eligible and placed on a waitlist may only receive Pre-ETS if they were receiving Pre-ETS services before being found eligible.

Registering for Services

In order for students to receive services as Potentially Eligible they (and their guardian if under age 18) must complete and sign a registration form. The registration form collects basic demographic information that is then inputted into the AWARE case management system to create a case record. The record must reflect that the student has a disability. Documentation that is acceptable includes the following:

- Information from an education official documenting spec ed or 504 status
- Case note documenting counselor observation or review of medical information from the referral source
- Referral from Juvenile Justice with data elements
- IEP
- SSA award letter
- Medical documentation

A *student with a disability* is defined as a student between the ages of 14 and 21 who is enrolled in an educational program and who is eligible for and receiving special education and related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.); or is an individual with a disability under Section 504. (Note: This definition includes students who may be in an alternative placement, enrolled in post-secondary education or home-schooled, among other settings)

Under the WIOA amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, a *youth with a disability* may be defined as an individual with a disability who is between the ages of 14 and 24 and who is or is not enrolled in an educational program.

If students with a disability require interpreter or reader services or accessible informational materials to ensure equal access to work-based learning experiences or other Pre-Employment Transition Services, those supports may be paid by VR with reserved funds, unless they would customarily be paid by another source, including local education agencies.

It is the expectation that DOE and DVR/DBVI will work closely together to ensure that students, families and schools are aware of the availability of Pre-Employment Transition Services and will jointly promote Pre-Employment Transition Services activities so that students with disabilities have access to these important career preparatory resources.

Schools can aid in increasing access for students with a disability to Pre-Employment Transition Services by:

- identifying students to refer to Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Collecting registration forms for Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Developing and delivering Pre-Employment Transition Services with VR staff.
- Braiding and blending funding for Pre-Employment Transition Services activities.

2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;

In order to promote better understanding and implementation of best practices in transition planning, DOE and DVR/DBVI will collaborate to offer technical assistance, cross-training and joint training opportunities. Topics may include transition services, Pre-Employment Transition Services, rehabilitation technology or other. All training and technical assistance will be provided in an accessible format and may be delivered via in-person, conference call, webinar, Zoom, Skype or other appropriate means.

In recognition of the importance of promoting information sharing and in order to ensure an effective and timely system of referrals for DVR services, DVR requests that school personnel adopt the following process: 1. When a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is in the transition planning process prior to entering ninth grade, the student and his/her parents or guardians will receive general information about VR services. 2. When a student is within two years of school graduation or exit from school, the services offered by VR should be re–introduced at the student's IEP or 504 meeting. Both the student and the parents/guardians should have an opportunity to receive VR materials outlining services and to ask questions concerning the referral. 3. VR Counselors should be invited to attend IEP meetings for students who have been determined eligible for services, as well as in cases where the presence of the Counselor at the meeting would assist in determining the appropriateness of a referral to VR.

VR Counselors will provide support to the IEP team to facilitate the IEP process as appropriate. DVR will provide information as requested to school personnel on access to "Long Term Support." DOE will provide guidance to schools on the release of information (including assessment, IEP, Summary of Performance etc.) for students who are working with DVR or who are in the eligibility process. DVR will inform the designated school case manager as to the status of the DVR referral/intake process on individual students with appropriate releases. DVR will determine eligibility and provide services to eligible students within two years prior to expected high school graduation or exit.

If disagreements arise regarding any aspect of the implementation of this Cooperative Agreement, they should first be attempted to be resolved between the specific parties involved. If this is unsuccessful, the dispute should be taken to the next successive leadership level until resolution is achieved.

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;

DOE and DVR will collaborate on possible grant opportunities that have an impact on services to students. DOE will assist DVR to share information about vocational rehabilitation services with students with disabilities who may be eligible for VR and provide DVR with de–identified data on an annual basis of numbers and demographics of transition–age students with disabilities who have reached ninth grade in public and private schools across Maine. DOE will provide information to DVR on eligibility, availability, and accessibility of CTE (Career and Technical Education) programs.

DOE will provide technical assistance to schools on IEP transition plan development. DVR will participate in DOE's efforts to maintain students in school and to prevent and reduce drop–out rates among students with disabilities. The agency will collaborate with schools on the delivery of the "Career Exploration Workshop" curriculum for eligible students with disabilities. At least annually, an in–house training for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors on topics in best practices in working with transition–age youth will be provided.

DOE and DVR are committed to promoting competitive, integrated employment opportunities for all Maine youth with disabilities as they transition from high school. To meet the requirements of Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, DVR/ in consultation with DOE will undertake the following process for youth with a disability:

Outreach and Identification – DVR will develop informational materials that describe services available for students and families who may be considering sub-minimum wage employment. These materials will include information on Pre- Employment Transition Services and individualized transition services available through DVR. DOE will assist by sharing this information with schools and families. Documentation – DVR will collect information to satisfy

the requirement to document the completion of required activities under Section 511 for youth who are seeking subminimum wage employment. This documentation will include:

• Youth's name;

• Determination made or activity/services completed;

• Name of individual making the determination or providing the service/activity; date determination made or required service or activity completed

• Applicable signatures of DVR/VRC transmitting documentation to youth and dates; and

• Method via which documentation was transmitted to the youth (including if refusal, youth names, description of refusal and reason, signature of youth or guardian, signature of DVR VRC documenting the refusal, date of signatures, date and method).

VR will provide documentation to the youth of all activities completed (such as the Bridge Career Exploration Workshop or career planning), regardless of whether they were completed under the VR program or IDEA. DOE will support the schools to provide documentation to VR no later than 30 days (after the completion of each activity) unless there are extenuating circumstances of all transition services completed by the youth under IDEA. It is the expectation that all documentation is exchanged and maintained in a confidential manner. MDOE assures that it will not enter into, nor permit any school to enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity as defined in 34 CFR 397.5 (d) for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

Note: On March 18, 2020, Maine's Governor Janet Mills signed into law LD 1874 "An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Subminimum Wage" which disallowed the payment of subminimum wages to persons with disabilities in the state of Maine and subminimum wage is no longer a possibility for students with disabilities exiting high school. Maine has no individuals working under subminimum wage certificates at the time of this plan.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;

This agreement does not involve any financial compensation or exchange of funds between DOE and DVR/DBVI. However, it is the expectation that in the development and implementation of services, DOE and DVR/DBVI will provide in–kind resources and will promote cost efficiency and non–duplication through collaboration. Nothing in this agreement relieves either party of the responsibility to provide or pay for any transition service that the agency would otherwise provide to a student with disabilities who meets the eligibility criteria of that agency. If a participating agency, meaning a state or local agency other than the educational agencies responsible for the student's education, that is financially and legally responsible for providing transition services to the student fails to provide the transition services described in the IEP, the education agency shall reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives for the child set out in the IEP.

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.

DVR will inform DOE in writing of procedural changes that may impact the eligibility of students with disabilities for vocational rehabilitation services, so that DOE may disseminate the information to local school districts. DOE will notify DVR concerning proposed changes in regulations, policies and procedures at the state or federal level that may impact students with whom DVR works.

DVR will collect de–identified information on informal/formal complaints and due process hearings that involve school–aged youth; this data will be provided on an annual basis to DOE, as well as numbers and demographics of transition–aged students served. DVR will provide a list of Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the schools they serve to DOE and each school district on an annual basis. A protocol to serve students who are in out–of–district placements in accordance with current policy is currently in development but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Maine DVR does not have any third-party cooperative agreements with private non–profit VR service providers.

F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DVR works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services to support partnerships that benefit individuals in need of supported employment services. One way this is accomplished is by leveraging resources - such as career planning - through the Department of Health and Human Services that help to prepare individuals for supported employment and assist them with accessing long term supports following VR services.

Career planning is a person-centered, comprehensive employment planning and direct support service. It is a focused, time-limited service that helps a person identify a career direction and develop a plan with the goal of achieving competitive, integrated employment at or above the State's minimum wage. The service provides assistance to obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive employment or self-employment. The service is provided up to 60 hours, is not to exceed a six-month period, and must occur in the community in businesses, Career Centers or other community locations.

Career Planning Goals:

- Identify skills, priorities, and capabilities determined through an individualized discovery process
- Provides opportunity to explore self-employment and determine potential steps necessary to develop a business
- Discover a career direction and creation of a career plan to be used in a person's individual plan for employment with VR.
- If applicable, a referral to benefits planning
- If applicable, a referral for an assessment for use of assistive technology to increase independence in the workplace
- Provides information which should be included as part of the application to Vocational Rehabilitation for services

Who can access the Career Planning Service?

The Service is designed for people with disabilities who have had limited experiences with competitive, integrated paid employment and who are unclear about their career direction, skills, interests and abilities. A person may request Career Planning through their individualized planning process; either at OADS or at Vocational Rehabilitation. Career Planning is NOT required for accessing Vocational Rehabilitation Services but may be used as part of the discovery process for a career direction.

Waiver Funded Career Planning

Waiver members can request and be authorized to receive Career Planning funded through Section 18, 20, 21 or 29 of MaineCare as part of their Person-Centered Planning (PCP) Plan of Care (POC) process. The service must be provided by an authorized Provider of waiver services who have staff who are certified to provide Career Planning.

The Service will be authorized up to 60 hours and is not to exceed a six-month period. The Career Planner will schedule at least weekly meetings. These meetings help the planner learn about the person, and their community, as well as explore businesses by completing tours and other activities which will lead to the creation of a Career Plan.

Process and documentation will be through two options (chosen by the person); Discovering Personal Genius™ or Maine Career Planning. The Career Plan will be submitted to OADS QA staff for monitoring, feedback and recommendations three times during the process.

At two weeks the Career Planner will:

- Assist the individual with an application to VR Services including documentation of disability, releases, copy of the PCP/POC, and filling out the health checklist
- Assist with an application for Benefit Counseling Services, including a release
- Assist with a referral for Assistive Technology assessment (if required)

Connecting Career Planning to Vocational Rehabilitation Services

People receiving Career Planning Services through OADS waiver funding are also either recipients of SSI or SSDI benefits. Since disability determination has already occurred by SSA or MaineCare, OADS consumers are presumed eligible for VR or DBVI once the application process has been completed. Case Managers and/or Care Coordinators can provide additional information during the application process to assist DVR/DBVI n this process. The goal is to create a smooth transition from Career Planning to the development of a VR Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The IPE goal could include counseling and guidance which will occur during the Career Planning process. If funded by OADS, the Career Planning Process can also be considered a comparable benefit as a service on VR's IPE. The Career Planner, with the person, will share the Career Plan and be available to review, discuss and share discovery information to inform the development of the CARNS and the IPE.

Career Planning is a discovery-based service designed to explore businesses, careers and skills. A waiver member who receives Career Planning has chosen to seek employment and coordination of services between the OADS and BRS must occur in order to support the person on a path to employment.

The Career Plan will be shared with VR counselors, with a release as part of the application for services and again when it is final by either the Career Planner or the Case Manager/Care Coordinator.

The Career Plan shall be maintained in the person's file and a copy given to the person and team members. If a person requires Career Planning again in the future all prior information will be used and reviewed as part of the development of an updated Career Plan and may not require the full 60 hrs. authorization.

Referral for Long Term Support -

DVR maintains a protocol with DHHS to allow for clients to achieve timely access to long-term supports following stability on the job. This process assists individuals who have an identified need for ongoing job coaching. Steps include DHHS' case manager/care coordinator working with the individual to discuss waiver work support providers and the process for selection of a provider. Following a vendor call, the approved transfer form will be completed identifying key

information on the business site, wages, schedule, level of support, technology and natural support plan and selected work support provider. The VR counselor works closely with the individual and case manager to ensure a smooth transition.

G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

1. VR SERVICES; AND

DVR is in the process of rebuilding a business services team. A Youth Employment Consultant is focused on creating business relationships to benefit the entry of youth – including students with disabilities – into the world of work through work-based learning opportunities and regular employment. The position is also charged with the responsibility of facilitating Progressive Employment in Lewiston and Portland. The Progressive Employment Model is a dual–customer strategy that is designed to assist jobseekers with significant barriers to employment and assist employers who may be averse to hiring with disabilities. The model coordinates rehabilitation counseling with job placement and business account management. Progressive Employment offers hands-on work-based activities in the community that assist our dual client offering career exploration to students and risk-free opportunities to employers.

The Youth Employment Consultant has worked successfully with employers in Maine's southern and western counties to set up opportunities for summer work experiences for youth – thereby meeting employer needs through introducing them to a new generation of potential workers. Videos describing the Progressive Employment model are available on the Maine DVR website which can be accessed through www.maine.gov/rehab.

DVR has also hired a Rehabilitation Counselor II in the Bangor office to focus on business services and job development. Two other positions – a Rehabilitation Counselor II in Machias and a Rehabilitation Counselor I in Presque Isle – are currently advertised and have a focus on business engagement, job development and job coaching.

A Regional Manager assists to coordinate the efforts of the business relations team as well as to oversee the use of Progressive Employment in Regions 3, 4, and 5.

Other Employer Engagement - DVR continues to be responsive to employer need through techniques such as:

- Staff outreach to businesses to address their workforce needs
- Partnership with the Career Center business staff to assist in delivery of job fairs
- Documentation of business engagement via the Maine Job Link

• Conducting business development via contracted Community Rehabilitation Providers.

• Participation on a Statewide Workforce Action Team (SWAT) that brings workforce system partners together to plan coordinated activities.

• Membership in Local Workforce Boards.

• Delivery of training and resources to business such as disability etiquette (including by certified Windmills trainers), ADA, and reasonable accommodations.

2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

In addition to Progressive Employment, the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)'s Transition Work-Based Learning (TWBL) Model Demonstration grant was a partnership with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG), the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, American Institutes for Research (AIR), and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). This project used a quasi-experimental design to conduct rigorous evaluation of two innovative interventions, Enhanced JMG and Progressive Employment. Maine DVR used the Progressive Employment model to expand employer relationships and align this dual customer community-based strategy with Enhanced JMG programs for students with disabilities.

These interventions served students with disabilities that were within two years of graduation from high school to test whether a model of work-based learning improves attainment of competitive integrated post-secondary employment and education outcomes. Specifically, under this grant, JMG expanded its services to five high schools in the Bangor area and DVR launched Progressive Employment in the Augusta and Bangor regions.

Maine DVR expected that the TWBL Model Demonstration would enhance statewide collaboration that facilitates the transition process from secondary and postsecondary schools, to competitive integrated employment at or above minimum wage. Within 1 year after graduation, at least 90 percent of study participants will enter postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment.

https://www.explorevr.org/progressive-employment-maine-transition-work-based-learning-model

The TWBL grant concluded on Sept 30, 2021. Despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on community activities during years four and five of the grant, there were a number of positive findings from the grant. During the life of the grant 355 students received Progressive Employment Services and at least 131 students participated in at least two work-based learning experiences. TWBL's evaluators found that (1) JMG programming had a significant impact on high school completion for students with disabilities. (2) an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) through DVR has a significant positive impact on employment and earnings outcomes for youth (3) There is a significant impact on youth earnings when youth received both JMG and VR services under an IPE – as well as other findings that will be posted with supporting materials on the Maine DVR website - https://www.maine.gov/rehab/grants/twbl/

Maine DVR works with employers to support activities such as: informational interviews, job shadows, business tours, on–the–job training/apprenticeships and work experiences. Business Development during the pilot project includes identifying potential business leads based on the goals of the individual referrals and contacting the employer; requesting an informational interview; requesting a tour of the business or facility; sharing information about DVR and determining if the employer is willing to allow assessments, informational interviews, job shadows or on–the–job training at this location. Through the business development process, as

it is described, the purpose is to gain an understanding of the various positions which this business employs and to ascertain the work environment and work culture.

H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

DVR/DBVI, OADS and DHHS-OBH have resumed negotiations to develop a joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations. The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed completion of this MOU, however it will be a priority for completion during 2022.

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine's Benefits Counseling Network, DVR/DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities who are eligible for MaineCare, the State's Medicaid program.

2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

To ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive quality vocational rehabilitation services and equal access to employment opportunities throughout the state of Maine, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation takes a multi–faceted approach that includes workforce development, engagement of business and the availability of support services for clients who need them, as described in the MOU with the DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services mentioned elsewhere in this state plan.

DVR/DBVI, in collaboration with the Maine Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), continues to contract with Syntiro, a technical assistance and training provider, to administer a comprehensive workforce development system for Employment Specialists in the Community Rehabilitation Provider sector. This project, Employment for ME Workforce Development System, includes basic certification (ACRE) training, advanced topical skills training, maintenance of a comprehensive training calendar and for newly certified employment specialists. The system was launched in July 2011.

Coordinated planning with DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services promotes implementation of best practices, smoother transition between systems and improved access.

3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

DVR has a MOU that guides the Maine Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), through its Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Office of Behavioral Health (DHHS-OBH), in the course of planning and implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence–based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities."

A new MOU, to reflect all requirements of WIOA, is in final development.

In addition to providing ongoing employment support to more than 200 employed individuals with mental illness through contracts with CRP's, the DHHS Office of Behavioral Health (DHHS-OBH) has several initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve:

Community Employment Specialist Program: DHHS-OBH contracts with Maine Medical Center's Vocational Services to provide Employment Specialists that are embedded in behavioral health organizations across the state to assist individuals living with serious mental illness. They assist with career exploration and securing employment, and provide other supports as needed. In keeping with best practices, these Employment Specialists work as a team with behavioral

health professionals to improve outcomes. This service is supplemental and not necessarily a replacement service for Vocational Rehabilitation services through the DOL Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

The Clubhouse Model of Psychiatric Rehabilitation: Clubhouses help support members with overcoming barriers to employment by offering a variety of services such as in-house prevocational programs, transitional employment and competitive employment in the community with or without Supported Employment services. Prevocational programs give members the opportunity to contribute to the daily operation of the clubhouse on a volunteer basis while learning valuable skills. Transitional employment (not supported through Vocational Rehabilitation) offers members the chance to work at temporary part time jobs through Clubhouse partnerships with local employers, with on-the-job support from both the Clubhouse and the employer. Members also work in permanent positions in the community, at a job of their choosing, with SE as needed. There are four clubhouses in Maine.

Promoting Employment Through Traditional Mental Health Services: Both the primary Community Support Services (Community Integration Services, Assertive Community Treatment and Community Rehabilitation Services), as well as Behavioral Health

Home services require the development of an Individual Support Plan (ISP). Every 90 days, through the Individual Support Planning process, individuals receiving these services are asked about their vocational status and about unmet vocational needs. DHHS-OBH funds specific employment services and collaborates with the Department of Labor's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide resources to address vocational needs. In keeping with the fidelity of the model, all ACT teams are required to have an employment specialist.

Jointly Funded Work Incentives Planning: Six Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) are available statewide to provide all Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities access to benefits counseling services. This initiative is a collaboration between DHHS-OBH, OADS, and the Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services DVR/DBVI.

Jointly Funded Employment Workforce Development System and Website: Maine has an Employment Workforce Development System that is jointly funded by DHHS (DHHS-OBH and OADS) and DOL BRS DVR/DBVI. This provides infrastructure for coordinating employment specialist trainings, webinars and advance topical trainings as well as maintaining a database of certified employment specialists.

DHHS (DHHS-OBH and OADS) and DOL BRS DVR/DBVI also collaborate on the development and maintenance of a comprehensive website, www.employmentforme.com, providing information on best practices and resources for employment for people with disabilities. The website is broken into four target audience sections – job seekers, service providers, youth in transition and employers. Another collaboration that is ongoing is the training and certification infrastructure.

DHHS (DHHS-OBH and OADS) also made available Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative included training for Work and Benefits Navigators, the development of an advanced Work and Benefits Navigator training for Employment Specialists, the development of a Pathways to Employment infographic, and training in Individual Placement and Support and Supported Employment.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

I. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;

In PY 2020, over 8000 individuals received services through Maine DVR.

–At the time of the state plan draft, DVR had 88 staff in the following positions:

Bureau Director - 1

DVR Director - 1

Systems Improvement & Quality Assurance Director - 0

DVR Assistant Director - 1

Regional Manager – 4

Casework Supervisor - 7

Rehabilitation Consultant - 4

Management Analyst - 1

Procurement and Contract specialist - 1

Rehabilitation Counselor II - 50

Rehabilitation Counselor I - 7

Support Staff - 11

Maine DVR averaged a 15 % turnover rate for Rehabilitation Counselor II's (RCII) VR Counselors in FFY 20. There are currently 17 RC II positions that are vacant. Maine's turnover rate continues to be deeply affected by the tight labor market and retirement, given the age of its workforce and less competitive wages when compared to private sector employment. VR Counselors are being actively sought by private sector employers who offer higher pay, work from home positions and other benefits. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted staffing rates. Assuming retention levels remain consistent, it can be projected that DVR staffing needs could require as many as 19 new Rehabilitation Counselors in the next 5 years. The average turnover rate for non–rehabilitation counselor staff has been relatively consistent, approximately 13–15 percent annually. In examining staffing patterns of all other DVR staff, the turnover rate is approximately 17 percent. During FFY 2020, DVR hired 13 Rehabilitation Counselor II's. At the time of this writing 28 positions (various roles) are vacant across the agency. DVR and DBVI work closely together on strategies regarding recruitment and retention - particularly in regards to communication with Maine state universities with rehabilitation programs.

II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

When applying the average turnover rates, it can be forecasted that Maine DVR will need to replace:

1 Regional Manager,

3 Casework Supervisors,

7 Paraprofessionals,

3 Clerical/Support Personnel and

0 Rehabilitation Consultants

III. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

Within the next five years. The projections for staff vacancies are dependent upon current levels of funding as well as stability in state hiring and contracts. Maine DVR will keep RSA apprised of developments on this issue

Projected vacancies over the next 5 years:

- Director Vocational Rehabilitation: 0 Vacancies
- Director SIQA: 1 Vacancy
- Director, Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened: 0 Vacancy
- Assistant Director Vocational Rehabilitation: 0 Vacancies
- Regional Manager: 1 Vacancy
- Casework Supervisor: 3 Vacancies.
- Rehabilitation Consultant: 0 Vacancies
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II: 15 Vacancies
- Paraprofessional: 2 Vacancies
- Support Personnel: 3 Vacancies

DVR estimates that approximately 8500 individuals with disabilities will be served by Vocational Rehabilitation in PY 2022. Reorganization and reclassification of DVR positions is occurring in light of new learning during the pandemic – as well as an ongoing tight labor market. Service delivery is performed by Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) staff, consisting of 68 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II's (including Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf), 10 Rehabilitation Counselor I's, eight Casework Supervisors, and three Regional Managers. DVR staff receives administrative and organizational support and guidance from the Director of DVR, the Assistant Director of DVR, the Director of SIQA (Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance), the Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, , and four Rehabilitation Consultants (program specialists), one management analyst, two Clerical Supervisors, and support services from 12 office personnel. DVR reserves up to three lines for use for interns.

B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

The University of Southern Maine (USM) is the only in–state institution of higher education offering a graduate program which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Act. In the last academic year, 34 students were enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science

in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education. USM did not pursue the recent competition for RSA's Long-term Training Grant. The University of Massachusetts Boston is now the nearest university which received funding under this program.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), in partnership with the University of Southern Maine, began offering an accelerated program in the Fall of 2015 that allows counseling students to graduate with a master's degree a year sooner. Graduates of the five–year program will be able to quality for both State licensing for counseling and national certification for rehabilitation counseling. The Program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

UMF typically graduates 16-20 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. When combined with experience, this new program will meet the standards set forth under WIOA.

This year Maine DVR has launched an initiative to offer paid internship slots for a limited number of graduate and undergraduate students. It is hoped that the offer of paid internships will attract a more diverse group of interns – including those who could not afford to participate in an unpaid internship. Internships have been an effective way to expose undergraduates to the world of vocational rehabilitation and to begin to create a career ladder.

DVR has limited resources to pay educational/training costs associated with its efforts to develop and maintain a fully qualified staff and, as such, conducts ongoing investigation of distance education programs that offer RSA grant funding to participants to share with staff who are interested in also moving up the career ladder with Maine DVR.

II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

During PY 20:

The University of Southern Maine had 34 students enrolled in its Master's of Science Degree in Counseling with a Concentration in Rehabilitation.

The University of Maine at Farmington had approximately 75 students enrolled in its Bachelor of Science Degree in Rehabilitation Services.

III. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

Graduates:

University of Southern Maine graduated less than 8 individuals who were eligible to sit for the CRC (MS in Counseling - Rehab Concentration). These individuals would meet minimum qualifications for DVR's Rehabilitation Counselor II positions.

University of Maine at Farmington graduated 16- 20 individuals who had an undergraduate preparation in Rehabilitation Services but were not eligible to sit for the CRC. Unless these individuals had at least two years of prior work experience in a related field, they would not be able to meet minimum qualification for DVR's Rehabilitation Counselor II positions - however they may be considered for Rehabilitation Counselor I positions.

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

DVR, with the support of the Commissioner of the Department of Labor, continues to work closely with the State of Maine's Bureau of Human Resources (BHR) to fill vacancies. Recent recruitment efforts have included electronic vacancy postings on national and State of Maine websites, local postings with community providers and information sharing with the University of Maine at Farmington (undergraduate) and the University of Southern Maine (graduate) rehabilitation programs. .

Recruitment efforts for fully qualified rehabilitation counselors have become increasingly difficult, in comparison to previous years. COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenge to fill positions. Increasingly, Maine DVR VR counselor positions are competing for candidates with case management agencies and private programs that offer increased salary and flexibility. While client applications fell during the initial months of the pandemic, those numbers are beginning to rebound, and DVR will need to have staffing to meet these needs. Positions are remaining vacant for extended periods – in most cases – for some months.

A new initiative to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion has included efforts to attract and retain a diverse workforce. To support that effort, Maine DVR has begun to offer paid internships for a limited number of undergraduate and graduate students from the rehabilitation programs at the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Southern Maine. Internships have been an effective means to introduce the world of state agency vocational rehabilitation services and create a pathway into employment. To strengthen the partnership with the universities, a Casework Supervisor sits on the Advisory Board of the University of Southern Maine's Rehabilitation Counseling program and DVR staff are regularly asked to be speakers to undergraduate and graduate students. DVR invites USM and UMF faculty to participate in training opportunities throughout the year.

DVR works closely with the Bureau of Human Resources to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to access Maine State Government's "Special Appointment" program. DVR has several employees with disabilities and provides appropriate accessibility accommodations to support employment. The State of Maine is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.

An area of concern for Maine DVR is the retention of qualified staff. DVR is committed to offering personnel development opportunities that enhance the work environment and support service delivery. Intensive training efforts in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategies as well as Motivational Interviewing are helping to increase staff skill level while also promoting opportunities for more staff to become involved in agency-wide improvement efforts. DVR hosted a "lunch and learn" panel discussion for staff who had an interest in promotional opportunities within the agency. Panel members shared their career paths, reflected on steps they took to prepare themselves for career growth and talked about the transition to a new role and challenges and supports that were helpful to them. Feedback from the session was very positive. DVR continues to review and assess essential job functions within the Division in view of the CSPD requirements and seeks the development of alternative and evidence–based approaches in the provision and maintenance of high-quality service delivery. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed DVR to learn more about remote work and its impact on delivery of client services. Staff surveys conducted during the pandemic indicate that opportunities to continue hybrid (remote/in-person) work schedules post-pandemic will be key to retaining staff.

3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

With the implementation of WIOA and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, Maine DVR has revisited its personnel requirements and hiring practices. Maine DVR recognizes that the standards for rehabilitation counseling personnel outlined in WIOA represent the minimum standards for qualification. These standards require a minimum of attainment of a baccalaureate degree in a field of study reasonably related to vocational rehabilitation, to indicate a level of competency and skill demonstrating basic preparation in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, supported employment, customized employment, economics, or another field that reasonably prepares individuals to work with consumers and employers; and

(2) Demonstrated paid or unpaid experience, for not less than one year, consisting of -

(i) Direct work with individuals with disabilities in a setting such as an independent living center;

(ii) Direct service or advocacy activities that provide such individual with experience and skills in working with individuals with disabilities; or

(iii) Direct experience in competitive integrated employment environments as an employer, as a small business owner or operator, or in self-employment, or other experience in human resources or recruitment, or experience in supervising employees, training, or other activities; or

Maine DVR continues to give priority to applicants and staff who possess master's degrees in counseling or a counseling–related degree, defined as Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, Rehabilitation and Counseling in alignment with WIOA's alternative requirement of attainment of a master's or doctoral degree in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related fields.

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

When recruiting or hiring new staff, Maine DVR gives preferences to those with a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, a closely related master's degree in Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, or Counseling or having Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRC). Through the interview process, DVR assesses the applicant's ability to demonstrate an understanding of the labor force and needs of individuals with disabilities. Maine DVR supports staff to obtain and practice 21st century skills through opportunities for training through RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers and state and local workforce development partners, including Maine DOL's Center for Workforce Research and Information.

DVR partners with DBVI to ensure active participation and representation on regional workforce boards across the State. Information is shared with DVR staff to provide local county workforce trends, high growth and demand industries, career pathways and future workforce needs. DVR's presence on these boards allows for increased awareness of hiring individuals with disabilities to local employers.

DVR is co-located with the Bureau of Employment Services statewide in CareerCenters. This co-location allows for increased collaboration on information sharing, co-enrollment opportunities, dual employer engagement and training opportunities. WIOA Memoranda of Understanding

have also increased discussion of needs, delivery of training and collaborative work across all CareerCenter partners.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A. A SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

Staff development is delivered through formal and informal modalities, internal and external. DVR employees participate in annual performance reviews, a portion of which specifically addresses personnel development. At these reviews, staff and supervisors jointly identify training required to address performance enhancement.

B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.

DVR completed two, four-week New Counselor Training (NCT) series to incoming RCI's and RCII's. The series covers over 60 topics pertaining to the delivery of Vocational Rehabilitation services.

DVR and DBVI supervisors are involved in weekly MI supervision group to enhance and support the ongoing technique of Motivational Interviewing.

DVR staff completed Motivational Interviewing bootcamp. This training was offered regionally over the course of a year to engage small group discussion to highlight MI practices.

DVR and DBVI leadership attended the three-part Ability to Execute (A2E) training offered by McKinsey and Company.

DVR maintains numerous recorded webinars on its intranet site – allowing easy access for ongoing refreshers as needed.

To promote better use of the agency's case management system – AWARE – the Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance Unit held weekly AWARE drop-in sessions to present content and respond to questions and needs from the field.

A sample of trainings that staff attended PY20:

Apprenticeship Town Hall

Motivational Interviewing- RCI and RCII focus

Excel 101- Adult Education

Work and Benefits Navigator Training (Part I and Part 2)

New Counselor Training (2x)

Apprenticeship Townhall

DVR Eligibility Training

Get Aware Live: Celebrating 100th Anniversary of Vocational Rehabilitation

WOWI Refresher

Virtual Job Shadow

Self-Employment Quarterly

Apprenticeship Townhall

Motivational Interviewing- Supervisor focus

McKinsey Leadership Training

PEERS

Windmills – Two staff were certified as trainers

Governor Office Opioid Response Seminar Series

McKinsey A2EE Train the Trainer

Transition Summit

OOS4 Implementation and Training

Virtual Job Shadow

5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

DVR has four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf positions – one is currently vacant. The other three Counselors are Deaf users of ASL. The Director of the Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened (who is Deaf himself) supervises the four Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and provides direction, education and outreach on issues impacting individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

As a state with a high percentage of older residents, there has been an increasing need to serve individuals who have age–related hearing loss and who wish to remain working. The Division Director has offered many workshops on deaf awareness/etiquette to employers, providers and state agencies this year to help increase awareness of promoting inclusion of employees who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Late Deafened. The Division Director meets once a month with his staff to address topics such as best practices in case management, communication strategies for individuals who use gestural communication for their primary mode of communication, among many other topics.

Staff who are Deaf have videophones at their desks for visual communication with consumers. During the pandemic, Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf were able to use their laptops and cell phones for Zoom and other video communication DVR offices are co–located in Maine's CareerCenter network. CareerCenters offer telecommunications devices including Interpretype, Ubi Duo, Video links, Video Relay and Video Remote Interpreting. Captioning (CART) services are used frequently to ensure access for staff and clients alike and are provided as needed. Zoom and Microsoft TEAMS are available across the State of Maine IT enterprise system to promote remote access.

Spoken language interpreter services are accessed through a statewide contract for both in–person and remote interpreting. DVR has a small number of staff who are proficient in a language other than English.

DVR continues its collaborative efforts with the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired, University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind, and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project, (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects and provides technical assistance for students until the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. Although the program,

"Independence Without Fear" has discontinued, the collaboration has expanded to include the Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and A Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire. Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication for people with significant vision and hearing impairments, as well as other services that are available to the dual sensory population. HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population.

DVR, as an agency in the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL), adheres to MDOL Policy No. 009 on Language Access. The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) recognizes its obligation to provide linguistic access to services for individuals whose primary language is not English. Individuals for whom MDOL staff may need interpreter services include applicants, customers, family members, and/or companions. When MDOL staff does not speak the language needed, staff will inform the applicant/consumer that interpreter services are available to ensure equal access to programs and services provided by this Department and its contractors. Accordingly, it is the policy of MDOL to provide its staff with interpreter resources to be utilized in providing access to programs and services to Limited English Proficient persons as well as to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. This policy outlines guidelines and procedures for the use of such interpreter services. All programs, benefits or services provided by MDOL shall be made available to all eligible persons regardless of their abilities to speak, write and/or understand English and who are deaf or hard of hearing. MDOL will provide interpreter services at no cost to individuals applying for or participating in MDOL programs. MDOL will have policies and procedures which combine the use of in-person and telephone interpreter services as well as translated material necessary for effective communication. MDOL is committed to the continued evaluation and improvement of these services, as well as education of staff in available resources and procedures. Every other quarter, DVR's regularly scheduled meetings with Maine's protection and advocacy agency – Disability Rights Maine – focus on Deaf Services to identify and address emerging or systemic needs.

The State Rehabilitation Council and DVR have looked at the need to have more materials available in languages other than English. During the last year, DVR conducted a staff survey to learn more about language access needs in the field and inform decision-making.

6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

As outlined in Section 606 (Employment of Individuals with Disabilities) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, Maine DVR continually makes "positive efforts to employ and advance in employment qualified individuals with disabilities in programs assisted under this title". Approximately 25 Transition VR Counselors are assigned to work with the more than 200 Maine High Schools, as well as with out–of–school youth and youth attending private institutions. During PY 20 youth aged 15-22 represented over 41% of all DVR clients. However, this number should be considered to be lower than what would have been expected due to the negative impact of the pandemic on traditional outreach, school visits and other information sharing about VR services – as well as some families not prioritizing referrals to VR during this challenging time. Transition-age youth remain the fastest growing population served by DVR due to increased focus under WIOA on Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Maine DVR joins the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired in a Statewide Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Advisory Group that has increased its frequency of meetings during the pandemic from quarterly to monthly to promote best practices in the provision of VR transition services. During the last year, the group has focused on exchange of effective practices in providing remote service and maintaining engagement with youth, families, schools and employers. The group has particularly focused on increasing delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services during the pandemic – including through informational

interviews over Zoom, use of Virtual Job Shadow, Virtual Job Clubs and the Virtual Transition Career Exploration Workshop. .

As outlined in DVR's current Cooperative Agreement with the Maine Department of Education (DOE), DVR has provided technical assistance to DOE and school districts on disability–specific information and resources issues and issues concerning eligibility and referral for services as requested. The DVR Director is the Chair of the IDEA Part B State Advisory Panel which is responsible for advising DOE on issues related to students with disabilities ages 3–20 (now 3-22). The DVR director regularly presents to school groups on best practices for supporting work experience for youth through WIOA.

The DVR Director is also a member of the State Special Education Directors' Association (MADSEC). DVR and DBVI worked closely with the Maine Department of Education and developed an updated interagency Memorandum of Understanding in June 2018. During the coming year, the MOU will again be updated to reflect technical assistance and training efforts currently being provided to Maine through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACT-C). In January of 2021, the Maine Department of Education issued an administrative letter expanding the age of eligibility for special education services to an individual's 22nd birthday. The VR Director and a number of DVR staff have been involved in the Extended Eligibility Workgroup and joined a three-day transition summit held in the Summer 2021 with support from NTACT-C. Additionally, the DVR Director is representing DVR and the Maine Department of Labor on the LD 924 Taskforce which is charged to examine post-secondary services for young adults – particularly those with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

The most current CSNA was conducted in FFY 2019. It may be found at https://www.maine.gov/rehab/docs/2020/dvr/SRCNeedsAssessmentUpdatedChartsandTablesFFY2019.docx

To estimate the number of people eligible for DVR services in Maine, we use information from the American Community Survey (ACS), conducted each year by the United States Census Bureau.[1] In Maine, among the civilian noninstitutionalized population in 2013-2017, 16% reported a disability. The likelihood of having a disability varied by age – from 7% of people under 18 years of age to 53% of people 18 to 64 years old, and to 40% of those 65 and over. ((ACS), 2013-2017). The ACS is designed to provide both national and State level data on demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of U.S. households.

1.

a. **ACS Disability Characteristics**

To describe the population of individuals eligible for DVR services, the ACS was used to obtain the sample of individuals with a disability described above. The ACS includes several demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that are useful for this purpose. From 2013 through 2017, an average of 208,646 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 15.9% of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This proportion was higher to that of the United States, where an estimated 12.6% of residents had a disability. ((ACS), 2013-2017).

- The distribution of Maine residents with disabilities by age group is similar to the national distribution. Despite the state's older population, Maine has a slightly smaller share of residents over 64 years of age who have a disability (40%) than the U.S. share (41%). In Maine and the U.S., more than half of those with a disability are of working age (18 to 64 years).
- From 2013 through 2017, an estimated 14% of Maine's working-age adults had one or more disabilities. Of these individuals, 33% were employed compared to 80% of the working-age population without a disability. Maine's 33% employment to population ratio among working-age adults with disabilities was lower than the U.S. ratio of 36%.
- The likelihood of working varies widely by type of disabling condition. Persons with sensory difficulties are more likely to be employed than those with other disabilities.
- Educational attainment is positively associated with both employment and earnings. Among adults ages 25 to 64, 42% of those with disabilities have some post-secondary education, compared to 64% of adults with no disability. Only 16% have a four-year college degree or higher compared to 34% of adults without disabilities.
- Adults with disabilities are less likely to be employed than adults with no disability. Fewer than half work or seek work. From 2013 through 2017, 33% of working-age Mainers with disabilities was employed compared to 80% of those with no disability. In addition, the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities was more than three times that of other working age adults.
- Workers will disabilities tend to earn less than those with no disability. From 2013 to 2017, median earnings of Maine workers with disabilities were $18,434 in a twelve-month period, compared median earnings of $31,217 among Maine workers with no disability. The earnings gap between Maine and U.S. was more pronounced among earners with disabilities. The median for Maine earners with disabilities was $3,800 less than the comparable national median, compared to a gap of $1,700 between earners without disabilities.
- People with disabilities and their families may receive income support from two programs administered by the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA): Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). While SSDI and SSI target different populations, there is some program overlap. In 2017, the share of Maine residents receiving worker disability benefits from SSDI and/or SSI was 10% of resident population age 18 to 64, compared to 6% nationally.

    - **Are DVR Services Reaching the Eligible Population?**

To determine if there are certain segments of the eligible population that are not being reached by the DVR program, BRS compared the characteristics of ACS disability sample against information collected by the agency on current DVR individuals. Disability type information is not presented as a side-by-side comparison because the ACS disability measures are not comparable to the way DVR collects primary disability type from each applicant.

Findings

- DVR participants are generally less educated than the eligible population with 20% lacking a high school diploma versus only 18% in the ACS with a disability sample.
- DVR individuals are also more likely to be male (56% versus 44%).
- Table 4 indicates that DVR serves proportionately fewer individuals of racial or ethnic minorities than those identified in the ACS work disability population.

DVR goals and strategies to address these needs include:

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine's Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop a plan to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities in competitive integrated settings. b. DVR will work with DHHS's Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services including through proposed co-location of staff. c. Increase post-secondary education and employment participation for high school students on the Autism Spectrum through participation in the DVR-sponsored "Step Up" program – a 5-week summer residential program held on a college campus. Step Up includes a 3-credit undergraduate course, paid work experience, and social skill instruction among other components. d. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

[1] For more information on the ACS, see http://www.census.gov/acs

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Vocational rehabilitation services to minorities with disabilities in Maine have always been a challenge to DVR because of the state's relatively homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity. Residents are primarily White (94.6%) with small representation of Black (1.6%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Native Americans represent a historically recognizable group and Maine has nearly 18,500 tribal members who are located both on reservations and defined land, as well as scattered across the state. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. Unemployment figures among Micmac and Maliseet tribes range from 55% to 76%. DVR continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseet's, which was recently re-awarded a five-year Section 121 grant. The grant has been extended until 2025.

The FFY 19 data in the most recent CSNA highlighted that 92% of the VR population is White and 8% identify themselves as being members of a racial or ethnic minority - meaning that VR is likely serving a proportional racial mix - however additional efforts are being made to determine if there are pockets of underserved minority populations.

1.

    a. Minority Populations in Maine

Findings

- Most the DVR population is white, and the work disability population identified in the ACS is 5.7% compared to 8.1% for Maine DVR

Findings

- Although Region I only closed 29.2% of the cases in FFY 2019, 34.5% of the minorities served were in this region.

- Region II only closed 21.9% of the cases with the second highest percentage (25.8%) of minorities served in this region.
- Region III had the highest percentage of cases closed (25.8%) of which 19.3% of minorities were served in this region.

DVR has significantly invested in time and attention to building capacity among DVR staff to meet the needs of marginalized populations including those who are minorities - and in particular to identify gaps in service to diverse populations. Goals and strategies in this state plan that are targeted to meeting that need include

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies: a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training. b. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports. c. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools. d. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

a. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation. b. Conduct educational and outreach activities to community organizations to increase awareness of availability of DVR services. c. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services. d. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials. e. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Among the groups that DVR considers when examining who has been unserved or underserved by the VR program include: Individuals with minority status (including New Mainers and indigenous populations), Individuals reentering from the corrections system, older workers, Veterans, individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. Maine DVR is also beginning to examine the representation of individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ related to access to services.

To estimate the number of people eligible for DVR services in Maine, we use information from the American Community Survey (ACS), conducted each year by the United States Census Bureau. In Maine, among the civilian noninstitutionalized population in 2013-2017, 16% reported a disability. The likelihood of having a disability varied by age – from 7% of people under 18 years of age to 53% of people 18 to 64 years old, and to 40% of those 65 and over. ((ACS), 2013-2017). The ACS is designed to provide both national and State level data on demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of U.S. households.

Per DVR's most recent CSNA https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/ , the following discrepancies were noted between the population being served by DVR and those who may be eligible for services:

- DVR participants are generally less educated than the eligible population with 20% lacking a high school diploma versus only 18% in the ACS with a disability sample.
- DVR participants are more likely to be male (56% versus 44%)
- DVR serves proportionately few individuals of racial or ethnic minorities than those identified in the ACS work disability population.

These needs are being addressed through state plan goals and strategies including:

Objective 3.9: Applying a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens, Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+

Strategies: a. DVR will continue its work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes. b. DVR will develop and provide staff training o increase capacity to serve meet the employment needs of this population. c. DVR will review policies, forms, and other materials at least annually to ensure inclusive practices. . d. DVR will develop or adopt resources to meet employer needs – particularly around best practices in inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minority individuals.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine's TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies: a. Partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and FEDCAP, pilot activities in two locations that build interagency collaboration and braid services on behalf of program recipients. b. Enhance New Counselor Training with a poverty-informed module targeted to meeting the needs of individuals who receive these benefits.

D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Colocation in Maine's network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One–Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that are components of the statewide workforce system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The redesigned Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open positions.

Programs overseen by the Bureau of Employment services reported the following enrollment numbers and identified participants with disabilities. These numbers indicate that there are many opportunities for co-enrollment, particularly with the youth population:

DVR has reflected these needs in the following state plan goals and strategies:

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in cross-training on WIOA programs and partners to increase knowledge of available resources for clients and employers. b. DVR will work with WIOA core partners to increase use of a common referral form. c. DVR will work with partners at the local, regional and state level to deliver job fairs, targeted training, and other activities to

meet the needs of jobseekers with disabilities. d. DVR will work with WIOA partners to promote accessibility of CareerCenter programs and services.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies: a. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners. b. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards. c. DVR will engage MDOL's Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities. d. DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Category 3 but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

Labor Exchange Self Service: 135,733 – disability info n/a

Labor Exchange Employment Services: 2,494 – 267 individuals with a disability or 10.7%

Adult Services – 580 – 75 individuals with a disability or 12.9 %

Dislocated Worker – 358 – 31 individuals with a disability or 8.7%

Youth – 395 – 195 individuals with a disability or 53.4%

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts, including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with disabilities. There are concerns about the accuracy of the current case management database; the system defines disability status within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Individuals who have a disability, which does not constitute a significant barrier to employment, are often not recorded as having a disability at all. Administrative override is required to update a person's disability status when they disclose post-enrollment.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, CareerCenter services moved to a virtual model that provided increased access for individuals who were not able to travel to a physical location. Live chat and other features allowed for quicker response to jobseekers' questions and needs

Research has shown that the number of people with disabilities served by CareerCenters is under-reported. According to 2020 estimates from the American Community Survey, people with disabilities comprise 16% of Maine's working age population. ((ACS), 2015-2019) . With the exception of the youth population, it would appear that people with disabilities are underrepresented in usage of workforce services. For additional information see Maine's WIOA State Plan for PY 20-23 and DVR's CSNA https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

Since passage of WIOA and promulgation of the final rules, Maine DVR has worked to develop, adopt and implement procedural guidance, programming and training to support the identification and registration of students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Through previously established relationships with school districts and through outreach initiatives and pilot activities, Maine DVR has sought to offer Pre-Employment Transition Services across the state. According to the most recent 2019 data from the Maine Department of Education, there are 10, 450 students from ages 14-20 receiving special education services across the state. Additionally, approximately 3000 students

grade 9-12 were identified as having a 504 plan. While overall numbers of school-age students have dropped in Maine, the numbers and percentage of students enrolled in special education services continue to increase. In 2015, 17.25 % of Maine students received special education services; in 2019 this number had risen to 18.9 %. Maine DVR has targeted the problem of early exiters from VR services and is collecting data and implementing targeted initiatives for transition-age youth designed to engage youth with disabilities and get them involved in community-based work experiences and other work-based learning sooner.

- Autism numbers continue to grow with a total number of students (n=859) in 2016, further analysis reveals that this number will be increasing significantly in the coming years.
- While not all of these potentially eligible students will become VR clients, based on most recent analysis, there may be greater capacity in certain areas of the state than others. In particular, Region I (Cumberland and York) has the potential to be asked to serve a greater number of transition-age clients per counselor in comparison to Region III (Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Somerset, and Waldo) and Region V (Aroostook).
- In Region II (Androscoggin, Franklin, Oxford, and Sagadahoc) and Region IV (Hancock, Piscataquis, Penobscot and Washington), there appears to be more equitable ratio of students to counselors. For more information see CSNA at · https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

As an Employment First state, Maine state agencies believe that employment should be a first and preferred service option, as identified in DVR's goals and strategies, this begins with early career exploration and preparation and paid work experience before high school exit.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

While DVR has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

3. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

Since the passage of WIOA and promulgation of final rules, DVR has worked closely with the Maine Department of Education to understand the numbers of students with disabilities in Maine who are eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. At the local education agency level, this has played out as VR counselors have worked with individual school districts to determine what services are already being provided in the school, what other service providers are involved, and how the LEA can partner with DVR to jointly deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education and outreach to LEA's has focused on the value of starting early, at age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services. Maine Department of Education's Special Services IDEA monitoring team has reinforced this message by providing VR materials during monitoring visits along with examples of how Pre-Employment Transition Services can inform the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

From 2016-2021, DVR participated in a RSA-Funded Disability Innovation Fund Grant that studied the application of two interventions (Progressive Employment and Enhanced-Jobs for Maine's Grads). The findings from that grant have been shared and are being applied within DVR transition services. More information about the findings of this study may be found at https://www.maine.gov/rehab/grants/twbl/ .

Maine DVR has assigned a Transition VR Counselor to every high school in the state. Students are offered Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the LEA on an individualized district by district plan. l. Over 300 transition age youth participated in Paid Work Experiences during 2019 and during the pandemic an array of virtual services were developed and delivered as well as a community-based transition services - these included virtual informational interviews, virtual job club, Virtual Job Shadow, and Virtual Transition Career Exploration Workshop.

In the FFY 2019 needs assessment there were 9,338 students with disabilities in Maine schools - which may be considered an approximate number of those who are likely eligible for VR's Pre-ETS and transition services. A significant number (859) were students identified with Autism. As outlined in the goals and strategies, DVR has responded to those numbers by launching two new initiatives - one, a research project in conjunction with the University of Maine delivers evidence-based social skills curriculum - PEERS - to VR clients via telehealth to assist them to build necessary skills for post-secondary success. Another initiative the "Step Up Program" is a residential 5-week summer program on the University of Maine campus that brings students who are interested in post-secondary education together to learn about college life and on-campus services, take a 3-credit course, have a paid work experience and participate in social skill development.

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K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2015 through 2019, just over 210,000 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16 percent of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. Just over half of Maine people with a disability are considered of working-age 18-64. This would mean that an estimate of possible VR eligible individuals could be as high as 100,000 for FFY 2023.

2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

A. THE VR PROGRAM;

In FFY 21 , DVR served 7,809 individuals. Based on projected estimates impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, estimates for FFY 22 and FFY 23 are for 8,500 individuals served each year.

B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

Maine DVR was not able to expend Supported Employment grant funds in recent fiscal years. In FFY 21, DVR received $252,000 in Supported Employment grant funding. DVR has struggled to expend Supported Employment funds in recent years due to limitations on how funding may be used. Specifically, DVR has demand for Supported Employment (A) funds but not the matching demand for Supported Employment (B) funds. Supported Employment (A) funds may only be drawn down at the same amount as Supported Employment (B) funds are – which has resulted

in Supported Employment funds being returned.
Using SE funds and VR funds, DVR expects to serve 1000 individuals in supported employment in FFY 2023.

C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

The expected services provision for FFY 22and FFY 23 by priority category is as follows:

FFY 22

OOS 1 – 4590 = 54%

OOS 2 –3902 = 46%

OOS 3 – 8 = .1%

OOS 4 – n/a

FFY 23

OOS 1 - 4590 = 54%

OOS 2 - 3910 = 46%

OOS 3 - n/a

OOS 4 - n/a

3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

At the time of this State Plan - DVR has 514 individuals who are in delayed status in Categories OOS3 and OOS 4 and are unable to be served.

During FFY 2016, DVR determined that it could no longer serve individuals in OOS Category 3 due to lack of resources. The projected number of clients to receive services after being found eligible is 8500 of which 6,000 are expected to be served under an employment plan. A very small number of pen cases in Category 3 were found eligible before the waitlist was established and they will continue to be served, .

Following identification of a misalignment in Order of Selection categories at the time of the last Unified State Plan in 2020, RSA provided technical assistance to Maine. Maine DVR undertook a rule change in 2021 to resolve this misalignment by adding a new Order of Selection Category 4 "All other qualified individuals". OOS Category 4 is currently also in delayed status.

A recent law requiring hearing aids to be covered by Maine insurance companies is also predicted to reduce applications for VR services for individuals who have fewer barriers to employment and would have been found eligible in Categories 3 or 4.

While DVR is currently fiscally able to serve individuals who are on the waitlist, severe staffing instability that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic would make it irresponsible to open the waitlist at this time.

4. THE COST OF SERVICES FOR THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES. IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION, IDENTIFY THE COST OF SERVICES FOR EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY.

to serve a total of 7,809 clients in all case statuses from Application to Closure (including supported employment and Pre-ETS but excluding those on the OOS 3 delayed status waitlist). DVR estimates the following costs for each priority category going forward in FFY 22 & 23.

For FFY 22 and FY 23 - $19,000,000

OOS Category 1 - $ 10,260,000 (4590 clients)

OOS Category 2 - $8,690,000 (3905 clients)

OOS Category 3 - $50,000 (5 clients)

OOS Category 3 - Delayed (Waitlist) Status - n/a

OOS Category 4 – Delayed (Waitlist) Status – n/a

L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS

Maine DVR, in concert with the DVR SRC has discussed State Plan goals and progress at its meetings throughout the year which has aided development of the plan. The SRC provides data on consumer satisfaction which is reviewed along with DVR's triennial customer satisfaction assessment.

2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine's workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment.

Goal 2

All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Goal 3

All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design, informed choice and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Goal 4

Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine's workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;

Maine DVR completed its comprehensive needs assessment using FFY 2019 data and presented it to the State Rehabilitation Council for comment. The State Rehabilitation Council reviewed the Assessment and associated data when considering input to the goals and strategies included in this plan. DVR will begin work shortly with the SRC on a FFY22 CSNA .

B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND

Maine tracks progress on Common Performance Measures - as well as some key (former) Standards and Indicators - in the Maine AWARE case management system. This software enables Maine DVR to track its progress in real time. Maine DVR relies heavily on data for informed decision making and has incorporated the quarterly Data Dashboards released by RSA in this data review. DVR collects and analyzes data through the agency's Division for Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance in collaboration with agency leadership.

Data is shared across the agency (through monthly, quarterly and annual reports) to promote accountability and increased understanding of trends, outcomes, and agency needs. All VR counselors, supervisors, and managers have been trained on Common Performance Measures and Performance Management Forms goals were updated for all VR counselors and casework supervisors to increase alignment of practice and performance with the Common Performance Measures.

C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.

No recommendations from SRC to DVR in their most recent Annual Report.

During DVR's 2017 RSA monitoring, two program areas were identified as needing improvement - time to eligibility and time to IPE development. These had also been identified by DVR prior to the monitoring and steps had begun to be taken to demonstrate improvement. Current efforts include:

• Targeted new counselor and ongoing staff training on strategies to determine eligibility within 60 days

• Targeted new counselor and ongoing staff training on strategies to develop an initial IPE within 90 days

- Addition of Performance Management objectives concerning 60- and 90-day timelines for VR Counselors and Casework Supervisors

• Quarterly reporting by region to assess progress

• Training for supervisors and managers on supporting VR counselors to meet both standards.

- Quarterly case reviews to document progress and identify areas of continued need.

• Regular discussion and data sharing with the State Rehabilitation Council regarding these two areas of need.

DVR has been notified by RSA that they will conduct a Corrective Action Plan virtual visit during March 2022 to follow-up to the 2017 monitoring findings.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

If services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals who apply, the Director of DVR will implement an Order of Selection (OOS) as set forth in this section. After determining eligibility counselors must assign a priority category and follow the Order of Selection set forth below for the provision of services. Individuals determined eligible prior to the date of implementation of the Order of Selection will continue to receive cost services. Maine DVR will notify all eligible individuals of the priority categories in the Order of Selection. Eligible individuals in priority categories not currently being served will be notified in writing of their assignment to a category and their right to appeal their category assignment.

Whether in an Order of Selection or not, Maine DVR has assigned all applicants to an OOS category to ensure that DVR continues to serve the most significantly disabled. This was upon the advice of RSA staff during the 2011 Section107 Monitoring review. The priority category shall be assigned, based on their level of significance of disability; "Level of significance of disability" means one of the following: Priority Category 1, " individual with a most significant disability"; Priority Category 2, "individual with a significant disability"; Priority Category 3, "individual with a significant disability" or Priority Category 4 " All other eligible individuals" . Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application. Eligible individuals who do not meet the Order of Selection category currently being served will have access to services through information and referral. Individuals will be appropriately referred to other programs – including those of other core WIOA partners.

B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

In late 2015, DVR was made aware of a potential shortfall in funding. Further analysis of the reasons behind the projected shortfall revealed: • The required 15% Title I set–aside for Pre-Employment Transition Services is reducing the funding available for all other clients other than Students with Disabilities. • Case service costs and expenditures have increased over the past year by approximately 20%, mostly due to an increase in applications by individuals seeking assistance with hearing aid costs • DVR has increased the numbers of individuals served and successfully closed in employment in each of the last five years while funding has not increased. • A high level of staff vacancies over the last year may result in immediate and premature referrals to fee–for–service providers.

When DVR became aware of the situation, the State Rehabilitation Council was advised and offered feedback and support for the implementation of an Order of Selection for Category 3 via their regularly scheduled executive committee and full group meetings. Additionally, in December 2015 two phone calls were held with RSA to apprise them of the situation.

Following the submission of the 2020 WIOA State Plan, DVR was notified by RSA of an error in the definition of Order of Selection Category 2. To correct this error with the least impact to clients, DVR consulted with RSA, the SRC and stakeholders and changed its rules to add Order of Selection Category 4 in 2021 – "All other eligible individuals". In accordance with Maine DVR's State Plan and policy guidance, this Priority Category also remains closed.

At the time of these modifications, DVR's fiscal situation has improved enough to allow for opening of the two closed OOS Categories – however, the dire shortage of staff during the COVID -19 pandemic has made opening the waitlist at this time irresponsible as DVR needs to have the

human resources to be able to provide high quality services. DVR continues to work closely with the State Rehabilitation Council and with its fiscal and quality assurance units to determine when stability of human resources has been reached such that the waitlist can be eliminated and OOS Categories 3 and 4 reopened.

DVR regularly reviews the waitlist status and is actively exploring opportunities to ensure that individuals who are found eligible in Categories 3 and 4 have awareness and access to other resources in the community.

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

Maine implemented an Order of Selection for Category 3 on January 18, 2016 and for Category 4 upon rule change and subsequent implementation in December 2021. The projected numbers of clients to be served under an IPE is 6000 in FFY 2022and FFY 2023. The proposed case service budget is $ 6, 000,000. The expected service provision by category is as follows: OOS Category 1 = 54%= $ 3,240,000

OOS Category 2 = 46 % = $ 2,700,000

OOS Category 3 = .1% = $ 60,000 (individuals found eligible prior to waitlist implementation)

Maine DVR projects that FFY 22 and FFY 23 closure goals will be 500 and 750 due to extended impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing waitlist – as well as focus on measurable skill gain and credential attainment to create opportunities for meaningful career pathways before VR exit. .

OOS 1 - 54% =Closures (270 FFY 22, 405 FFY 23)

OOS 2 - 46% =Closures (225 FFY 22, 345 FFY 23)

OOS 3 - 0.1% = Closures (5 FFY 22, 0 FFY23)

00S 4 – n/a = 0 Closures

Total: 500 – FFY 2022, 750 – FFY 2023

D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

Per FFY 21 data, DVR estimates that it will take individuals in each OOS category the following time to reach their IPE goals

OOS 1- 27 months (average)

OOS 2 - 19 months (average)

OOS 3 - 73 months (Based on 1 case closure)(note - given the small number of cases served in OOS 3 due to the waitlist the average is impacted by an outlier case)

OOS 4 – n/a

E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Individuals with disabilities shall be served first based on significance of disability and second by date of application in the following priority order: Priority Category 1, “most significantly disabled”; Priority Category 2, “significantly disabled”; Priority Category 3, “significantly disabled” or Priority Category 4 “All other eligible”. Individuals in Priority Category 2 will be served only after all individuals in Category 1 receive services.

2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT

Maine DVR has not selected to serve eligible individuals in this manner.

N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine's workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment.

Goal 2

All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine's Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop a plan to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities in competitive integrated settings. b. DVR will work with DHHS's Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services including through proposed co-location of staff. d. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

Maine DVR places a priority on serving individuals with the most significant disabilities including those in need of supported employment. While DVR is able to expend all SE-A funds, the requirements tying SE-A spending to SE-B has been challenging due to the limited need currently to expend SE-B funds in accordance with federal guidelines. Coordination with other state agency partners, focus on employment fit and natural supports, and employer-provided supports have minimized the need to expend SE-B funds for extended periods and thus has limited SE-A expenditures. When post-job placement expenditures that could be charged to the SE-A are not able to be charged because they exceed what has been expended under SE-B, DVR uses VR grant funds for those expenses as they are allowable under the VR grant. This ensures the provision of all needed supported employment services. DVR will continue to work with partners and will continue to provide training for staff on supported employment. DVR's Pre-ETS work will also help to build a pipeline of more youth who are entering employment - including those with the most significant disabilities who may need supported employment supports.

2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING:

A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND

Maine DVR has developed procedural guidance for staff on the use of extended services for youth. This guidance states that DVR will make available extended services for youth with the most significant disabilities in suppported employment for a period not to exceed four years or until such time that a youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability. Extended services are defined as ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support an individual with the most significant disability in supported employment. During the comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs it may be determined that a youth with a most significant disability will benefit from supported employment services and may need to access extended support services.

If the youth does not have access to extended support services through a comparable benefit, and other supports are not available or do not meet the client's needs, the VR counselor will work with the client and guardian such that there is agreement that the employment placement and extended services with or without assistive technology and accommodations will enable the youth to develop adequate natural supports such that other supports are not needed or will connect them with other sources of support.

DVR will authorize one year of extended supports at a time. In limited individualized circumstances, the plan may be updated for an additional time period, up to one year at a time but under no circumstances for longer than four years or after the youth turns 25.

B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES.

DVR has a close working relationship with our partners at DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and Office of Behavioral Health a procedural directive, spells out how waiver services will fund career planning and other discovery activities and will coordinate with a referral to DVR who will work with the case manager and agency to proceed with job development and perhaps further exploration as needed. Then, when an individual has been successfully placed in a job and is stable and closed out successfully (may utilize extended services for this as needed), waiver funds will then pick up again and cover long term support services (usually job coaching), which will help the individual continue to remain stable on the job. This agreement is being updated at the time of this State Plan.

O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

These Goals, Objectives and Strategies to attain PY 2020-2023 goals developed based on the recommendations from the most recent Statewide Needs Assessment as well as input from the State Rehabilitation Council.

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine's workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment

Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2,636 in PY 2018 to 2, 500 in PY 2020 and further reducing to 2, 000 in PY 2023.

Strategies: a. Provide staff training on techniques that promote engagement – such as Motivational Interviewing and Progressive Employment b. Explore technological options to promote regular communication between clients and VR counselors c. Promote retention of qualified staff through analysis of reasons for departure and development of retention approaches informed by learning through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 1,769 in PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY 2023 - leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies: a. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities, DVR will support at least 300 students with disabilities to have paid work experiences annually during PY 2020 through PY 2023. b. Maine DVR - in collaboration with DBVI and with support from PolicyWorks – will launch a statewide peer mentoring effort during PY 2022. Peer mentoring will be provided by "near peers" to support preparation for post-secondary education and employment. c. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include through joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways. d. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education's Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs. e. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children's behavioral health services. f. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow. g. Maine DVR will work with Maine's Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities h. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will develop and deliver targeted Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School. i. Maine DVR will explore opportunities to support delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with Job Corps and YouthBuild programming. j. Maine DVR will participate in the Cross-Agency Council on Transition and support inclusion of DVR clients in the "Youth Advisory Group" to receive feedback and input on needed transition services and related policies. k. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine's Economic Development plan - collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation. l. Maine DVR will disseminate, implement and sustain promising practices and lessons learned for work-based learning from the RSA-funded Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant.

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients' Individualized Plans for Employment.

Strategies: a. Deliver joint training opportunities for DVR staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers on best practices in the use of Career Pathways. b. Provide training for DVR staff on using the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs to promote use of Apprenticeship and self-employment as approaches to Career Pathways c. DVR will build on pilot efforts in partnership with the Maine Department of Labor's Apprenticeship program to develop

statewide policies and practices to promote increased use of Apprenticeship as a Career Pathways strategy. d. DVR will work with DBVI and the Maine Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Program to ensure that clients who Deaf/Hard of Hearing or who have significant disabilities are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine. e. Open and closed case reviews will monitor for inclusion of career pathway strategies.

f. DVR will participate in RSA-funded Technical Assistance Centers' training and assistance on utilization of Career Pathways strategies

Objective 1.4: Through lessons learned from the use of Progressive Employment, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce system partners.

Strategies: a.. b. Partner with local Chambers of Commerce, the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), and others to expand business outreach/network. c. Actively participate in the Statewide Workforce Action Team (SWAT) that is made of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) core partners and others in the workforce development system to grow and diversify Maine's workforce through targeted outreach to employers. d. Develop, support and maintain a team of DVR staff across the state to function as a Business Relations Team – including in partnership with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired business relations staff.

Goal 2 All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in categories 3 and 4 in the future.

Objective 2.1: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (90%) in determining eligibility within 60 days of receiving an application for DVR services. DVR will progress from 79.7% in PY2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2021 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2022-2023.

Strategies: a. Collect data on eligibility determination and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best practices in the field. b. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in eligibility determination – including use of strategies provided through technical assistance provided by RSA c. Provide education and outreach on the use and ease of new electronic options to access and submit an application and supporting materials for DVR services.

Objective 2.2: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (90%) in timely plan development by increasing the percentage of clients who are have an Individualized Plan for Employment developed within 90 days from 78.9% in PY 2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

Strategies: a. Collect data on timely plan development and disseminate quarterly to DVR supervisors and managers to support best staff practices in the field. b. Deliver staff training and supervision on best practices in IPE plan development and Order of Selection (OOS) determination. c. Increase use of the Career Exploration Workshop, which has been shown to decrease case length time. d. Work closely with the Maine Department of Education to ensure implementation of the joint Cooperative Agreement and best practice guidelines on referral and timely application for transition age students.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine's Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with Maine DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Maine Department of Education to develop a plan to improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities in competitive integrated settings. b. DVR will work with DHHS's Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide joint education and outreach to individuals, families, case managers and other providers, on the benefits of employment and the process to access DVR services including through proposed co-location of staff.. c. Increase post-secondary education and employment participation for high school students on the Autism Spectrum through participation in the DVR-sponsored "Step Up" program – a 5-week summer residential program held on a college campus. Step Up includes a 3-credit undergraduate course, paid work experience, and social skill instruction among other components. d. Continue to provide access to and training on the BRIDGE – Career Exploration Workshop including virtual modules developed with input from self-advocates.

Objective 2.4: Maine DVR clients will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services – including the use of qualified Community Rehabilitation Providers.

Strategies: a. DVR will maintain and review data quarterly on the use of Community Rehabilitation Providers and related outcomes. b. DVR will partner with other state agencies to grow and maintain professional development for employment support providers through Maine's Employment for ME Workforce Development system leading to increased employment support availability across systems. C. Maine DVR will pilot the use of internal staff to provide job coaching and employment specialist services in hard-to-serve regions.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine's federally- funded Assistive Technology program. b. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate. c. DVR will develop in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services through the support of two to three DVR staff in the new University of Maine at Farmington post-bachelor's certificate in Assistive Technology Studies.

Goal 3: All individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design, informed choice, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies: a. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training. b. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports. c. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools. d. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are "New Mainers" and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and following these strategies:

a. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation. b. Conduct educational and outreach

activities to community organizations to increase awareness of availability of DVR services. c. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services. d. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials. e. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Building on a successful pilot effort, Maine DVR will partner with the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Employment Services to expand delivery of a targeted pre-release "Career Exploration Workshop" to state and county correctional facilities throughout the state. b. Strengthen DVR participation in the Reentry Network and other justice advisory groups - leading to increased knowledge of resources and supports to promote employment and reduce recidivism. C. Maintain corrections liaisons in each office. Liaisons will be paired with regional correctional facilities leading to increased collaboration and timely pre-release referrals. Liaisons will participate in joint DVR/Department of Corrections quarterly meetings leading to increased coordination of services for mutual clients. d. Provide annual staff training on best practices leading to successful employment for individuals with a criminal history. e. Increased access to Pre-Employment and other Transition services for youth through coordination with Maine Youth Center staff and educators.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Continue to collaborate with Bureau of Employment Services' Veterans Services leading to increased co-enrollment opportunities for veterans with disabilities. b. DVR will maintain "Veterans Liaisons" in each office. Liaisons will participate in quarterly Bureau of Employment Services' Veterans Services team meetings to exchange information and plan joint events (such as targeted job fairs). C. During PY 2022, DVR will update its Memorandum of Understanding with federal Veterans' Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment leading to increased referrals of Veterans eligible for both services. d. DVR will provide training to staff on the employment needs of Veterans.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following:

Strategies: a. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Behavioral Health and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities including through staff training. b. DVR will work with the Department of Corrections through its quarterly joint meetings to identify effective practices in referring and supporting individuals for whom mental health is a barrier to employment. c. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards. d. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs. e. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers' Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Strategies: a. DVR will maintain a roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. b. In conjunction with the Board, DVR will ensure at least annual training for all Board-approved VRCs. c. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers' Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

Strategies: a. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use. b. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested. c. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use. d. DVR will explore effective strategies – like Progressive Employment – for use with this population. e. DVR will gather and analyze data during PY 2022 on the extent of the impact of substance use as a barrier to employment for DVR clients.

Objective 3.9: Applying a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens, Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible students, youth, and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

Strategies: a. DVR will continue its work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes. b. DVR will develop and provide staff training o increase capacity to serve meet the employment needs of this population. c. DVR will review policies, forms, and other materials at least annually to ensure inclusive practices. . d. DVR will develop or adopt resources to meet employer needs – particularly around best practices in inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minority individuals.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine's TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies: a. Partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and FEDCAP, pilot activities in two locations that build interagency collaboration and braid services on behalf of program recipients. b. Enhance New Counselor Training with a poverty-informed module targeted to meeting the needs of individuals who receive these benefits.

Goal 4. Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine's workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in cross-training on WIOA programs and partners to increase knowledge of available resources for clients and employers. b. DVR will work with WIOA core partners to increase use of a common referral form. c. DVR will work with partners at the local, regional and state level to deliver job fairs, targeted training, and other activities to

meet the needs of jobseekers with disabilities. d. DVR will work with WIOA partners to promote accessibility of CareerCenter programs and services.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies: a. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners. b. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards. c. DVR will engage MDOL's Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities. d. DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Category 3 but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS

Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology.

Strategies: a. DVR staff will participate in training opportunities provided by Maine CITE, Maine's federally- funded Assistive Technology program. b. Individualized Plans for Employment will address the need for Assistive Technology as appropriate. c. DVR will develop in-house capacity around the use of Assistive Technology to support vocational rehabilitation services through the support of two to three DVR staff in the new University of Maine at Farmington post-bachelor's certificate in Assistive Technology Studies.

3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

Goal 3

Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design, informed choice, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Strategies:

1. Maine DVR will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities – including New Counselor Training.

2. Wabanaki VR will provide training and technical assistance to Maine DVR on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native employment supports.

3. DVR will work with Wabanaki VR to increase opportunities for collaboration on delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to Native American students with disabilities attending Maine high schools.

4. According to the joint Memorandum of Understanding, Maine DVR and Wabanaki VR will meet at least annually to review the agreement.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are "New Mainers" and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the lens of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and following these strategies:

a. Provide staff training and development to DVR staff to increase cultural competence as measured through pre- and post- training evaluation. b. Conduct educational and outreach activities to community organizations to increase awareness of availability of DVR services. c. Join with other workforce system partners to address common barriers to employment – such as transcript analysis, English language skills, and need for support services. d. Ensure language access in all DVR-produced and delivered materials. e. Include best practices in hiring and retaining New Mainers in employer engagement activities.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Building on a successful pilot effort, Maine DVR will partner with the Department of Corrections and the Bureau of Employment Services to expand delivery of a targeted pre-release "Career Exploration Workshop" to state and county correctional facilities throughout the state. b. Strengthen DVR participation in the Reentry Network – and other justice advisory groups - leading to increased knowledge of resources and supports to promote employment and reduce recidivism. c. Maintain "Corrections Liaisons" in each office. Liaisons will be paired with regional correctional facilities leading to increased collaboration and timely pre-release referrals. Liaisons will participate in joint DVR/Department of Corrections quarterly meetings leading to increased coordination of services for mutual clients. d. Provide annual staff training on best practices leading to successful employment for individuals with a criminal history. e. Increase access to Pre-Employment and other Transition services for youth through coordination with Maine Youth Center staff and educators.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

a. Continue to collaborate with Bureau of Employment Services' Veterans Services leading to increased co-enrollment opportunities for veterans with disabilities b. DVR will maintain "Veterans Liaisons" in each office. Liaisons will participate in quarterly Bureau of Employment Services' Veterans Services team meetings to exchange information and plan joint events (such as targeted job fairs). c. During PY2022, DVR will update its Memorandum of Understanding with federal Veterans' Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment leading to increased referrals of Veterans eligible for both services. d. DVR will provide training to staff on the employment needs of Veterans.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

1. Through its Division for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, DVR will work in partnership with DBVI and other community organizations to explore opportunities to build capacity of Support Service Providers across the state.

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

Strategies: a. DVR will partner with the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Behavioral Health and MaineCare Services to explore opportunities for collaboration to strengthen and expand employment services to individuals with mental health disabilities including through staff training. b. DVR will work with the Department of Corrections through its quarterly joint meetings to identify effective practices in referring and supporting individuals for whom mental health is a barrier to employment. c. DVR will partner with Clubhouses (that are certified or pursuing certification) to provide employment services that meet Clubhouse International standards. d. DVR will maintain a liaison to the local Clubhouse in each office and work with them on joint training and outreach needs. e. DVR will provide staff training at least annually on best practices in vocational rehabilitation for individuals with mental health disabilities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers' Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Strategies:

1. DVR will maintain a roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

2. In conjunction with the Board, DVR will ensure at least annual training for all Board-approved VRCs.

3. DVR will meet at least annually with the Workers' Compensation Board to assess the success of the MOU initiative.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

Strategies:

1. DVR will provide training to staff, at least annually, on best practices in supporting the employment of individuals impacted by substance use
2. DVR will participate in grant advisory and other work groups as requested.
3. DVR will participate with WIOA and other partners in targeted efforts to promote employment of individuals impacted by substance use
4. DVR will explore effective strategies – like Progressive Employment – for use with this population.

e. DVR will gather and analyze data during PY2022 on the extent of the impact of substance use as a barrier to employment for DVR clients.

Objective 3.9: Applying a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens, Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

Strategies: a. DVR will continue its work group to review best practices in serving this population and make recommendations for policy and practice changes. b. DVR will develop and provide staff training o increase capacity to serve meet the employment needs of this population. c. DVR will review policies, forms, and other materials at least annually to ensure inclusive practices. . d. DVR will develop or adopt resources to meet employer needs –

particularly around best practices in inclusion of transgender, non-binary and other gender minority individuals.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine's TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Strategies:

1. Partnering with the Bureau of Employment Services, the Department of Health and Human Services and FEDCAP, pilot activities in two locations that build interagency collaboration and braid services on behalf of program recipients.

2. Enhance New Counselor Training with a poverty-informed module targeted to meeting the needs of individuals who receive these benefits.

4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 1,769 PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

Strategies: a. Through use of Progressive Employment, Summer Work Experience, and other work- based learning opportunities, DVR will support at least 300 students with disabilities to have paid work experiences annually during PY 2020 through PY 2023. b. Maine DVR - in collaboration with DBVI and with support from PolicyWorks – will launch a statewide peer mentoring effort during PY 2022. Peer mentoring will be provided by "near peers" to support preparation for post-secondary education and employment. c. In partnership with the Maine Department of Education and Local Education Agencies, Maine DVR will deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services to Potentially Eligible and Eligible students with disabilities across Maine. This will include through joint activities such as job tours, job clubs, Transition Career Exploration Workshop, and delivery of information on labor markets and career pathways. d. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Education's Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices to develop opportunities to increase the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services to students in Career and Technical Education programs. e. Maine DVR will partner with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child and Family Services to ensure access to and participation in Pre-Employment Transition Services of youth served through child welfare and children's behavioral health services. f. Maine DVR will expand delivery of strategies to address the needs of rural youth including through online resources and Virtual Job Shadow. g. Maine DVR will work with Maine's Parent Training and Information Center to increase family awareness of Pre-Employment Transition Services and the value of early career exploration and planning for students with disabilities h. Through its Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened, DVR will develop and deliver targeted Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School. i. Maine DVR will explore opportunities to support delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services in conjunction with Job Corps and YouthBuild programming. j. Maine DVR will participate in the Cross-Agency Council on Transition and support inclusion of DVR clients in the "Youth Advisory Group" to receive feedback and input on needed transition services and related policies. k. In keeping with current research, Employment First, and the State of Maine's Economic Development plan - collect and record data to track progress towards ensuring that all Maine youth have a paid work experience before high school graduation. l. Maine DVR will disseminate, implement and

sustain promising practices and lessons learned for work-based learning from the RSA-funded Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant.

5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

While DVR has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs with the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

Performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA – DVR is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One–Stop system. DVR is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act's implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub–committees. In addition to Maine unemployment insurance wage data, Maine will access the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS is also developing a data sharing agreement with Maine's Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. Progress on these initiatives have been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and related staffing resources but efforts to improve internal controls and data quality assurance will continue during the remaining two years of this Unified State

DVR presented is providing ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners; common performance measures, career pathways and best practices in serving the needs of employers. While WINTAC was a funded TA Center, BRS had an intensive technical assistance agreement in place with WINTAC to assist with this effort and to further their expertise on Common Performance Measures, Internal Controls, Career Pathways, Apprenticeships and Peer Mentoring that served to assist in building agency capacity.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine Job Link as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Goal 4

Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine's workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – leading to increased employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

Strategies:

1. DVR staff will participate in cross-training on WIOA programs and partners to increase knowledge of available resources for clients and employers.

2. DVR will work with WIOA core partners to increase use of a common referral form.

3. DVR will work with partners at the local, regional and state level to deliver job fairs, targeted training, and other activities to meet the needs of jobseekers with disabilities.

4. DVR will work with WIOA partners to promote accessibility of CareerCenter programs and services.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

Strategies:

1. DVR will complete Memoranda of Understanding with all required partners

2. DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, will provide representation on Local Workforce Boards.

3. DVR will engage MDOL's Center for Workforce Research and Information to produce updated disability data on the employment status of Maine people with disabilities

4. DVR will develop strategies with WIOA core partners to provide referrals to workforce services for individuals found eligible for DVR under Categories 3 and 4but unable to be served by DVR due to waitlist.

8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

Maine is a large geographical state, which spans 30,843 square miles. The state is primarily rural in nature with a dispersed population of 1.3 million people and a density of 43 people per square mile. The largest population center can be found in southern Maine in the greater Portland area where approximately 91,200 individuals reside. Residents are primarily White (93.5%) with small representation of Black (1.5%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.7%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. Maine's population growth is significantly lower than the rest of the country with a rate of 0.6% between 2010 and 2017 as compared to the national rate of 5.5%.[1] Additionally, the 2017 demographic profile released by the US Census Bureau indicates that Maine's median age is 44.0 years, which is the oldest in the country.

According to the Maine Department of Labor's Center for Workforce Research and Information[2], economic conditions in much of Maine are favorable. The size of the economy and the number of jobs continue to reach new highs, driving unemployment and other measures of labor market slack to new lows. These tight labor market conditions provide a positive environment for individuals with high numbers of job openings and rising wages, but they are a challenge for employers, who are concerned about finding the staff they need. The economy continues to grow. Total output, measured by gross domestic product, has been increasing at an accelerating rate in recent years. GDP in Maine reached $64 billion in 2018.The statewide seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has been below 4% each month since the beginning of 2016, the longest period on record. Unemployment has been close to 3% throughout the second half of 2019.

The tight labor market is driving wages up. Over the last four years the average wage paid in Maine has increased at the fastest rate in decades after adjusting for inflation. In the 12 months through June 2019 the average wage per job reached $46,100. Per capita personal income has steadily increased. Over the last two decades, per capita income in Maine relative to the nation was higher in the two recessionary periods (early 2000s and 2008 & 2009) than it was during expansionary periods. That is because the downturns were not as deep here as in much of the country. For the last seven years per capita income in Maine was close to 90% of the national level. The labor force participation rate has declined in Maine for nearly 20 years and the size of the labor force has not changed appreciably in 14 years. The primary reasons labor force participation has declined, and is expected to continue to do so, are the advancing age structure of the population and lower participation in areas of the state where the economic base has eroded.

In an environment in which the labor force is shrinking, Maine does not have the luxury of tens of thousands of people less than fully engaged in the workforce. Many will require education or training intervention to acquire meaningful skills employers need. (CWRI, 2015).

The passage of The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, along with the subsequent release of final rules in 2016, has resulted in important changes to the practices of state vocational rehabilitation agencies including increased collaboration with other workforce development system partners and expanded services to students with disabilities.

Many changes designed to help youth and adults with disabilities access employment education, job training and support services, have been made, including:

• Establishing a much larger role for public vocational rehabilitation (VR) as youth with disabilities make the transition from school to adult life. Public VR funds in the amount of a 15% set-aside, must now be used for transition services, specifically pre-employment transitions services that include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary opportunities, workplace readiness training, and training on self-advocacy. Each local VR office must also undertake pre- employment transition coordination activities and they must involve schools and workforce development system in these activities.

• Focusing supported employment state grants to VR agencies on youth. Half the money the state receives under these grants will now have to be used to support youth up to age 24 with the most significant disabilities to achieve supported competitive integrated employment.

• VR may now provide extended supported employment services for up to 24 months (previously the limit was 18 months).

• Limiting the use of sub-minimum wage. Section 511 is specifically intended to reduce the number of transition-age youth entering sheltered workshops and working for sub-minimum wage. The emphasis is on moving young people with significant disabilities into integrated community employment. The law prohibits individuals with disabilities age 24 and younger from working in jobs paying less than the federal minimum of $7.25 per hour unless they first apply for and receive vocational rehabilitation services, among other requirements. There are exceptions but only for those already working for subminimum wage and cases where individuals may be deemed ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Section 511 also prohibits schools from contracting for services, training or work experiences that involve the use of sub-minimum wage.

• Requiring state VR agencies to have formal agreements with the state Medicaid systems, and the state intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) agency.

• Adding a definition of “customized employment” in federal statute, and an updated definition of “supported employment” that includes customized employment.

• Adding a definition for "competitive integrated employment" as an optimal outcome.

• Enhancing roles and requirements for the general workforce system and One-Stop Career Centers in meeting the needs of people with disabilities, including the expectation of full programmatic accessibility. (Lisa A. Mills, 2015)

This Act regulates a major portion of the state's rehabilitation services, including consumer-related services that are routinely purchased from community-based service providers.

The Bureau is engaged at all levels as the implementation of WIOA transforms existing systems into a more cohesive, effective and collaborative entity through participation in restructuring the One-Stop Career Center processes, Workforce Boards, training, employment and youth workforce activities. DVR is a full contributor to the unified State Plan and is actively engaged in WIOA implementation across the workforce system.

Demand for community inclusion and access to employment by people with disabilities and their supporters continues to be strong across the country with consumer choice and opportunity for full participation being important for all. The advocacy and advice of the State Rehabilitation Council, Independent Living Council, and Disability Rights Maine, as well as groups, such as Maine APSE and the Alliance for Full Participation, help to ensure that rights are being respected, laws are being followed, and practices are being improved to increase the successful employment of people with disabilities.

In June 2014, Maine's legislature enacted the Employment First Maine Act (Sec. A-1. 26 MRSA c.3), which was a natural progression in Maine's focus on competitive integrated employment as

a valued outcome for the state's citizens with disabilities. It set forth that the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education must implement employment as a core component of services and supports provided and is the first and preferred service or support option offered to individuals with disabilities.

The Act also convened a time-limited coalition of interested parties, including employers, state agency representatives, advocacy organizations, and people with disabilities, to review and make recommendations regarding the improvement of the administration of employment services and the employment outcomes of people with disabilities. Before its sunset in October 2016, the Employment First Maine Coalition produced a report summarizing the work that was completed and identifying twenty-seven recommendations for consideration by the Governor, the Legislature and state agencies, primarily identifying strategies that encourage the employment of youth and adults with disabilities, engage the business community, and improve EFM performance measures. (See complete report at: http://employmentfirstmaine.org/). Since that time, the Commission on Disability and Employment, which is a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board, has been monitoring progress on the recommendations with the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services.

According to the Center for Workforce Research and Information[3], from 2013 through 2017, an average of 208,600 persons with one or more disabilities resided in Maine, equal to about 16% of its civilian non-institutionalized population of 1.3 million. This proportion was higher than that of the United States, where an estimated 13% of residents had a disability. Of additional note, is that the age distribution of civilian noninstitutionalized population with disabilities differs from the general population (with and without disabilities), with higher shares of persons over 64 and lower shares in cohorts 64 or younger. In Maine, nearly 40% of the population with disabilities is over 64 years, more than double the comparable share of the general population (18%).

Workers with disabilities in Maine are less likely to be employed than adults without disabilities. Fewer than half work or seek work; the unemployment rate among adults with disabilities is three times that of other working age adults. From 2013 through 2017, 33% of

working-age Mainers with disabilities was employed compared to 80% of those with no disability. Those who do work earn less than those with no disability; median earnings of Maine workers with disabilities were $18,434 in a twelve-month period, compared median earnings of $31,217 among Maine workers with no disability.

Adults with a disability are more likely to live in or near poverty, regardless of work status, and are less likely to have postsecondary education than adults with no disability.

While DVR services are an important resource for individuals with disabilities who are looking to enter, or re-enter the Maine workforce, VR services are only one option in an expanding array of employment supports and services. Co-location in Maine's network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One-Stop CareerCenters has provided DVR the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that support employment of people with disabilities.

The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The redesigned Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open positions.

Programs overseen by the Bureau of Employment services reported the following enrollment numbers and identified participants with disabilities. These numbers indicate that there are many opportunities for co-enrollment, particularly with the youth population:

Labor Exchange Self Service: 135,733 – disability info n/a

Labor Exchange Employment Services: 2,494 – 267 individuals with a disability or 10.7%

Adult Services – 580 – 75 individuals with a disability or 12.9 %

Dislocated Worker – 358 – 31 individuals with a disability or 8.7%

Youth – 395 – 195 individuals with a disability or 53.4%

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts, including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers with disabilities. There are concerns about the accuracy of the current case management database; the system defines disability status within the context of vocational rehabilitation. Individuals who have a disability, which does not constitute a significant barrier to employment, are often not recorded as having a disability at all. Administrative override is required to update a person's disability status when they disclose post-enrollment.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, CareerCenter services moved to a virtual model that provided increased access for individuals who were not able to travel to a physical location. Live chat and other features allowed for quicker response to jobseekers' questions and needs.

Research has shown that the number of people with disabilities served by CareerCenters is under-reported. According to 2020 estimates from the American Community Survey, people with disabilities comprise 16% of Maine's working age population. ((ACS), 2015-2019) . With the exception of the youth population, it would appear that people with disabilities are underrepresented in usage of workforce services. For additional information see Maine's WIOA State Plan for PY 20-23 and DVR's CSNA https://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/stateplan/

[1] US Census Bureau. Maine Quick Facts. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ME. Retrieved January 24, 2018.

[2] Center for Workforce Research and Information, https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/publications/pdf/Maine2019AnnualWorkforceReport.pdf

[3]https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/index.html

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

State Independent Living Council (SILC) To assist the SILC to increase organizational capacity and member effectiveness, Maine DVR continued to support the SILC to employ an Executive Director to envision and articulate the organization's goals and establish the systems and mechanisms to achieve these goals. The SILC Executive Director is responsible for conducting the work of the SPIL under the supervision and direction of the Maine SILC to accomplish tasks such as a) recruitment and management of members and volunteers b) establish and maintain partnerships with community members and organizations c) market and promote the Maine SILC d) increase and diversify the resources related to the six core areas of the SILC. State Rehabilitation Council Support Innovation & Expansion funds are used to support the activities and administration of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Division and the SRC meets monthly as a full council. The SRC has standing committees that meet regularly. These committees include, DVR/SRC Policy Group, CSPD Subcommittee, Membership, Annual Meeting, Website committee, and the Executive Committee. For more information regarding the SRC, please visit www.mainesrc.org.

C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.

DVR recognizes that one of the greatest barriers to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and State Supported Employment Services Program is lack of awareness of the availability of VR services. This has been identified nationally as a need to increase awareness of the VR program. This is particularly needed when individuals from marginalized communities have a lack of trust in government services. Through its DEI initiatives, DVR is increasing staff competence in serving individuals from diverse backgrounds. Through partnership with workforce system partners, Maine DVR will have access to branded messaging and materials that will help to increase visibility of the VR program. Maine DVR is working with the SRC to provide materials in multiple languages used by Maine residents.

Other barriers can arise because of competing priorities and stretched resources as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. A return to more regular operations in a post-pandemic world will free up time that has been spent over the last two years ensuring safety of staff and clients . Resources will also be able to shift to support data collection and more intensive analysis.

P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine's workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment

Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2,636 in PY 2018 to 2, 500 in PY 2020 and further reducing to 2, 000 in PY 2023.

DVR continues to prioritize minimization of early exit from VR services – particularly during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic. PY 20 numbers of early exiters was 1875 meeting and

surpassing the target set for this objective. DVR has implemented its strategy of training all staff on the principles of Motivational Interviewing. As follow-up DVR contracted with an expert in (a) Motivational Interviewing to provide ongoing instruction and practice for supervisors so that they would be better able to support VR counselors in their use of Motivational Interviewing with clients. Internal capacity has been created through identification of Motivational Interviewing "champions" as well as through distribution of monthly Motivational Interviewing tips. Progressive Employment, with its dual customer approach and early engagement focus, has now expanded across the state and has grown from its initial use with youth to now be available a strategy for adult clients as well. An Institute for Community Inclusion-developed Progressive Employment training curriculum is now posted on the DVR website for easy access for new VR staff and Community Rehabilitation Providers. (b) During the COVID-19 pandemic, DVR staff quickly moved to offer VR services remotely and to stay connected with clients. This included use of cell phone, text, email and video-conferencing. VRCs have anecdotally noted that missed appointments have decreased and that reduced travel time to in-person appointments has allowed for increased availability for communication with clients. All DVR VR counselors have Microsoft TEAMS and Zoom videoconferencing available on their State of Maine-issued laptops.

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 2, 287 reported activities in PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

(a, c, f) The COVID pandemic that began in March of 2020 had a negative impact on community-based work experience activities as safety became the top priority. Many employers were closed early in the pandemic or did not want to take on the risk of having students on site. Many families were hesitant to have their young person in the community. Where work-based learning and other Pre-ETS could be held in the community – employment settings that were outside and not working in close proximity were sought. Additionally, the closure of schools or move to remote classes reduced access to teachers and students and therefore reduced referrals and collaborative activities. A previously established pilot contract for the Virtual Job Shadow online job shadow platform was expanded to be available to Pre-ETS youth across the state. The Virtual Job Shadow curriculum allowed students, teachers and VR counselors to meet on the platform and share lesson plans and track student progress. (b) Peer mentoring was redeveloped with assistance from PolicyWorks under the umbrella of WINTAC and the redesigned model was launched as a pilot in one region of the state. Based on feedback from staff and contracted providers, the model was again reworked and launched in January 2022 as statewide virtual peer mentoring. Offering the service virtually through diverse modalities is anticipated to meet student needs. Near-peer certified mentors with experience in disability will be available and efforts will be made to recruit diverse individuals. (d) Representatives of Maine Department of Education's Special Services and Career and Technical Education offices have met regularly with VR leadership over the last two years. This has included jointly participating in technical assistance to promote better alignment of services to students offered by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative. A field guide for Career and Technical Education programs on best practices to promote success and inclusion of students with disabilities will be released in Spring 2022 and includes information on partnering with Vocational Rehabilitation. Every Career and Technical Education Center has an assigned Maine DVR transition counselor. (e, f) To better promote the transition of young people who have experienced Maine's foster care system, DVR has designated liaisons in each office who have additional knowledge of child welfare and are able to promote connections between transition specialists through the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child and Family Services and VR counselors. At least annual team meetings are complemented by local efforts. As an example, VR staff recently participated in a workshop for youth in foster care where they offered an overview of VR services and showcased the Virtual

Job Shadow tool. (g) DVR partners regularly with Maine Parent Federation to increase awareness of VR services for students with disabilities. VR staff participate in the training of all Family Support Navigators and share resources to be distributed through Maine Parent Federation's newsletters and website. (h) Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf deliver summer and school year Pre-ETS services through local schools and in partnership with the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. One successful example has been the launch of a transition club for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The club meets regularly and focuses each meeting on a particular aspect of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf co-lead and have noted students' increasing self-confidence and ability to self-advocate. (i) In 2021 DVR updated its MOU with the Penobscot Job Corps. The MOU describes the partnership process – including delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services. COVID-19 disrupted Job Corps residential programming. DVR's Job Corps liaison is continuing to work with Center staff to explore opportunities for collaborative delivery of Pre-ETS. During this time period no targeted outreach has occurred with Youth Build programs. (j) Cross-Agency Council on Transition has expanded and been subsumed under other collaborative transition work as a result of the expansion of eligibility of special education services to age 22 and technical assistance efforts to Maine transition partners through the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative. Maine Parent Federation's youth leadership initiative is ongoing and DVR will finalize a contract in Spring 2022 to support youth feedback through that organization. (k) DVR has established a special indicator in the AWARE case management system to track paid work experience before high school exit. The DVR Director sits on the Governor's Children's Cabinet staff group and is involved in planning for the launch of Career Exploration – as detailed in the State of Maine's Economic Development 10-year strategic plan and as supported through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. (l) The Transition Work Based Learning Model Demonstration Grant concluded on September 30, 2021. The final report was submitted on January 31, 2022. Materials, findings and recommendations from the grant's research will be made available via posting on DVR's website as well as through dissemination on the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials website. A presentation of findings and recommendations related to work-based learning has been developed for staff and stakeholder training during 2022 and beyond.

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients' Individualized Plans for Employment.

(a)Training on best practices in the use of Career Pathways has been offered to staff. Training for Community Rehabilitation Providers will be included in a series of trainings made available through Maine's Employment Workforce Development System – which is currently in the procurement process. (b) To better support self-employment for VR clients, DVR is currently engaged in a pilot initiative with the University of Montana's Rural Institute to test their self-employment materials with DVR staff and clients. Training on the use of the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs to promote use of Apprenticeship and self-employment has taken place with staff around the state as part of the Apprenticeship pilot project. (c, d) MDOL has been awarded Apprenticeship funding that includes support for a Bureau of Rehabilitation Services-housed Apprenticeship Navigator to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. This position will be filled in the coming weeks. Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf have been leaders in the Apprenticeship pilot. An individual who is Deaf was showcased in his Apprenticeship as part of an Apprenticeship Town Hall meeting. Performance Management objectives were updated during the last year for all VR counselors to include a measurement on use of career pathways with clients. In addition to case reviews, this will be another place to measure and reinforce the use of career pathways. (f) DVR made use of WINTAC resources while they were available. Since the conclusion of WINTAC, DVR is exploring resources through

the new TA Centers to continue to support this work. Additionally, DVR worked with Division for the Blind to put together a training for partners in the CareerCenters on use of career pathways.

Objective 1.4: Through lessons learned from the use of Progressive Employment, expand the number of Maine employers who implement diversity hiring activities through engagement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and workforce system partners.

The initiative at the Maine Retail Association (a) was discontinued due to factors outside of VR. The importance of partnering with businesses to use a business to business approach was supported through other means (b) including through redevelopment of a DVR-based business relations team which continues to strengthen and is providing coordinated outreach to employers – and connecting employers to other employers. Business engagement activities – delivered by DVR or contracted providers are entered into the Maine Job Link for Common Performance Measure reporting. The DVR business team and other key staff participate in employer events like the State Human Resource Management conference and attend targeted Chamber of Commerce events. (c) DVR maintained an active presence with the Statewide Workforce Action Team and is involved in a current reconstitution of the group following a key leader's departure. (d) A member of the DVR business team was part of a Disability Bootcamp project supported through TA from USDOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy. That initiative led to the creation of curriculum modules on disability employment that can lead to microbadge credential attainment.

Goal 2 All individuals, including those with the most significant disabilities, will be served in a timely manner -which means determining eligibility within 60 days and developing Individualized Plans for Employment for all eligible clients within the 90-day time frame. DVR will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in category 3 in the future.

Objective 2.1: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (94%) in determining eligibility within 60 days of receiving an application for DVR services. DVR will progress from 79.4% in PY2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

Eligibility determination rates have been negatively impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic – related staffing shortages and difficulty in obtaining supporting medical and school documentation during closures – However, in PY 20 eligibility was determined within 60 days 85.5% of the time with another 6.8% of eligibilities occurring following eligibility determination extension. All DVR supervisors and managers receive detailed reports (a) on eligibility determination rates in the units on a quarterly basis. Additionally, each has the ability to access real-time information from the AWARE case management system to aid them in providing support to VR counselors. (b) at least annually – and included in New Counselor Training – DVR provides regional training on determining eligibility that reinforces strategies to promote timely eligibility determination as provided by RSA in earlier monitoring visits. VR counselor performance management goals included objectives on timely eligibility determination. While WORK Services was discontinued (c), DVR has an online application option that is now available statewide. Particularly during the pandemic, this online option has increased the speed at which applications can be received and processed. This option has been shared broadly – while maintaining other traditional methods to receive applications for VR services.

Objective 2.2: To continue progress to reach substantial compliance (94%) in timely plan development by increasing the percentage of clients who are have an Individualized Plan for Employment developed within 90 days from 78.9% in PY 2018 to substantial compliance in PY 2020 and maintain substantial compliance or better in PY 2021-2023.

Timely plan development reports (a) are shared with DVR supervisors and managers on a quarterly basis. Each also has access to real-time data through the AWARE case management system to better support supervision of VR counselors. (b) DVR staff participate in regular (at least annually) training on timely plan development in addition to training provided through New Counselor Training. During the pandemic, the Career Exploration Workshop (c) was redesigned for virtual use and as a result the Workshop could be offered through partnership between VR counselors across the state. This had the effect of reducing any delay in access in one's own region as clients could access a Workshop series every week virtually rather than a once monthly offering pre-pandemic. DVR continues to work closely with the Maine Department of Education (d) and is currently involved in a joint TA effort around transition with assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative. DVR materials are provided to each Maine school during the monitoring process to assist them with meeting the requirements of IDEA Part B Indicator 13.

Objective 2.3: Maine DVR will address the underemployment of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities by assisting them to prepare for, reach, maintain and advance in careers of their choice in keeping with Maine's Employment First law and as documented by measurable skills gains, credential attainment and successful closures in employment.

DVR meets monthly with DHHS' Office of Aging and Disability Services and discusses the needs of mutual clients. (a) Over the last year, DVR has joined Maine Department of Education and the Office of Aging and Disability Services in a joint effort to promote a comprehensive approach to promoting employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This has occurred as part of an Expanded Eligibility workgroup hosted by the Department of Education and as part of a Legislative Taskforce charged to address the transition needs of this population. (b) the Office of Aging and Disabilities Services joins with DVR to offer regular opportunities to educate stakeholders on services available through VR. One example are joint calls that have been held for case managers who can serve as gatekeepers to employment planning. (c) DVR launched the "Step Up" five-week summer program in 2019 for students with Autism who had an interest in pursuing college. During 2020 and 2021 the program was offered virtually and the curriculum was modified to fit that modality. While Step Up has been a success, the goals of the program are best met through an in-person on-campus experience. (d) The former "Bridge – Career Exploration Workshop" was discontinued as a face-to-face workshop during the pandemic and instead DVR collaborated with members of the self-advocacy group - Speaking Up For Us - to provide feedback on and pilot new curriculum modules that were delivered via Zoom. The result of this work is more accessible training sessions that are able to be used across a variety of settings.

Objective 2.4: Maine DVR clients will have timely access to appropriate Community Employment Services – including the use of qualified Community Rehabilitation Providers.

Recognizing the need for more comprehensive access to Community Rehabilitation Providers across the state, DVR undertook a RFP process that resulted in employment services contracts being awarded to a primary Provider in regions 1, 2 and 3. (a) DVR receives quarterly data on the use of Community Rehabilitation Providers and meets monthly with the selected Providers in regions 1, 2, and 3. In regions 4 and 5, multiple Community Rehabilitation Providers provide services. (b) To support high quality employment services, DVR contributes resources and funding to Maine's Employment for ME Workforce Development system. These services are currently out to bid following a RFP process. The selected provider will deliver webinars, in-person training, and access to archived training materials to promote continuing improvement and learning among Providers, VR staff and other stakeholders. Partners in the Workforce Development System include Office of Aging and Disability Services, Office of Behavioral Health, Office of Child and Family Services, Department of Education, as well as Maine's VR agencies.

Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology.

Maine's federally-funded Assistive Technology program – Maine CITE – has hired a new director in the last year. This individual has met with DVR and DBVI leaders to share her vision for the program and learn about Maine's needs (a). Maine CITE continues to provide training that DVR staff can access. They are working collaboratively on a number of transition initiatives where VR is also present around the state. (b, c) DVR has identified the need to grow in-house capacity around Assistive Technology to better support its identification and inclusion in Individualized Plans for Employment. A plan to train a VR counselor in each region on Assistive Technology through the use of a post-bachelor's certificate program at the University of Maine at Farmington was delayed when a key faculty left and the program was postponed. DVR continues to plan to pursue this option when available. In the meantime, DVR accesses AT service providers across the state as appropriate. The rise in digital and virtual services during COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the technology divide among DVR's clients. VR counselors have worked with clients to help bridge that gap by providing instruction on technology as well as the technology itself to support continued access to VR services.

Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design and informed choice as measured by consumer feedback and case review.

Objective 3.1: Maine DVR will work closely with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation, to increase co–enrollment from 3 individuals in PY2019 to 10 individuals annually by PY 2023.

Maine DVR is proud to partner with Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance activities. (a, b, c, d) Wabanaki VR, DVR and the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired updated their MOU in 2021 and strengthened language promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as well as collaboration on Pre-Employment Transition Services. Wabanaki VR helped to arrange a cultural competence training during 2021 for Maine Department of Labor staff – including VR. Wabanaki VR also regularly provides training at New Counselor Training sessions. Approximately 5 individuals received services in PY20.

Objective 3.2: To address the growing numbers of Maine residents who are "New Mainers" and who may be eligible for DVR services, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

This objective has come under the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion umbrella as that work has progressed over the last two years. MDOL has conducted sessions across the Department to gather information on strengths and needs related to DEI. Additionally, DVR's manager for DEI initiatives is representing DVR on the State Workforce Board's Immigrant Workforce Committee. This has supported efforts to hear directly from a wide variety of stakeholders on this issue. (a, e) A team from DVR and Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired participated in the UA Currents' ABC of Cultural Competence. Following the training, the team continued to meet as a workgroup on DEI issues. They developed three in-house trainings to support cultural competence – Inclusive Language, Inclusive Relationships and Lifelong Learning. These trainings are currently being rolled-out to all DVR staff with evaluation data being collected. (b) DVR seeks out and accepts opportunities to share information on VR programs and services with diverse groups around the state. The DVR Director sits on the Children's Cabinet staff committee where issues concerning services to children and youth from diverse and historically marginalized communities is addressed. (c) DVR joins with other workforce system partners to support efforts to ameliorate barriers to employment and includes development of English language skills and support services on Individualized Plans for Employment as appropriate. (d) During the past year, DVR has worked with its SRC to discuss strategies to produce more

materials in languages other than English – rather than waiting for a request to do so. This will be a joint activity with the SRC going forward in the coming year.

Objective 3.3: To support the successful reentry of individuals with disabilities exiting the correctional systems and reentering employment, Maine DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

DVR maintains a current roster of staff who serve as Corrections Liaisons in each office (c). The DVR Assistant Director oversees efforts to support successful reentry and participated on the advisory group for the Department of Corrections' Second Chance Act Youth Offender Reentry Grant as well as on the Juvenile Justice Task Force. Both groups provided recommendations to improve the corrections system for youth -including connections to training and employment preparation. While work remains, one example of success has been regional care committees that address the needs of juveniles exiting correctional involvement. DVR staff have represented the Department of Labor on these committee and are able to offer guidance and braiding of resources where appropriate. (a) The Career Exploration Workshop pilot offered in-person was negatively impacted due to the pandemic and related limitations on entry into congregate settings. Efforts continue to develop ways to deliver virtual services as well as to plan for in-person services when allowed. (d) DVR makes available training to staff on working with individuals with a criminal history. An upcoming training for 2022 -that will be recorded for future use - is targeted to support VR and Community Rehabilitation Provider staff in assisting individuals with sexual abuse convictions to prepare for and find successful employment. This training features a panel that includes individuals who themselves have sexual abuse convictions.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

DVR remains committed to ensuring that Veterans with disabilities who are in need of VR services have access to those services and that they are coordinated with other Veterans' serving programs. (a) DVR maintains a current list of "Veterans Liaisons" who are VR staff across the state with an interest and commitment to being a resource to clients and staff on Veterans' issue. The liaisons meet quarterly with the Bureau of Employment Services' Veterans Services team and federal Veterans Affairs representatives to share information and resources. (c) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DVR was not able to focus resources on updating its Memorandum of Understanding with the federal Veterans' Affairs Veteran Readiness & Employment (a name change from Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment) – however an annual meeting to review the partnership was held in April 2021. MOU renewal will be a priority in the coming year. Despite the lack of an updated MOU, DVR continues to connect with VR & E counselors – many of whom were previously counselors with Maine DVR.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened in partnership with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and other community organizations has worked with assistance from the Helen Keller Center to build capacity to serve individuals with dual sensory needs – including through use of Support Service Providers. Three regional meetings were held over the last year with Maine hosting one (a).

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

DVR holds a monthly meeting with key partners at the Department of Health and Human Services – including the Office of Behavioral Health (formerly the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services) (a). These meetings allow for regular discussion of opportunities to

collaborate to strengthen and expand employment services for individuals with mental health disabilities. (b) Through DVR and the Office of Behavioral Health's work with the Department of Corrections – resources and strategies are shared on a regular basis to promote employment opportunities for individuals reentering post-incarceration. (c) Clubhouse operations were disrupted during the early days of the pandemic but are returning to more regular connections with assigned VR counselors spending time in each Clubhouse across the state. Some Clubhouses have opted to discontinue contracting as a Community Rehabilitation Provider with DVR, but this has not negatively impacted the partnerships. Other Clubhouses are interested in expanding opportunities to focus on transition-age youth and this will be an area for pilot initiatives in the coming year. (e) In addition to Motivational Interviewing ongoing training, DVR staff are offered opportunities during the year to participate in training to assist in meeting the employment needs of individuals with mental health disabilities through the Employment Workforce Development System, New Counselor Training, and online training opportunities.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers' Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

DVR continues to maintain a small roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors – despite experiencing turnover due to staff promotion and resignation (a). Annual training and an annual meeting (b,c) have not occurred formally during the pandemic and instead has been provided on an as requested/needed basis. During the coming year, renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding will be a priority.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

During the early days of the pandemic, when service delivery was slowed, DVR placed a priority on increasing staff training in targeted areas – including (a, b, c) employment of individuals impacted by substance abuse. A grant to the Maine Department of Labor to address employment opportunities for those impacted by the Opioid epidemic has also created public service announcements, training and other resources that have been helpful to DVR. Governor Mills has convened a Coalition that has examined a number of issues related to the Opioid epidemic. DVR staff have also accessed these resources to better support clients. (d) At the time of this writing, Progressive Employment is being actively pursued for expansion for clients of the Bureau of Employment Services through the use of American Rescue Plan Act funding. Identified target populations include individuals exiting corrections and those who have experienced substance abuse. Given DVR's experience with Progressive Employment – and the likelihood of a high degree of dual eligibility for services – DVR will work closely with the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure successful roll-out of this effort.

Objective 3.9: Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

(a, b) After convening for over two years and making recommendations on best practices, members of the DVR and DBVI LGBTQ+ workgroup sponsored a series of facilitated conversations with George Washington University's DJ Ralston during October 2021 to coincide with National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Prior to attending the conversations, staff were asked to attend two previously-recorded trainings through GWU that provided a foundation in language and issues for consideration when conducting Vocational Rehabilitation work with individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. These conversations were well-received and fit within the framework of the Maine Department of Labor's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts. Following the training, the LGBTQ+ workgroup decided to merge with DVR/DBVI's DEI workgroup – creating a stronger team. DVR is currently looking at flexibilities within agency policies that promote more inclusive approaches to serving individuals – particularly those who identify as transgender or non-binary.

Objective 3.10 Maine DVR will work with Maine's TANF/ASPIRE programs and contracted providers to increase collaboration – leading to improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Over the last two years, regular strategic planning at the state and regional level has brought TANF increasingly into WIOA partnership efforts. (a)This increased attention to alignment has resulted in VR being asked to share resources about accessing VR services for FEDCAP participants in two targeted locations, thereby promoting braiding of funds. Additionally, WIOA meetings on infrastructure funding agreements and implementation of Memoranda of Understanding have also increased regular communication and access between TANF and DVR leadership. (b) This year, a poverty-informed module was added to the New Counselor Training to increase awareness of the role that poverty may play in individuals with disabilities selection of employment goals and services.

Goal 4 Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine's workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – thereby increasing employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

While the pandemic limited some in-person service delivery of WIOA services, Maine's network of CareerCenters made a number of changes to increase access and better serve jobseekers. These included providing virtual services, creating a 1-800 number that could be answered statewide and adding live chat features to the CareerCenter website. (a) Recorded cross-training webinars highlighting WIOA partner programs are available for VR staff to watch on the agency's intranet website. (b) Work continues to develop a common referral form for use across the state. The Maine Job Link currently assists in promoting cross-referral through customer response to registration questions. (c) DVR staff meet regularly with local CareerCenter partners and collaborate on delivery of local events like job fairs or presentations. At the regional and state level similar collaboration to support events such as employer engagement events and the State Human Resource Management conference. This year, DVR collaborated with social service providers to offer a reverse job fair to support DVR clients to market their skills to agencies looking to hire qualified staff. (d) DVR provides technical assistance to CareerCenter partners to support accessibility of programs and services. This is done both informally and through response to identified needs. The State ADA Coordinator is housed within DVR and is an additional resource on technical and physical accessibility issues.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

At the time of this writing, Memoranda of Understanding have been completed in two of the three Local Workforce Areas (a). The third MOU is near to final completion and should be executed by April 1, 2022. (b)DVR, in conjunction with DBVI, provides representation to each of the Local Workforce Boards. (c) DVR works with the Center for Workforce Research and Information within the Maine Department of Labor to produce a Maine Workers with Disabilities dashboard that is available at https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/disabilities/index.html . (d) For individuals found eligible for DVR services but placed on a waitlist for services (formerly Category OOS 3 and now Categories OOS 3 and 4), DVR will update – at least annually – a resource sheet that includes CareerCenter partner resources that may be helpful to support the individual when VR services are not yet available. This resource sheet is included in eligibility determination letters to individuals placed on a waitlist as well as sent annually to the cumulative waitlist.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Goal 1

Maine DVR clients will reach their employment goals and be valued members of Maine's workforce as measured by a. measurable skill gains, b. credential attainment and c. successful employment closures in competitive integrated employment

Objective 1.1: To continue to reduce early exit from DVR services from 2,636 in PY 2018 to 2, 500 in PY 2020 and further reducing to 2, 000 in PY 2023.

DVR continues to prioritize minimization of early exit from VR services – particularly during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic. PY 20 numbers of early exiters was 1875 meeting and surpassing the target set for this objective.

Objective 1.2: To promote increased access to and delivery of Pre–Employment Transition Services to all students with disabilities from 2, 287 reported activities in PY 2018 to 3,000 in PY 2020 and 4000 annually by PY2023 leading to improved post-secondary education and employment readiness.

(a, c, f) The COVID pandemic that began in March of 2020 had a negative impact on community-based work experience activities as safety became the top priority. Many employers were closed early in the pandemic or did not want to take on the risk of having students on site. Many families were hesitant to have their young person in the community. Where work-based learning and other Pre-ETS could be held in the community – employment settings that were outside and not working in close proximity were sought. Additionally, the closure of schools or move to remote classes reduced access to teachers and students and therefore reduced referrals and collaborative activities. (b) Peer mentoring was redeveloped with assistance from PolicyWorks under the umbrella of WINTAC and the redesigned model was launched as a pilot in one region of the state. Based on feedback from staff and contracted providers, the model was again reworked and launched in January 2022 as statewide virtual peer mentoring.

Objective 1.3: To promote careers in high wage-high growth, STEM, and other promising industry sectors through the exploration and inclusion of career pathways in DVR clients' Individualized Plans for Employment.

(b) To better support self-employment for VR clients, DVR is currently engaged in a pilot initiative with the University of Montana's Rural Institute to test their self-employment materials with DVR staff and clients. Training on the use of the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs to promote use of Apprenticeship and self-employment has taken place with staff around the state as part of the Apprenticeship pilot project. (c, d) MDOL has been awarded Apprenticeship funding that includes support for a Bureau of Rehabilitation Services-housed Apprenticeship Navigator to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. This position will be filled in the coming weeks.

The initiative at the Maine Retail Association (a) was discontinued due to factors outside of VR. The importance of partnering with businesses to use a business to business approach was supported through other means (b) including through redevelopment of a DVR-based business relations team which continues to strengthen and is providing coordinated outreach to employers – and connecting employers to other employers. (c) DVR maintained an active presence with the Statewide Workforce Action Team and is involved in a current reconstitution of the group following a key leader's departure.

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will continue to maintain no wait list for those individuals in categories 1 and 2 and will monitor the ability to again serve those in category 3 in the future.

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Timely plan development reports (a) are shared with DVR supervisors and managers on a quarterly basis. Each also has access to real-time data through the AWARE case management system to better support supervision of VR counselors. (b) DVR staff participate in regular (at least annually) training on timely plan development in addition to training provided through New Counselor Training. During the pandemic, the Career Exploration Workshop (c) was redesigned for virtual use and as a result the Workshop could be offered through partnership between VR counselors across the state. This had the effect of reducing any delay in access in one's own region as clients could access a Workshop series every week virtually rather than a once monthly offering pre-pandemic. DVR continues to work closely with the Maine Department of Education (d) and is currently involved in a joint TA effort around transition with assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative. DVR materials are provided to each Maine school during the monitoring process to assist them with meeting the requirements of IDEA Part B Indicator 13.

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Objective 2.5 Maine DVR will ensure client services reflect access to and best practices in the use of Assistive Technology.. (b, c) DVR has identified the need to grow in-house capacity around Assistive Technology to better support its identification and inclusion in Individualized Plans for Employment. A plan to train a VR counselor in each region on Assistive Technology through the use of a post-bachelor's certificate program at the University of Maine at Farmington was

delayed when a key faculty left and the program was postponed. DVR continues to plan to pursue this option when available. In the meantime, DVR accesses AT service providers across the state as appropriate. The rise in digital and virtual services during COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the technology divide among DVR's clients. VR counselors have worked with clients to help bridge that gap by providing instruction on technology as well as the technology itself to support continued access to VR services.

Goal 3 All Individuals served by DVR receive high quality vocational rehabilitation services in an accessible and culturally-competent manner that reflects the principles of universal design and informed choice as measured by consumer feedback and case review.. (d) During the past year, DVR has worked with its SRC to discuss strategies to produce more materials in languages other than English – rather than waiting for a request to do so. This will be a joint activity with the SRC going forward in the coming year.

Objective 3.4: To support successful employment of individuals who are Veterans, DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

(c) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, DVR was not able to focus resources on updating its Memorandum of Understanding with the federal Veterans' Affairs Veteran Readiness & Employment (a name change from Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment) – however an annual meeting to review the partnership was held in April 2021. MOU renewal will be a priority in the coming year. Despite the lack of an updated MOU, DVR continues to connect with VR & E counselors – many of whom were previously counselors with Maine DVR.

Objective 3.5: To support successful employment and community inclusion of individuals with dual sensory impairments (Deaf/Blind), DVR will strengthen its services to this population through the following strategies:

The Division for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened in partnership with Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired and other community organizations has worked with assistance from the Helen Keller Center to build capacity to serve individuals with dual sensory needs – including through use of Support Service Providers. Three regional meetings were held over the last year with Maine hosting one (a).

Objective 3.6: Maine DVR will develop new strategies to increase the employment of people with mental health disabilities:

(c) Clubhouse operations were disrupted during the early days of the pandemic but are returning to more regular connections with assigned VR counselors spending time in each Clubhouse across the state. Some Clubhouses have opted to discontinue contracting as a Community Rehabilitation Provider with DVR, but this has not negatively impacted the partnerships.

Objective 3.7: Maine DVR will continue implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding with the public Workers' Compensation system in order to better serve injured Maine workers who eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services.

DVR continues to maintain a small roster of Board-approved Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors – despite experiencing turnover due to staff promotion and resignation (a). Annual training and an annual meeting (b,c) have not occurred formally during the pandemic and instead has been provided on an as requested/needed basis. During the coming year, renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding will be a priority.

Objective 3.8: Maine DVR will work with state agencies, treatment providers, and other partners to promote and support employment for individuals impacted by substance use.

During the early days of the pandemic, when service delivery was slowed, DVR placed a priority on increasing staff training in targeted areas – including (a, b, c) employment of individuals impacted by substance abuse. A grant to the Maine Department of Labor to address employment opportunities for those impacted by the Opioid epidemic has also created public service announcements, training and other resources that have been helpful to DVR. Governor Mills has convened a Coalition that has examined a number of issues related to the Opioid epidemic. DVR staff have also accessed these resources to better support clients. (d) At the time of this writing, Progressive Employment is being actively pursued for expansion for clients of the Bureau of Employment Services through the use of American Rescue Plan Act funding. Identified target populations include individuals exiting corrections and those who have experienced substance abuse. Given DVR's experience with Progressive Employment – and the likelihood of a high degree of dual eligibility for services – DVR will work closely with the Bureau of Employment Services to ensure successful roll-out of this effort.

Objective 3.9: Maine DVR will provide equitable vocational rehabilitation services to potentially eligible students and eligible youth and adults who identify as LGBTQ+.

DVR is currently looking at flexibilities within agency policies that promote more inclusive approaches to serving individuals – particularly those who identify as transgender or non-binary.

Goal 4 Maine DVR services will be provided in partnership with Maine's workforce development system as measured annually by documented collaborative activities, co-enrollment, technical assistance, and training – thereby increasing employment and credential attainment opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities.

Objective 4.1: Maine DVR will refer clients to workforce system programs and services to meet their needs and increase access to comparable benefits.

While the pandemic limited some in-person service delivery of WIOA services, Maine's network of CareerCenters made a number of changes to increase access and better serve jobseekers. These included providing virtual services, creating a 1-800 number that could be answered statewide and adding live chat features to the CareerCenter website. (a) Recorded cross-training webinars highlighting WIOA partner programs are available for VR staff to watch on the agency's intranet website. (b) Work continues to develop a common referral form for use across the state. The Maine Job Link currently assists in promoting cross-referral through customer response to registration questions. (c) DVR staff meet regularly with local CareerCenter partners and collaborate on delivery of local events like job fairs or presentations. At the regional and state level similar collaboration to support events such as employer engagement events and the State Human Resource Management conference. This year, DVR collaborated with social service providers to offer a reverse job fair to support DVR clients to market their skills to agencies looking to hire qualified staff. (d) DVR provides technical assistance to CareerCenter partners to support accessibility of programs and services. This is done both informally and through response to identified needs. The State ADA Coordinator is housed within DVR and is an additional resource on technical and physical accessibility issues.

Objective 4.2: Maine DVR will work with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act partners to share data and information leading to increased alignment of program and services and expanded opportunities for DVR clients.

At the time of this writing, Memoranda of Understanding have been completed in two of the three Local Workforce Areas (a). The third MOU is near to final completion and should be executed by April 1, 2022.

2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

Due to the limitations on expending SE-B funds, DVR was unable to charge all expenses that would have been eligible to be charged to the SE-A grant. Instead, those expenses were charged - as allowed - to the VR grant.

This allowed DVR to continue to provide Supported Employment services and achieve goals that included Supported Employment objectives.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Maine DVR has been unable to fully expend Supported Employment Funds due to changes to how funding may be expended made under WIOA. Specifically, the grant has been divided into two parts - adult (a) and youth (b) and expenses charged to SE-A may not exceed those charged to SE-B. Additionally, SE funds may now only be spent once an individual is in employment which is also a change under WIOA. Maine DVR typically is able to transition youth in SE to long-term supports outside of DVR in a timely manner meaning that there are fewer charges that can be made against the SE-B portion of the grant between entering employment and transfer to long-term supports.

Because supported employment expenses are allowable to be charged to the VR grant, those adult expenditures that exceeded the amount expended under SE-B have been charged to the VR grant.

3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DVR is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One–Stop system. DVR is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act's implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub–committees. DVR will be using wage data from the Maine Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance to establish baseline and initial WIOA performance targets for employment outcomes. Although it does not provide information on individuals who are placed in self–employment or other jobs, such as federal and out–of–state positions, but DVR has recently gotten access to the State Wage Interface System (SWIS), which will expand access to national wage data.

During PY2020, Maine DVR exceeded the negotiated level for MSGs (33.8) with a performance level of 47.6.

4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

State Rehabilitation Council Support -

Innovation & Expansion funds are used to support the activities and administration of the Statewide Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Division. The SRC meets monthly as a full council. For more information regarding the SRC, please visit www.mainesrc.org.

In FFY 21 I & E expenditures were $3,604. This figure was considerably less than during FFY 20 and represented the impact that COVID-19 had on expenses related to the State Rehabilitation Council. Specifically, meetings were held virtually thus reducing the travel reimbursement that would have been paid for members to attend in-person meetings. Additionally, conferences (such as CSAVR) that SRC members would have typically attended were also held virtually so no travel expenses were charged.

Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

1. THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

The Division works together with its state partners, community providers and advocacy groups to ensure Supported Employment Services are available to eligible individuals.

A. Quality. Our management information system (AWARE) reports provide information on weekly wages, hours worked, and public assistance at the time of application and closure. The reports also provide information on the type of disabilities being served, the cost per case, and the average cost by counselor, region, and state. This information provides the information necessary to manage resources and ensure quality outcomes are achieved. The development of a joint data tracking system with the Department of Health and Human Services- Office of Behavioral Health and Office of Aging and Disability Services -continues to be pursued and would increase the ability to monitor ongoing supports provided to an individual to obtain and maintain successful, quality, employment

The Division and the Department of Health and Human Services oversee a comprehensive workforce development system for employment staff such as Employment Specialists, Job Coaches and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, as well as other professionals who support individuals with disabilities in their pursuit of employment, including case managers, education staff, and care coordinators. The Employment Workforce Development System provides basic Employment Specialist certification, Advanced Topical Trainings, monthly webinars and a registry of certified Employment Specialists and Career Planners in the state. The Training Calendar provides a place where employment professionals and other human service professionals can get information on national, state and online options for employment related trainings.

Community Rehabilitation Providers who contract with The Division can be approved to provide services following two different paths to accreditation-- CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) or The Division's In–State approval process. In addition, they are required to employ staff who meet the Accreditation of Community Educators (ACRE) Employment Specialist qualifications, or other Division approved training, and meet ongoing continuing education requirements.

The comprehensive In-State approval process includes evaluating areas such as:

- Mission statement,
- Policies and Procedures (including assuring adherence to APSE standards for Supported Employment)
- Admission Criteria,
- Assessment Policy and Practice,
- Case Coordination,
- Client Input,

- Health and Safety,
- Personnel records documenting staff qualifications and background checks,
- Policies and practices regarding client rights and appeal procedures.
-

The approval process also includes interviews with key stakeholders such as clients, employers, and funding agents.

B. Scope of Supported Employment:

The primary service provided to clients in supported employment is job coaching since funds must be now used to support an individual who is in employment status. These direct services are provided by an Employment Specialist or a Job Coach, who supports the client through activities such as interactions with supervisors and peers, and integration into the workplace culture.

Additional services that may be provided as needed include social skills training, consultation with the employer and facilitation of natural supports.

Individuals with brain injuries, physical disabilities, developmental disabilities and autism that receive assistance from the Division in obtaining employment may require ongoing supports to maintain successful employment. These individuals can access employment related services through one of the four Home and Community Based Waivers (HCBS). Career Planning is available to assist an individual in exploring interests, skills and abilities prior to a referral to VR. All four HCBS waivers offer long term work supports to provide support at the job site. These supports are also available to assist a waiver member with their own business. All employment services are determined by individual need through a person-centered planning approach that can include the VRC.

OADS has expanded available employment services to all 6,000 waiver participants during the last several years. Currently there are an estimated 1,200 of these individuals employed but an additional 3,500 are of working age and have employment funding available to them when they choose to go to work. We anticipate three to four hundred of these individuals will be applying for VR during the next year.

Individuals with Mental Illness who meet diagnostic eligibility criteria for Maine Care Section 17.02 Community Support Services, and/or Maine Care Section 92.03 Behavioral Health Home Services and require ongoing supports to maintain successful employment may access Mental Health Long Term Supported Employment Services funded by the DHHS Office of Behavioral Health - who then contract with Kepro, Inc to administer these services.

The Division also has limited state dollars available to provide long term employment supports through two separate programs to VR consumers with the most significant disabilities who have been closed successfully. The programs are The Basic Extended Support Program (BES) and the Brain Injury Support Program (BIS). The BES program has an annual cap per client of $3,000 and the BIS program has an annual cap per client of $8,000.

Employment services are also available to individuals with mental illness through Vocational Clubhouses. There are currently four vocational clubhouses in Maine. Transitional Employment is intended to build on basic job skills and build clubhouse members' confidence in their ability to maintain competitive employment. It is one of several employment options available through the Clubhouse approach. Transitional employment offers part-time positions in integrated worksites in the community, for 6-9 months (not supported by the use of VR funds). The individuals are paid by employers who have an agreement with the clubhouse that if the individual is not able to work their shift, the position will be covered by staff from the

clubhouse. Clubhouse staff are also responsible for the training of the member on the job site, as well as providing job coaching on the job, thereby relieving the employer of these responsibilities. Transitional employment sites are meant to be a bridge on the way to permanent employment within the community, for those who need it.

The Division will continue to work together with its state agency partners and service providers to ensure that supported employment services are provided in a quality manner that supports the outcome of integrated, community-based employment.

2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

The Division's rules state the maximum time period for DVR time–limited services is 24 months, unless the IPE indicates that more than 24 months of services are necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transition to extended services. In day–to–day practice, a team approach is used to determine when an individual is ready to transition to extended support.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Maine Department of Labor

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING

THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Libby Stone-Sterling

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

FOOTNOTES

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Libby Stone-Sterling
Title of Signatory	Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Date Signed	April 15, 2022

ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and	

The State Plan must include	Include
its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared	No

The State Plan must include	Include
funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility	

The State Plan must include	Include
for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	No
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	

The State Plan must include	Include
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	
4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the	

The State Plan must include	Include
Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act	
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:	Yes
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	44.0%	45.0%	46.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	43.0%	43.0%	44.0%	44.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4325	4,325	$4541	$4541
Credential	34.0%	34.0%	35.0%	35.0%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Attainment Rate				
Measurable Skill Gains	48.0%	48.0%	49.0%	49.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND)

A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

1. INPUT PROVIDED BY THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, INCLUDING INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL'S REPORT, THE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, AND OTHER COUNCIL REPORTS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED AS PART OF THE COUNCIL'S FUNCTIONS;

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) meets at least bi-monthly to provide updates on programs, review and analyze reports, and activities within the division and advise the Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). The SRC DBVI has been involved in Maine's development of a Unified State Plan, including the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Portion, through:

Comments regarding Goal (1) which currently reads:

<u>To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes.</u>

Goal (1) should be modified to read as:

<u>Goal (1) To Engage DBVI clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.</u>

Under the second objective, the SRC recommends that DBVI provide an update to strategy d. to note that the self-employment focus group has been restarted.

Comments regarding Goal (2) which currently reads:

<u>To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA deliverables</u>

Goal (2) should be modified to read as:

<u>To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA common performance measures.</u>

The SRC wonders about strategy d within the objective for this goal. Is this something that is ongoing?

Comments regarding Goal (3) which currently reads:

To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

The SRC recommends that Goal 3 remain as written. The SRC also recommends that DBVI review strategy d. to determine if the scope of programs listed is accurate.

Comments regarding Goal (4) which currently reads:

To ensure that a larger number of individuals, with disabilities, who may be unserved or underserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

Goal (4) should be modified to read as:

Goal (4)

To increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

The SRC also recommends the following modifications:

Objective 2:

1. DBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

The SRC also recommends that strategy b from objective 4 be modified to read:

2. DBVI will provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Further, the SRC recommends that objective 5 be expanded to include the following:

3. DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasis Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

Comments regarding Goal (5) which currently reads:

To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

The SRC recommends that Goal (5) remain as written, but recommends additional strategies be added to meet this goal. The proposed additions are:

1. DBVI will finalize and publish a DBVI consumer guide. The intent for this guide is to provide an accessible resource that covers the wide range of services available through DBVI.

2. DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers.

The SRC also proposes that a third objective be added, and strategies be developed to meet this objective. This objective stems from the review of the CSNA and identified gaps in consumer feedback discussed identified by the SRC. The SRC proposes:

Objective 3:

DBVI will develop strategies for stronger communication and enhance connection throughout the provision of services to reduce early exits from the program and to improve successful employment outcomes.

1. DBVI will conduct outreach with unsuccessful closures to determine areas of need and whether they may be interested in reengagement.
2. DBVI will continue to improve its comprehensive system of personnel development to decrease turnover and improve consistency among staff leading to improved outcomes.
3. In an effort to receive additional feedback from consumers, DBVI is updating their consumer satisfaction survey and the methods through which that survey can be completed. Those methods will be online, by mail, or over the phone.

Further Comments

From our review of the CSNA, the SRC found that despite challenges associated with Covid-19, DBVI staff was largely able to pivot and continue to provide services to clients. The majority of individuals noted that there was no impact to their services as a result of the pandemic. The increase in remote services for some served as an asset, as it allowed for increased flexibility. There were some challenges, particularly in the pace of service delivery and lack of in-person meetings.

From the SRC's review of the current state plan and the CSNA, the SRC feels that future strategies should be more precise and focus on attainable actions. Many of the strategies are written broadly, which makes it difficult to assess how effective the outlying strategies were in meeting DBVI's goals.

The SRC also feels that DBVI should include more space for provider feedback about services and service delivery to improve outcomes. The SRC would like to dedicate more time to discussing this need.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

Comments regarding Goal (1) which currently reads:

<u>To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes.</u>

Goal (1) should be modified to read as:

<u>Goal (1) To Engage DBVI clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.</u>

Under the second objective, the SRC recommends that DBVI provide an update to strategy d. to note that the self-employment focus group has been restarted.

Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the language change in goal #1 as it addresses each individual's needs. DBVI is involved with many students which may mean that they work with the consumer for a longer period of time. DBVI is also focusing on career pathways which can often take longer for some individuals to achieve their goals.

DBVI also agrees to provide an update to the second Objective, strategy d which reads: Reestablish DBVI/DVR Self-Employment Focus Group(s), comprised of VR counselors, Small Business Development Center business consultants, and Client Assistance Program staff, and provide training and technical assistance to DBVI staff and consumers engaged in Self-Employment.

Comments regarding Goal (2) which currently reads:

To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA deliverables

Goal (2) should be modified to read as:

To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA common performance measures.

The SRC wonders about strategy d within the objective for this goal. Is this something that is ongoing?

Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the change in this language to better align with the WIOA language.

Strategy d refers to Workhands app, which is an onlineportal used by many apprenticeship sponsors in Maine. DBVI will update this strategy but currently DBVI does not have any apprentices within the program.

Comments regarding Goal (3) which currently reads:

To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

The SRC recommends that Goal 3 remain as written. The SRC also recommends that DBVI review strategy d. to determine if the scope of programs listed is accurate.

Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the SRC recommendation and will review and provide updates on strategy d: which addresses summer programs and sessions available to parents.

Comments regarding Goal (4) which currently reads:

To ensure that a larger number of individuals, with disabilities, who may be unserved or underserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

Goal (4) should be modified to read as:

Goal (4)

To increase the number of individuals with disabilities, who may be underserved or unserved or have minority status, access DBVI services.

The SRC also recommends the following modifications:

Objective 2:

1. DBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

The SRC also recommends that strategy b from objective 4 be modified to read:

2. DBVI will provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Further, the SRC recommends that objective 5 be expanded to include the following:

3. DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasis Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility.

Agency Response: DBVI agrees with the SRC's recommendation and will modify the language in the goal.DBVI agrees with the other recommendations under goal #4.

Comments regarding Goal (5) which currently reads:

To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

The SRC recommends that Goal (5) remain as written, but recommends additional strategies be added to meet this goal. The proposed additions are:

a. DBVI will finalize and publish a DBVI consumer guide. The intent for this guide is to provide an accessible resource that covers the wide range of services available through DBVI.

1. DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers.

The SRC also proposes that a third objective be added, and strategies be developed to meet this objective. This objective stems from the review of the CSNA and identified gaps in consumer feedback discussed identified by the SRC. The SRC proposes:

Objective 3:

DBVI will develop strategies for stronger communication and enhance connection throughout the provision of services to reduce early exits from the program and to improve successful employment outcomes.

1.

a. DBVI will conduct outreach with unsuccessful closures to determine areas of need and whether they may be interested in reengagement.

b. DBVI will continue to improve its comprehensive system of personnel development to decrease turnover and improve consistency among staff leading to improved outcomes.

c. In an effort to receive additional feedback from consumers, DBVI is updating their consumer satisfaction survey and the methods through which that survey can be completed. Those methods will be online, by mail, or over the phone.

Agency Response: DBVI agrees with all the recommendations to goal #5.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

DBVI accepted all recommendations from the State Rehabilitation Council.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

1. A LOCAL PUBLIC AGENCY WILL PROVIDE THE NON-FEDERAL SHARE OF COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WAIVER REQUEST;

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has not requested a waiver of statewideness.

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has continued the use of cooperative planning to expand and enhance the work of blindness rehabilitation for consumers who are blind or have low vision. DBVI works in conjunction with other agencies that are not in the statewide workforce development system.

State Agencies

DBVI, along with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), has a long-standing relationship and works very closely with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). DBVI/DVR and DHHS have two memorandums of understanding (MOU). One MOU is with the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), which serves individuals with developmental disabilities and the other is with the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) which serves individuals with mental health, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. The MOU's address the combined efforts that DBVI/DVR and DHHS have initiated to clarify roles to implement an aligned service delivery system to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these entities. Through these strong partnerships with OADS and OBH, DBVI/DVR has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers. Additionally, DBVI/DVR, OADS and OBH have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state. DBVI/DVR, OADS and OBH have collaborated on one MOU to develop a cost sharing plan to address current WIOA regulations.

DBVI continues to work closely with many other state partners to ensure that Maine's benefits counseling services remain available to beneficiaries of SSI/SSDI, and specifically, DBVI applicants and eligible clients. DBVI/DVR currently administers a single contract with Maine's approved WIPA provider, Maine Medical Center's Department of Vocational Services, which includes funding from four sources of state and federal funds, including from DBVI, DVR, OBH and OADS. The contract's scope of work includes direct service provision of benefits counseling, training of VR counselors and case managers, and service capacity building through quarterly system development network meetings, which include representatives from the Disability Rights Maine's Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and the Bureau of Employment Services.

The Division f/t Blind and Visually Impaired, in conjunction with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the **Department of Corrections (DOC)** have developed a 'Procedural Directive' to assist those individuals who are incarcerated and anticipate applying for VR services. Employment has been identified as one of the most important factors in reducing recidivism among individuals who are exiting the criminal justice system. In Maine, there are many individuals who may be eligible for VR services who are currently incarcerated and who could potentially benefit from Vocational Rehabilitation services to obtain and maintain employment upon their release. The Department of Corrections through its prisons and probation systems are committed to working collaboratively with DBVI and DVR to promote appropriate referrals, as well as the exchange of information and needed documentation to support VR eligibility determination. If individuals who are blind or have low vision are

identified as having blindness rehabilitation needs, other than for VR services, they will be referred directly to a local DBVI office.

Federal Agencies

DBVI staff has been involved in teaming efforts with the staff at the **Veterans Administration (VA)** Blindness Rehabilitation Program at the Togus, VA hospital in Maine to collaborate on services for veterans who are blind or visually impaired. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Maine Department of Labor – Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services was finalized and signed in November 2011.

"The purpose of this MOU is to set forth the commitments of BRS and VA–VR&E to cooperate to meet the needs of veterans with disabilities. Through the efforts outlined in this agreement, BRS and VA–VR & E will strive to minimize duplication of services, improve information sharing and referral, and coordinate activities in accordance with all applicable statutes and regulations."

The MOU is currently being reviewed and updated to reflect new language from WIOA and other changes.

Other

DBVI continues its collaborative efforts with the University of Southern Maine Linguistics Department, Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for the Deaf-Blind and the Maine Deaf-Blind Project (a project which is a member of the New England Consortium of Deaf Blind Projects, and provides technical assistance for students through the age of 21 and focuses on transition age youth) to improve services for clients who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired from hearing and vision loss. There is collaboration with staff from Department of Health and Human Services, Disability Rights Maine, Division of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened, and A Tri-state Collaborative with Vermont and New Hampshire. Efforts have included discussions to recruit, train, and maintain a database of specially trained volunteers who can facilitate communication for people with significant vision and hearing loss, as well as other services that are available to the dual sensory population. HKNC and OIB-TAC have provided training to staff on services to this targeted population.

2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

Assistive technology services and devices are provided to individuals who are blind or visually impaired as determined by the individual's employment goal and appear as prescribed services on the individual's signed Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). DBVI works closely with several assistive technology providers such as Alpha One, All-Tech, Mainely Access, Inc., and Excel Consulting, as well as Maine CITE, the Assistive Technology grantee for Maine, to ensure that the appropriate technical assistance and assistive technology devices are provided.

3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

DBVI supports staff involvement in the USDA's AgrAbility project. Maine AgrAbility is administered by Alpha One and the University of Maine. The liaison to the project ensures that DBVI staff are knowledgeable about AgrAbility and related resources. VRCs can connect with AgrAbility for participants interested in agriculture to see how services can be braided.

4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) works with other state agencies and many councils and committees, including the Governor's Children's Cabinet which is examining the needs of out-of-school youth.

5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

The Division works collaboratively with the University of Southern Maine/Maine Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), and Coastal Enterprise, Inc. (CEI) a private, nonprofit Community Development Corporation in assisting and supporting VR consumers who are interested in self-employment opportunities.

Historically, a workgroup convened quarterly and included DBVI Staff, DVR staff, SBDC staff, and representatives from the CAP program. Quarterly statewide meetings have begun again which have included BRS staff, CAP and SBDC staff. SBDC staff and BRS Leadership met prior to the meetings and understand each agencies process to better assist the client as they follow the self-employment "pathway,"

The Division also contracts with qualified organizations to provide employment support services for DBVI clients. Services procured include: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Job Seeking Skills, Job Skills Training, Job Development and Placement Services; Job Coaching and Supported Employment; and Business Engagement.

The division takes advantage of master agreements when appropriate for temporary staffing or interpreting services.

D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

1. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S PLANS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AS WELL AS PROCEDURES FOR THE TIMELY DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLANS FOR EMPLOYMENT FOR THE STUDENTS

DBVI holds regional meetings at multiple points throughout the calendar year, and one always at the beginning of the school year, in which the entire team - VR Counselor(VRC), Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist (BLRS), Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI), Orientation and Mobility Specialist (O&M) - are present to discuss and review the status, strengths, barriers, and disability and educational needs of every student on the TVI's caseload. Starting at around the age of 8 or 9, these team discussions focus around students' pre-vocational skill level, potential eligibility, and appropriateness for vocational rehabilitation services. These discussions move into and occur within the school system, with the BLRS and TVI present to explain VR services and make recommendations of pre-employment transition services that would best prepare the student for future vocational successes.

The BLRS's also support and advocate for parents and guardians outside the school setting to establish rapport and connection that allows, ideally, for more open and consistent communication between team members and parents as their children move into early adolescence and begin to explore the world of work and vocational rehabilitation as possibilities. With the development of this relationship, parents are more engaged, responsive, and more willing to help their child pursue VR.

Students in Maine begin receiving pre-employment transition services when they turn 14 and generally are in 9th grade and/or the summer prior to entering 9th grade. Students are typically referred to VR by the DBVI Transition Consultant or the Teacher of the Visually Impaired. The Transition Consultant works collaboratively with the student, family and VR Counselor to assist completing the VR application and eligibility process. The IPE is developed within 90 days and

includes appropriate Pre-ETS services. If the student with the disability, age 14 doesn't apply to VR, Pre-ETS services are offered to the potentially eligible student by the Transition Consultant.

Funds are used for the provision of pre-employment transition services to pay for auxiliary aids and services needed by all students who are blind or visually impaired who need such aids and services to access or participate in pre-employment transition services.

2. INFORMATION ON THE FORMAL INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT WITH THE STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY WITH RESPECT TO:

A. CONSULTATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO ASSIST EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES IN PLANNING FOR THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM SCHOOL TO POST-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING VR SERVICES;

DBVI, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), along with the Department of Education (DOE) first developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) about ten years ago, updating it throughout the years to capture changes in resources and maximize our on-going collaboration between agencies. The most recent MOU addresses both individual and shared agency responsibilities across our systems to improve employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. It functions as a guiding tool for services to transition age youth with disabilities that are based on best practices and lead to post-secondary education, training and employment upon graduation.

The agreement focuses upon the needs of the individual student and allows for flexibility and professional judgment to be exercised by personnel. It also spells out the roles of each agency in referral, outreach, and the provision of service. The blindness-specific curriculum services that are identified in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 plans facilitate the achievement of the employment goal, which is further developed in the Vocational Rehabilitation Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). DBVI, the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) develop the IPE, utilizing the interests, strengths, and needs of the student.

The VRC may consult with the school case manager or transition specialist responsible for coordinating work experiences. DBVI supports meaningful employment for students with disabilities and actively assists the local education unit to secure only job placements at or above minimum wage in an integrated setting. DBVI does not support subminimum wage employment and provides consultation to students, families and schools regarding the concerns. On March 18, 2020, Maine's Governor Janet Mills signed into law LD 1874 "An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Subminimum Wage" which disallowed the payment of subminimum wages to persons with disabilities in the state of Maine and subminimum wage is no longer a possibility for students with disabilities exiting high school. Maine has no individuals working under subminimum wage certificates at the time of this plan.

Local transition events are effective in connecting employment programs, vocational programs, skills of blindness instruction, and special education programs to employers as an aid to sorting out career options, developing successful work histories, and creating employment opportunities for students. In addition, collaboration with Maine CITE provides education and services for furthering the use of assistive technologies that bridge education and employment. Unfortunately, in-person events have been limited due to the pandemic.

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;

The purpose of this collaboration with DOE is to promote and establish a process that results in an effective working relationship between state agencies on behalf of, and with youth with disabilities, in order to gain the greatest benefit from their respective programs and services.

For DBVI, direct services are provided by teams comprised of specially trained blindness professionals, such as BLRS, TVIs, and O&Ms. Specialized training includes (but not limited to) the development of visual and spatial concepts, use of adaptive aids, and instruction in reading and writing Braille (when appropriate).

DBVI VR participates/contributes to the transition planning in the IEP of all VR students (age 14 and generally entering 9th grade or in the 9th grade). The team (BLRS, O&M, TVI & VRC) attend IEP's and make recommendations for the transition plan. Recommendations include appropriate areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum which align with components of the Transition Plan such as Independent Living goals and employment goals. The VRC collaborates with the IEP team in identifying accommodations, adaptations and resources for executing the transition plan. The VRC may consult with the school case manager or transition specialist responsible for coordinating work experiences. DBVI supports meaningful employment for students with disabilities and actively assists the local education unit to secure only job placements at or above minimum wage in an integrated setting.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;

The roles and responsibilities of each department are outlined in the MOU. This agreement does not involve any financial compensation or exchange of funds between DOE and DVR/DBVI. However, it is the expectation that in the development and implementation of services, DOE and DVR/DBVI will provide in–kind resources and will promote cost efficiency and non–duplication through collaboration. Nothing in this agreement relieves either party of the responsibility to provide or pay for any transition service that the agency would otherwise provide to a student with a visual impairment who meets the eligibility criteria of that agency. If a participating agency, meaning a state or local agency that is financially or legally responsible for providing transition services to the student (other than the educational agencies responsible for the student's education), fails to provide the transition services to a student as outlined in the IEP, the education agency shall reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives for the student.

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.

DBVI will inform DOE in writing of procedural changes that may impact the eligibility of students with disabilities for vocational rehabilitation services, so that DOE may disseminate the information to local school districts. DOE will notify DBVI concerning proposed changes in regulations, policies and procedures at the state or federal level that may impact students with whom DBVI works.

DOE did notify DBVI that as of January 21, 2021, there was an administrative letter that changed the ending date for special education eligibility to the student's 22nd birthday or completion of high school. DOE has provided technical assistance and worked with DBVI and DVR to determine how vocational rehabilitation services can be provided to these students.

DBVI will collect de–identified information on informal/formal complaints and due process hearings that involve school–aged youth; this data will be provided on an annual basis to DOE, as well as numbers and demographics of transition–aged students served. A protocol to serve students in out–of–district placements in accordance with current policy will be developed.

E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

When procuring goods and services, the Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired follows state procurement processes, which are overseen by the Maine Bureau of Business Management, Division of Procurement Services. We work closely with contracted community

providers to ensure that the contracts and cooperative agreement address requirements for informed consumer choice, any licensing requirements and ensure that staff are qualified to deliver rehabilitation services and blindness-specific skills training for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

DBVI continues to require that primary community providers for adult blindness rehabilitation services maintain accreditation for delivery of rehabilitation services for people who are blind or have low vision. The accreditation program, previously managed by the National Accreditation Council Incorporated, is now under the executive management of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

The primary contracted partner for adult blindness rehabilitation provides community-based services, such as assessments, direct instruction, consultation, and support to (or on behalf of) blind and visually impaired individuals who are 14 years or older to prepare them for pre-employment, employment, and independent living in their community. Services can be provided one-on-one in the consumer's community or in groups with other consumers. These services are to provide the consumer with the skill set to obtain, retain, or advance in employment in a competitive, integrated setting.

F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth, receive supported employment services when appropriate. An IPE is written that describes the goal, the planned services, the need for extended services (if appropriate), and an assurance that the individual has been able to make an informed choice in the development of this plan. If long term supports are necessary, the VR counselor is involved in the arrangements from the transition of the VR program to the long-term support program.

DBVI has Memorandums of Understanding and staff participate in meetings with the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) and the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) to work more effectively in assisting consumers in obtaining employment with appropriate and necessary supports. The objective of the meetings is to get people together regularly to provide the opportunity for face-to-face communications so that we can better network services, increase understanding of program and resource limitations, and refine procedures. In conjunction with Community Rehabilitation Providers, DBVI along with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation continue to advocate with DHHS for increased state financial support for extended support and supported employment services. Another outcome of these meetings has been increased collaboration at the local level in troubleshooting individual consumer circumstances, as well as learning about the various service opportunities as they occur.

To provide quality employment services in a non-duplicative and seamless manner that leads to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities, including youth and individuals with the most significant disabilities, the agencies will work together to:

- identify and pursue opportunities for interagency coordination, and create a more closely aligned employment service system, to better serve youth and adults with disabilities;
- Inform consumers of the differences between the services provided by the parties to this agreement so that those individuals are better able to access necessary services;

- pursue system development and coordination opportunities with the Department of Education and other service systems involved in assisting people with disabilities to gain employment;
- Continue to work together to maintain an accessible, comprehensive system of benefits counseling services across the State of Maine for all individuals with disabilities interested in pursuing employment;
- Implement procedures that provide a smooth path from referral to transition from the short term (DVR/DBVI funded) supports to natural supports or extended support services (funded by MaineCare/OBH or DVR/DBVI);
- Share relevant information for the purposes of integrated service delivery regarding mutual clients, with appropriate signed releases; and
- Make full use of the services available through the workforce development system, including Career Centers, as appropriate.

G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

1. VR SERVICES; AND

Overall collaboration with WIOA requirements in regard to competitive integrated employment and career exploration continues to expand and improve. DBVI continues to participate on the Maine Bureau of Rehabilitation Services Apprenticeship Planning Committee which also includes members from the Maine Apprenticeship Program, Title 1 local workforce partners, and SafalPartners. During 2021, this planning committee worked with 2 employers recognized for inclusive hiring practices to develop remotely offered Employer Spotlight webinars featuring apprenticeship opportunities and hiring practices of these employers. The committee also offered 2 remote "Town Hall" webinars in which employers, Department of Labor Staff and Maine job seekers could expand on current understanding of what apprenticeship is and how it works in VR, what registered apprenticeships are available in Maine and how to find them, and who employers and job seeker could contact for more information. Further, during the past year the Maine Apprenticeship Program was awarded a State Apprenticeship Equity, Expansion and Innovation (SAEEI) grant allowing for the hiring of 5 Apprenticeship Navigators including one Navigator dedicated full-time to work with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services in the development and placement of VR clients into registered apprenticeships. This grant will also allow for increased partnerships with CTEs in the state, seeking to coordinate apprenticeship sponsors with high school students in pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

DBVI's Vocational Counselors (VRC) and Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) are reporting on their meaningful employer engagements and activities to a designated staff person in DBVI's central office for tracking.

An increased emphasis of career pathways, or a shift from job attainment to career for economic success, has resulted in use of Labor Management Information (LMI) that is provided to DBVI through the Center for Workforce Research and Information, who derives direct information from their employer contacts.

2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

In facilitating transition services, Pre-Apprenticeship is in its infancy and is currently being explored within the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL). Collaboration with the Maine Apprenticeship Program in BES is leading to increased access to employers.

The Progressive employment model has continued to increase access to business through tours, informational interviews, and career exploration activities, all leading to more employer engagement. Both youth and adults have benefitted under this model.

DBVI's Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists/Transition Consultants (BLRS/TC) are using the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) model and are utilizing Maine's Business Enterprise Program to do more career exploration in the area of small business ownership, further enhancing the facilitation of opportunities of competitive integrated employment.

H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

Through its collaboration with DHHS and specifically the coordination of Maine's Benefits Counseling Network, DBVI has been able to develop opportunities and overcome barriers to competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities who are eligible for MaineCare, the State's Medicaid program. DBVI/DVR, OADS, and OBH have resumed negotiations to develop one joint MOU in accordance with WIOA regulations. The goal is to have the MOU completed by the end of the first quarter of PY22.

2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

DBVI continues to support individuals (who are blind or visually impaired) with Developmental Disabilities to obtain and retain employment and is committed to ensuring their access to employment and meaningful work. DBVI co-enrolls clients with DVR to ensure that all rehabilitation needs are identified and addressed ensuring better employment outcomes. DBVI funds Discovering Personal Genius which is a customized employment program effective with the DD population. DBVI also coordinates with DHHS regarding long term job supports through their Waiver services programs. DBVI actively coordinates DD services with area agencies providing services to the DD population including Case Management Services, Housing and Day Services.

3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

DBVI has strong partnerships with the Department of Health and Human Services, and specifically the Offices of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) and Office of Behavioral Health (OBH). The MOU addresses the combined efforts that DBVI and DHHS have initiated and clarify roles to improve the successful outcomes for these jointly served populations. The MOU is used to guide these agencies through a system change planning process for the purpose of implementing an aligned service delivery system that promotes evidence-based practices. It contains information about policies and processes that pertain to maintaining and enhancing the relationship between these two entities.

Through these strong partnerships with OADS and OBH, DBVI has been able to maximize federal and state funding to Maine by drawing down its full federal allotment for public rehabilitation services and accessing employment support services through Medicaid waivers. Additionally, DBVI, OADS and OBH have developed and are implementing joint approaches to the workforce development of community rehabilitation providers and business engagement throughout the state. Currently, DBVI, OADS and OBH are in planning meetings and started to develop one MOU.

In addition to providing ongoing employment support to employed individuals who are blind or visually impaired with mental illness through contracts with CRP's, the DHHS Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) has the following initiatives currently underway to promote employment among the individuals they serve.

Community Employment Specialist Program:

OBH contracts with Maine Medical Center's Vocational Services to provide Employment Specialists that are embedded in behavioral health organizations across the state to assist individuals living with serious mental illness. They assist with career exploration and securing employment, and provide other supports as needed. In keeping with best practices, these Employment Specialists work as a team with behavioral health professionals to improve outcomes. This service is supplemental and not necessarily a replacement service for vocational rehabilitation services through the DOL Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, DBVI.

The Clubhouse Model of Psychiatric Rehabilitation:

Clubhouses help support members with overcoming barriers to employment by offering a variety of services such as in-house prevocational programs, transitional employment and competitive employment in the community with or without supported employment services. Prevocational programs give members the opportunity to contribute to the daily operation of the clubhouse on a volunteer basis while learning valuable skills. Transitional employment offers members the chance to work at temporary part-time jobs through Clubhouse partnerships with local employers, with on-the-job support from both the Clubhouse and the employer. Members also work in permanent positions in the community, at a job of their choosing, with supported employment as needed. There are five clubhouses in Maine.

Promoting Employment Through Traditional Mental Health Services:

Both the primary Community Support Services (Community Integration Services, Assertive Community Treatment and Community Rehabilitation Services) and Behavioral Health Home services require the development of an Individual Support Plan (ISP). Every 90 days, through the Individual Support Planning process, individuals receiving these services are asked about their vocational status and about unmet vocational needs. OBH funds specific employment services and collaborates with the Department of Labor's DBVI/DVR to provide resources to address vocational needs. In keeping with the fidelity of the model, all Assertive Community Treatment teams are required to have an employment specialist.

Jointly Funded Work Incentives Planning:

Six Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs) are available statewide to provide all Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities access to benefits counseling services. This initiative is a collaboration between OBH, OADS, and the Department of Labor's Bureau of Rehabilitation Services.

Jointly Funded Employment Workforce Development System And Website

Maine has an Employment Workforce Development System that is jointly funded by DHHS (OBH and OADS) and DOL (BRS - DBVI/DVR). This provides infrastructure for coordinating employment specialist trainings, webinars and advance topical trainings as well as maintaining a database of certified employment specialists.

DHHS and DOL also collaborate on the development and maintenance of a comprehensive website, www.employmentforme.com, providing information on best practices and resources for employment for people with disabilities. The website is divided into four target audience sections - job seekers, service providers, youth in transition and employers. Another collaboration that is ongoing is the training and certification infrastructure.

DHHS (OBH and OADS) also made available Balancing Incentive Program funds to increase system capacity to support individuals with disabilities on the path to employment. This initiative included training for Work and Benefits Navigators, the development of an advanced Work and Benefits Navigator training for Employment Specialists, the development of a Pathways to Employment infographic, and training in Individual Placement and Support and Supported Employment.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

I. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WHO ARE EMPLOYED BY THE STATE AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES IN RELATION TO THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY;

The Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired has procedures and activities in place to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit. Staff in Central office maintain a data system on personnel and personnel development. This is outlined in the areas below.

Qualified Personnel needs – The system for collecting and analyzing annual data on qualified personnel needs is supported within the Department of Labor's Human Resources and DBVI staff in the central office. The system includes keeping track of the number of personnel within DBVI who serve VR in relation to the number of individuals served by personnel category. In addition, DBVI keeps track of the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services by personnel category and the projections of the number of personnel, by personnel category, who will be needed by the state agency to provide VR services in 5 years. This number is based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field and other relevant factors.

Over the past performance period, 35 staff positions in DBVI served 300-400 individuals with visual impairments in the VR program. Personnel categories included: 1 director, 1 assistant director, 2 regional directors, 1 rehabilitation services manager, 1 consultant, 7 VRC II, 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists, 5 Paraprofessionals/VRC I, 1 support personnel, 2 BEP staff, and 10 O&M (one vacancy).

II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

Currently, a number of DBVI's VRC I and II staff are new to the position and working with DBVI consumers. Of the 6 designated VRC II staff, 3 are new to DBVI within the past year. Although 2 of the new staff have VRC experience, the blindness rehabilitation specialty is a steep learning curve. Two of these new staff have already completed a 3-week New Counselor Training program that provides a breadth of information across the VR program. The new staff have demonstrated ability to learn quickly and it is anticipated that DBVI VR consumers will be well represented over the next performance period.

III. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

It is anticipated that DBVI staffing needs could include approximately 7 new staff within the next five years. The table below highlights the current vacancies within DBVI. These vacancies are currently being covered by existing staff and contracted staff. The chart also depicts anticipated staffing needs for the next five years due to expected vacancies from retirements.

Row	Job Title	Total positions	Current vacancies	Projected Vacancies over the next 5 years
1	**Director**	**1**	**0**	**1**
2	**Assistant Director**	**1**	**0**	**1**
3	**Regional Directors**	**3**	**0**	**2**
4	**Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist**	**3**	**0**	**0**
5	**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor II**	**6**	**0**	**1**
6	**Paraprofessional VRC 1**	**5**	**0**	**1**
7	**Support Personnel**	**1**	**0**	**0**
8	**Rehabilitation Consultant**	**2**	**1**	**0**
9	**Business Enterprise Program Staff**	**2**	**0**	**0**
10	**Orientation & Mobility**	**11**	**2**	**3**
Total		**35**	**3**	**9**

One of the ways that DBVI has been a leader in the field regarding retention of qualified staff is our reimbursement program for certifications. Although DBVI does not pay for initial certifications, we recognize the financial strain to maintain these certifications, especially having multiple certifications. Therefore, we allow staff to request for reimbursement for ACVREP and CRC certification costs on a yearly basis if they provide those services as part of their DBVI employment during the course of the year.

DBVI has also provided a session on succession planning for those who want to advance into leadership positions as we see that as an area that will have a large turnover in the next 5 years. This session included the tasks of each of the various roles along with the required qualifications. Staff were allowed to ask questions. This gave them an opportunity to determine if leadership might be of interest to them and allows them some time to attain the appropriate qualifications. Many current staff have identified that they would like to promote within the agency. They will work with their supervisors to determine what they may need for personal development and any training that would better prepare them for the role.

B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

Maine has only one in-state institution of higher education, the University of Southern Maine (USM), that offers an educational program, which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The University of Maine in Farmington (UMF) works in partnership with USM.

In addition to this in-state option, UMass Boston also offers programming for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists, Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT). Many DBVI services are provided through these specialty positions, either through staff or contracted partners.

II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

The University of Southern Maine (USM) is the only in–state institution of higher education offering a graduate program which satisfies the standards set forth by the Rehabilitation Act. In the last academic year, 34 students were enrolled full–time or part–time in its Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling Program. USM classes are offered on campus and via distance education. USM did not pursue the recent competition for RSA's Long-term Training Grant. The University of Massachusetts Boston is now the nearest university which received funding under this program.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), in partnership with the University of Southern Maine, began offering an accelerated program in the Fall of 2015 that allows counseling students to graduate with a master's degree a year sooner. Graduates of the five–year program will be able to quality for both State licensing for counseling and national certification for rehabilitation counseling. The Program is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs and the Council on Rehabilitation Education.

UMF typically graduates 16-20 students per year with a B.S. in Rehabilitation Services. When combined with experience, this new program will meet the standards set forth under WIOA.

2022 UMass Boston - O&M – Anticipating 12 O&M students will graduate. Looking back over the past several years, most students seek employment in O&M where they currently live; have not had one from Maine since 2017. Contracted positions: TVIs – 18 and VRTs 12.

III. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

University of Southern Maine (USM) graduated less than 8 individuals who were eligible to sit for the CRC (MS in Counseling - Rehab Concentration). These individuals would meet minimum qualifications for DBVI's Rehabilitation Counselor II positions. DBVI does not have any staff enrolled in the Master's program at USM at this time.

University of Maine at Farmington graduated 16- 20 individuals who had an undergraduate preparation in Rehabilitation Services but were not eligible to sit for the CRC. Unless these individuals had at least two years of prior work experience in a related field, they would not be able to meet minimum qualification for DBVI's Rehabilitation Counselor II positions - however they may be considered for Rehabilitation Counselor I positions.

UMass Boston graduated approximately 15 O&Ms, 15 TVIs and 10 VRTs but often the individuals return to their home state.

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

DBVI continues to have concerns about the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff in Maine due to the low salary scales. Recent recruiting efforts have included electronic vacancy postings on national and State of Maine websites, local postings with community providers, and information sharing with universities and colleges across the country that offer a rehabilitation/blindness program. Recruitment methods used continue to be extensive and include internet postings on a variety of specific and general job bank sites, ongoing contact

with graduate programs throughout the country, promotion of DBVI staffing opportunities at national conferences, networking with community rehabilitation providers, other state agencies, our contracted partners and job listings in Maine Career Centers. Additionally, DBVI offers professional internship opportunities to pre and post-graduate level students.

Maine DBVI Leadership Team has recently entered ongoing communications, as well as presented at a job fair for O&M students and staff from UMass Boston regarding our current 2 O&M vacancies in order to provide for internships that would potentially lead to increased recruitment efforts for current vacant and anticipated vacant positions in the future.

The UMass Vision Studies program is holding recruitment informational meetings for both the TVI and O&M programs. This program also has a newly developed AT certification. A webinar provided by UMass Boston Vision Studies program Northeast Resource Center for vision education is available to discuss graduate career opportunities in vision education and rehabilitation. These types of webinars assist DBVI to encourage undergraduates in Maine to take advantage of the current grants offered that lead to certifications in the Blindness rehabilitation fields and will assist with our recruitment efforts to obtain qualified staff. Viewing these webinars is also an opportunity for staff to encourage clients that we work with to go into the blindness rehabilitation field.

Maine state government continues its efforts to better promote state jobs to persons with disabilities. The Bureau of Human Resources has implemented and continues to implement the Maine law regarding preferences in hiring persons with disabilities and providing increased access to classified service through a program called Special Appointment. Through this initiative, the individual must meet the qualifications for the position and then can be hired under this program in an "acting capacity" for up to one year. The worker receives the same pay as other workers in this classification and earns sick and vacation time after 90 days but does not accumulate seniority time. If at any time during this year the supervisor deems the worker has performed their duties satisfactorily, they will be placed in the position as a new employee subject to the usual probationary period of new State employees. through the Special Appointment program, a person with a disability may also participate in a situational assessment for a State position in order to determine if the requisite skills are present and whether the job is a good match. A unique feature of this initiative is that the Human Resources Department throughout all of state government is centrally connect to this process, which allows for people with disabilities from anywhere within the state to be contacted at the very first point the state becomes aware that there will be an open position. In this manner we can recruit from across a comprehensive networks to fill vacancies within DBVI, providing the applicant meets the minimum qualifications of the State position.

3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

After the WIOA standards for qualifications of an RC II changed the definition of qualified staff, Maine DBVI has accepted the following qualifications of an RC II: a baccalaureate degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or related field, such as Special Education, Counseling, Psychology, Occupational Therapy or Social Work, and two years of experience directly working with individuals with disabilities; OR a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or related field, such as Special Education, Counseling, Psychology, Occupational Therapy or Social Work.

DBVI will also take advantage of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) Amnesty Program. Beginning January 1, 2020, the CRCC will offer a one-time CRC Amnesty Program to formerly certified professionals still active in the field who would like to

reinstate certification. It is CRCC's intent to bring expired CRCs back to the rehabilitation counseling profession.

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

DBVI utilizes our close relationship with our CareerCenter partners in order to ensure that we all have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. DBVI is housed with our CareerCenter partners statewide. We attend joint meetings and provide training to, and get training from, CareerCenter staff on an ongoing basis. Staff participate in One stop Partner quarterly meetings where members of the transition board, Career Center staff and DBVI participate in ongoing core team meetings.

Additionally, DBVI staff are members of the workforce investment boards statewide and participate in ongoing training provided to the boards. Often DBVI staff are invited to attend relevant training. One recent example was a training provided by the regional board for our staff working with consumers in recovery. The training shared important information about the recovery resources and services available for businesses and job seekers to support employees and strengthen the community at large. The training provided staff with information to assist job seekers to maximize their career development opportunities and included our local resource Bangor Area Recovery Network (BARN) which strengthened that partnership. Another training included the Maine Human Rights Commission and addressed strategies for businesses and job seekers to protect themselves and to maximize their career development opportunities.

Staff have participated in meetings in the Zoom Area by Kate Carnes, AT for Independent Living by John Brandt, Self-Care by NAMI, Motivational Interviewing and continued trainings throughout the year in LGBTQ, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEI-A).

The DEI-A trainings included staff participation in LGBTQ + Q&A sessions presented by the George Washington University, Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research and Education. Discussions focused on the importance of identity, pronouns, and relationships, particularly related to working with youth. Staff also participated in MDOL's goals which were formulated from stakeholder meetings. They focus on accessibility of MDOL resources, staff recruitment and retention, training, and creating space to engage in DEI-A topics and outreach to priority communities.

Staff have attended trainings in their regions, in the Career Centers and in BRS specific training events.

4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

A. A SYSTEM OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS WITHIN THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

New VR employees must also attend a 3 week, comprehensive New Counselor Training. This training is provided by supervisory and management staff and covers such topics as intake and eligibility, guidance and counseling, career exploration, comprehensive assessment, IPE development, post-secondary training, self-employment, casework management, transition counseling, post-employment and the appeals process.

All DBVI staff operate under an annual Performance Management Form (PMF) which has a section titled "Employee Development Plan". Supervisors work closely with each staff member

to identify areas of needed training based on interest, leadership development and performance observations. Identified trainings are outlined in the annual PMF and can be achieved in several outlets including attending part/all of new counselor training, attending annual training events such as All Agency Day or DBVI Day, or through trainings offered virtually such as Hadley, The Job Accommodation Network, the Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research & Education and the Institute for Community Inclusion.

Other opportunities for staff training are afforded through training at national conferences such the AFB, AER and NSCAB conferences as well as contracted trainings from organizations such as Sky's the Limit and Maine CITE. Staff are encouraged to read from extensive online and physical library of publications specific to blindness rehabilitation throughout their career with DBVI.

DBVI utilizes current staff with specific interests and skills as subject matter experts in the area of technology. These technology specialists work with the DBVI leadership to recommend devices and equipment for purchase as demos for the various offices; devices include items such as Sunu Band, Talking Compass, Victor Reader Trek, iPad, and Aftershokz headphones. Consultation with the Buzz clip company occurred to obtain demo devices that are housed in the regional offices. Multiple presentations on Aira app to individual clients and the Maine Low Vision group are/were offered. Consultation is provided to DBVI staff in regard to apps and other technology as requested as well as the provision of AT training/overview for new DBVI staff. Staff attended trainings offered by Maine CITE Adaptive Equipment Financing Program, OIB-TAC, International O&M Online Symposium and Helen Keller Deaf blindness Equipment to stay current on new apps and technologies.

B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.

Training opportunities and conference materials are shared through a number of statewide means, including the BRSNet. A library of training resources, including texts, journals and videotapes addressing vocational rehabilitation and blindness/low visiontopic areas are available to be loaned to regional offices as needed. Materials include Institute on Rehabilitation Issues publications, videotapes addressing learning disabilities, Consumer Choice News, National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, and other documents from the various National Rehabilitation and Research and Training Programs throughout the United States. DBVI also makes full use of many valuable web-based resources such as American Foundation for the Blind, National Federation of the Blind, American Council of the Blind, Texas School for the Blind, ACVREP, CRCC and Hadley. Examples of these materials can be seen in the "Comprehensive onboarding and staff development program" provided at the end of this CSPD reporting section.

DBVI recognizes that staff are the most valuable resource in our work supporting consumers who are blind or visually impaired in the pursuit of their vocational goals. To that end the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development was designed to support the training needs of Division staff. Staff development is delivered through formal and informal modalities and are derived from internal and external sources.

In the past performance period, approximately 300 individuals were served by the Maine DBVI VR system. Maine DBVI currently has 6 occupied VR Counselor II positions that carry an average caseload of approximately 30 individuals, and 3 Blindness Rehabilitation Specialist, in addition to carrying a small caseload, assist the families with children who are blind and visually impaired in accessing needed supports and resources, assisting in advocacy and providing technical assistance to community stakeholders. We expect these staffing numbers to remain consistent going forward. Although DBVI's numbers decreased due to homemakers, we expect to serve about 300 individuals annually over the next five years and anticipate that 100% will be individuals with significant disabilities due to the nature of the population that DBVI serves.

Current service delivery positions include five VR Counselor 1 positions that assist in facilitating clients through the process, and 10 Orientation and Mobility Specialists (excluding the vacancies) throughout the state that work with VR clients. All O&M staff are currently ACVREP certified.

DBVI annually reviews the qualifications of all staff and tracks the educational plans of new hires and personnel requiring education and training to ensure that CSPD standards are achieved to the maximum extent possible. CSPD plans for rehabilitation counselors and other staff working in the DBVI VR program who have not met the state standard are developed with supervisors upon completion of probation and reviewed as part of an annual performance review. CSPD plans reflect a balance between personnel development and operational need. The plans seek optimal training modalities and formats, as well as the most cost-effective methods to utilize those institutions. Upon entering CSPD plans, program and coursework approval must be obtained from the DBVI management team.

This past year, a separate survey was not sent out, but information was gathered through some evaluations that came after trainings. This was in part because this was used as a tool to help plan for staff wanting to travel in person to trainings. Due to COVID, staff had the opportunity to join conferences, like OIB-TAC CON and AFB Leadership Conference that they may not have been approved to travel to attend. As trainings happen, evaluations are sent out to track and monitor staff attendance and achieve credential attainment. Training sponsored by the division is determined by operational need as well as by employee needs to maintain or retain qualified status. DBVI employees participate in annual performance reviews, a portion of which specifically addresses personnel development. At these reviews, staff and supervisors jointly identify specific training required to address individual performance enhancement and operational need. The Regional Managers meet with their staff on an annual basis to review performance and to plan the professional development for the upcoming year. That plan would outline what coursework or credits were beneficial to the agency and/or are required for the employee to continue to be qualified staff. DBVI central office tracks all the courses that employees attend and the credits they earn while supervisors monitor the progress regarding professional development. Employees submit requests for trainings and are evaluated and approved as they relate to the professional development/operational need. Often staff will request to go to a conference such as the New England Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) that allow them to attain many of their required credits.

In an effort to ensure a high level of skilled staff to deliver quality services to consumers, the CSPD plan addresses long-range college training needs for qualified rehabilitation blindness professionals and paraprofessionals. In addition, the CSPD provides short-term training needs that allow for continuous learning and the maintenance of professional certification, including Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credentials, and Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists, Vision Rehabilitation Therapists (VRT) and Low Vision Therapists (LVT) and newly developed certification program for Assistive Technology (AT) Specialists. The Division's goal is to encourage staff to pursue a variety of educational choices in a supportive working environment and with the necessary time and financial support. Certifications in all disciplines are encouraged, as well as training plans that support maintaining CRC, O&M and other specific professional certifications.

DBVI also supports educational programming for existing staff seeking to meet fully qualified status and, for those who have achieved CRC status and require on-going CRC training credits. DBVI qualified personnel standards for O&M/VRT/LVT staff are to be certified by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. The ACVREP website explains, "The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals offers professional certification for vision rehabilitation and education professionals in order to

improve service delivery to persons with vision impairments. ACVREP is committed to quality certification programs that meet rigorous recognized standards. Programs are designed to offer applicants the means to demonstrate that professional knowledge and skills that promote the provision of quality service and ethical practice. ACVREP offers certification in three disciplines: Low Vision Therapy, Orientation & Mobility, and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. Individuals who possess ACVREP certification demonstrate a level of quality and care that is unmatched in the field." Often staff will request to go to a conference such as the New England Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) that would allow them to attain many of their required credits. Whenever possible, DBVI acquires the ACVREP endorsement to earn CEU credits for trainings provided in state.

In an effort to maximize training resources, staff often solicit local training resources to provide free or low-cost workshops, attend trainings with a 'train the trainer' perspective to provide turn-around training to other staff, and share internal expertise through in-house training opportunities. This year with the pandemic, there were numerous trainings that were offered virtually and often for free.

The Research and Training Center (RTC): Rural which is part of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities (RIIC) at the University of Montana provided a training on self-employment that two BRS staff (one DVR and one DBVI) attended. It was designed to be a train the trainer model and these individuals will bring that information back to other BRS staff.

Many attended an Ability to Execute (A2E) Essentials training that taught 9 essential skills to drive change within an organization. This training was used as a model for BRS staff to join other trainers and provide the training to more of MDOL staff.

DBVI made continuous efforts to seek and identify enhanced learning opportunities, particularly through use of distance learning modalities, in providing educational forums for its staff. Videoconferencing capacity has been established on a statewide basis and has led to an extensive learning collaborative with DVR, the CareerCenter One Stops, the Social Security Administration, external partners such as Maine CITE, the Small Business Development Corporation, and the local workforce development boards. DBVI staff also has been able to take advantage of many free virtual training opportunities through webinars and teleconferences during this pandemic.

One training that has been very successful, and has been provided by videoconferencing, is the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services new counselor training curriculum. This training entails a comprehensive overview of the VR process and it takes places generally over a 3-week period. The most recent one was Dec 7, 2021 to January 6, 2022 with some time off for the holidays. Continuing education credits have been made available for new and current staff that want to refresh procedures and/or obtain credits, mainly CEU's and CRC's. The training includes topic areas such as rehabilitation technology, job placement and assessment, and guidance and counseling, such as casework flow and post-secondary education. It is available to all staff and required of new DBVI VR staff. In addition, DBVI utilizes a variety of internet links, on-line videos, and web resources as part of its overall training for new DBVI employees. Training opportunities and conference materials are shared through a number of statewide avenues, including the Internet and Intranet, as well as counselor, managerial and supervisory networking activities and interactions.

DBVI is committed to providing an annualDBVI Day training for all staff. During the pandemic, this training has been offered remotely and in multiple sessions to reduce the screen time and fatigue for staff. We utilize this opportunity to provide training to assure that all staff are up to date. We are also committed to providing an annual All Agency/Blindness Systems training for all State of Maine professionals and our contracted partners who are working in the field of blindness rehabilitation. This training has been instrumental in maintaining a positive working

relationship with our blindness team and to focus on training specific to blindness rehabilitation.

DBVI worked this past performance period with Mississippi state to develop a comprehensive onboarding and staff development program that has is designed to be a yearlong developmental program for DBVI staff. This four tier course outlines areas in supervision, mentoring, reading, viewing, job shadowing and experiential practice. (An overview of this program is included at the end of the CSPD section)

DBVI takes advantage of the National Research & Training Center free short courses. They are approved for ACVREP, CRC and National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB) credits. These include an Introduction of the Basics of Blindness and Low Vision, Cultural diversity and competence; Fundamental courses on eye conditions; Essentials for working with Individuals with Visual impairments; Visual Impairment and additional health conditions, Courses on Program Effectiveness; Special Topics for VR; Research based short courses related to employment; and the Business Enterprise Program.

In addition, DBVI is committed to work with our partner, DVR, in offering a biennial, two-day statewide training event for all Bureau of Rehabilitation Services staff at which multiple trainings - identified and prioritized by staff surveys, case reviews and oversight bodies (i.e. State Rehabilitation Council) are offered. Training needs and activities are often identified and offered at the regional/office levels through free or low-cost workshops. During this past performance period, this training was offered virtually due to the pandemic. It was an opportunity to celebrate 100 years of VR.

Over the past performance period DBVI has worked with our DVR partners to participate in many Bureau wide training. Training surveys are used, via Microsoft forms, for staff to complete to receive certificates of attendance and CRC credits. Recent trainings included: 2-day communication/ethics training, World of Work Inventory training, Personality Disorders, Motivational Interviewing, Brain Injury, WIOA Cross-Training Webinars, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility and, specifically for supervisors, a 3-day BRS Leadership training in which the focus was on providing skill training for leaders utilizing challenging supervisory scenarios. Some additional trainings include: Maine Medical Center CWIC Benefits Navigator training (3 part) Digital Badging Training, Adult Education Hi Set Training, and Celebrating Employment First Training, McKinsey Academy training – Ability to Execute Essentials, LGBTQ training by George Washington University and Motivational Interviewing. These trainings were available to all Bureau of Rehabilitation staff – DBVI and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

One program that has been recently developed for BRS is a 6-part series with a WIOA overview and partner cross training. There are 13 brief webinar links beginning with "WIOA 101: An introduction to the New Law" and ending with the "Youth Program". Included in the zoom trainings were common performance measures, career pathways, youth programming, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Apprenticeship and working with corrections and Veterans.

Another BRS training included the presentation of the newly developed AWARE QA tool for all management/supervisory staff. It addresses the case review process, types of case reviews, statewide review template, assigning cases, practice cases, how to monitor progress on case reviews and QA reports. For many years, DBVI had been conducting case reviews using survey monkey (more recently Microsoft forms) to collect data. This new QA tool is designed to replace survey monkey and contain the entire date collection process within our case management system, AWARE.

Lastly, the State of Maine was working with all employees regarding Workday Maine, an online Human Resource portal where employees can record and code their timesheets, request time off and track accrued earned time. All staff were being provided with Employee Self-Service

Town Hall Materials, job aids, quick reference guides, and instructional videos, in order to navigate this new system. This work with this new portal is currently on hold.

Below is a list of training over the past performance period:

DBVI Day (annual)

DBVI Day Part 2

All Blindness Agency Day

Motivational Interviewing

Supervisor/manager MI training with an experienced clinician. (These individuals then became a member of the BRS MI team. The focus of the team is to support all BRS staff in developing and/or improving MI strategies in order to improve client outcomes.)

New Counselor Training

Communication

Personality Disorders

OIB TAC-trainings (dementia, DB, adjustment)

BRS Leadership Training

Brain injury

Peer Mentoring

CRP project training

Syntiro Training

BRS Statewide (2018)

AFB Leadership conference

BLAST Conference (BEP)

AER (NE)

AER Orlando

Helen Keller (fall 2018)

Apprenticeship

WOWI

Comprehensive onboarding and staff development program

Maine Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) - An Introduction to New Employee Training

This training is to be utilized and customized for all DBVI employees for their first year of employment.

Tier One Module (to be completed during the first quarter of employment)

- Arrange for HR orientation for all state employees (DOL policies)
- Get a State ID picture and badge

- Tour of regional and central office
- Central fleet orientation (for state vehicle use before use)
- BRS website & resources http://inet.state.me.us/rehab/index.shtml

Note: Sign up for BRS new counselor training for VRC II and customized for others

- Maine AWARE case management
- Safety/Emergency Evacuation Plan (for the pertinent office)
- Utube video run hide fight
  https//www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf
- Link to Lt. Elliot's active shooter training:
  http://inet.state.me.us/labor/safety/index.shtml

Base Reading & Viewing:

DBVI Rules, Guidance memos, policy, and protocol

http://inet.state.me.us/rehab/casework_resources/dbvi_policies_procedures/index.shtml

- at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
- Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center (OIB TAC) website and courses https://www.oib-tac.org/

Under resources at least 3 items listed below:

- Quick Overview of Commonly used Acronyms, Abbreviations and Jargon in the Field of Blindness and Low Vision Older Blind Version
- Information for Working with a Person Who is Visually Impaired or Blind
- Information on specific eye diseases
- Vision Impairment 101 curriculum (book available in each regional office and training if needed by DBVI staff Kim Stumph)

Additional resources:

- Maine Senior Guide is a free, on-line resource for older Mainers and their families. Besides the Maine Senior Guide website with hundreds of resources, we publish this newsletter, have an active Facebook page, and also host and produce senior expos around the state.
- The Iris Network https://www.theiris.org
- Catholic Charities Maine https://www.ccmaine.org
- Maxi Aids Products for independent living www.maxiaids.com
- Consumer Groups:

1. ACB of Maine: acbmaine.org
2. Pine Tree Guide Dog Users: pinetreeguidedogusers.org
3. National Federation of the Blind of Maine: nfb-me.org

Job Shadow

- At least oncewith each of the various types of Blindness Professionals within your Region: *VRC*VRT *O&M *TVI *AT
- Client assistance program (CAP) - view the website and meet with the representative

Experiential:

- Human guide by local O&M staff (needs to be in the first week of employment before see clients)
- Work under occlusion to include: Orientation, interpreting surrounding environment, independent travel w/ O&M
- Numerous blindness-specific IL activities geared toward "can do," with VRT

Mentoring:

- Weekly meetings with DBVI mentor, (face-to-face or zoom or phone)
- Monthly face to face meeting with DBVI mentor to include at least one shadow.

**the shadowing needs to occur in two forms, initially with the new staff observing mentor, and then mentor observing new staff once they begin working with clients.*

Supervision:

- Performance evaluation
- Weekly meetings with supervisor to include regular/weekly observation/shadows; organizational system review; TAMS; Maine Aware, etc.
- Updated "Who's Who" in DBVI statewide and our partners; include brief bio, certifications and current information.
- Orientation to Career Center staff and resources
- Acronym list review
- Orientation to Business Enterprise Program – (BEP) by DBVI representative
- BRS new counselor training (sign up for VRC II & customized as needed for others)

<u>Tier Two Module (to be completed during second quarter of employment)</u>:

Base Reading & Viewing:

- at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
- The American Council of the Blind (ACB.org) strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people
- American Foundation for the Blind *AFB.org*
- American Foundation for the Blind Senior Site afbinfo@afb.org
- ADA Guidelines for Visual Impairment – Eric.Dibner@maine.gov
- Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired www.hadley.edu
- Helen Keller – DeafBlind Services www.helenkeller.org/hknc
- https://youtu.be/JtC4ZfMVknU

- National Federation of the Blind https://www.nfb.org
- Pine Tree Guide dog user ellsworthme.org/**pinetree**
- *MOBALE website* www.MOBALE.org www.Facebook.com/MOBALEMaine
- Information about Winter and Summer Sports Education Camps
- AllPast 24 hoursPast weekPast monthPast yearAlpha 1 www.alphaonenow.org
- *Maine Parent federation***mpf**.org

Job Shadow

- At least oncewith each member of your job classification/discipline in DBVI outside your Region
- Meet with VIST and/or BROS from the V.A. to discuss the program requirements and role with DBVI
- Attend a Low Vision Exam
- Iris network – website and tour the center & Iris Park Apts.

Experiential:

- Participation in at least one "blindness community" and consumer group activity:

(for example) ACB, NFB, *Pine Tree Dog Guide Users*, Support groups, Recreation activities, BVA, MOBALE winter or summer sports education camps

- Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Training with state representative (Esther Butler)
- State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) training on-line through Regional Services Administration (RSA)
- Low Vision Training – including orientation to low vision kits/devices i.e. magnifiers, CCTV's, *scopes, glare filters, etc.

Mentoring:

- Bi-Weekly check-ins with DBVI mentor, (face to face or via telephone or polycom).

Monthly face to face meeting with DBVI mentor to include at least two shadow opportunities over the course of the quarter.

Supervision:

- Bi-Weekly meetings with supervisor to include regular observation/shadows
-

<u>Tier Three Module: (to be completed during third quarter of employment)</u>:

Base reading & Base viewing

- at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
- AERBVI.org Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- American Printing House for the Blind web site www.APH.org

- Perkins School for the Blind web site www.perkins.org
- VISION Aware web site www.visionaware.org
- TSBVI (Texas School for the Blind) https://www.tsbvi.edu
- www.carroll.org Carroll Center for the Blind
- **napvi**.org NAPVI.
- RRTC on VR Practices for Youth and Young Adults and click on "Trainings" to find these online seminars, as well as other webinars: http://vrpracticesandyouth.org/
    - The Family Role in Career Planning and Preparation for Youth with Disabilities
    - Integrated Employment: Expectation AND Choice
    - Introduction to Seamless Transition
    - Inclusive Higher Education and VR Common Performance Measures
    - 10 Tips for Effective Collaboration Between VR and Higher Education
    - Introduction to Inclusive Higher Education and Its Impact on VR Services
    - Family and VR Roles in Supporting Higher Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Job Shadows:

- At least one job shadow in another discipline outside your region

Mentoring:

- Monthly check-ins with DBVI mentor, (face-to-face or via telephone or polycom).

Regular face-to-face meeting with DBVI mentor to occur at least every six weeks and should include at least two shadow opportunities over the course of the quarter.

Supervision:

- at least monthly meetings with supervisor to include regular observation/shadows

<u>Tier Four Module (to be completed during fourth quarter of employment)</u>:

Base reading & Base Viewing:

- at least: 1 of the publications, 1 of the books, and 1 of the videos identified below
- LEAP, check out the video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVrG1ESEsjM
- LEAP's website: https://resourcevt.org/training-programs/leap/
- Flying blind from Larry Lewis – flying blind.org every Thursday (they are achieved & technology driven)
- HR guide for employers under our products – employment products – how to make a PDF accessible – blind.msu.state.edu
- access world by AFB – reviews assistive technology devices
- https://corporate.comcast.com/values/accessibility

- RespectAbility feature about Janet LaBreck as part of their honoring Women's History Month: https://www.respectability.org/2019/03/women-disabilities-janet-labreck/

Job Shadow:

- Section 121 – read about it and meet with the regional rep

Experiential:

- Listen to a book in audio format
- Listen to a movie with audio description

Mentor: TBD as needed

Supervision: TBD as needed

BOOKS

- Making Life More Livable: Simple Adaptations For Living At Home After Vision Loss. Duffy, M. (2015).
- O&M for Independent Living: Strategies for Teaching Orientation and Mobility to Older Adults. Griffin-Shirley, N & Bozman, L. (2016).
- Pathway to Independence: A guide for people with vision loss. Kersh, Rita (2015).
- No Barriers: A Blind Man's Journey to Kayak the Grand Canyon by Erik Weihenmayer
- The Adversity Advantage: Turning Everyday Struggles Into Everyday Greatness by Paul G. Stoltz, Erik Weihenmayer
- Micheal Nye "my heart is not blind"
- David Feeling your way through life – on Kindle in September
- Tom Sullivan book – seeing lessons – one that is a kid at Perkins and escape Adventures in Darkness –
- Mike May book crashing through

PUBLICATIONS

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- Binns, A., Bunce, C., Dickinson, C., Harper, R., Tudor-Edwards, R., Woodhouse, M., et al. (2012). How effective is Low Vision Service Provision? A Systematic Review. Survey of Ophthalmology, 57(1), 34-65.
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- McDonnall, M. C. (2009). The effects of developing a dual sensory loss on depression in older adults: A longitudinal study. *Journal Of Aging And Health*, 21(8), 1179-1199.
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- McDonnall, M. C., Crudden, A., LeJeune, B. J., Steverson, A., & O'Donnell, N. (2016). Needs and challenges of seniors with combined hearing and vision loss. *Journal Of Visual Impairment & Blindness,* 110(6), 399-411.
- Moore, J. E. (2003). Using Program Evaluation To Improve Service Delivery For Older Individuals Who Are Blind. *Journal Of Visual Impairment And Blindness*, 97, 42-45.
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- Moore, J. E., Steinman, B. A., Giesen, J. M., & Frank, J. J. (2006). Functional outcomes and consumer satisfaction in the Older Blind Independent Living Program. *Journal Of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 100(5), 285-294.

- VIDEOS
- "What Do You Do When You See A Blind Person?"
- "Going Blind"
- "When Blindness Occurs" by the Seeing Eye
- "Walking in My Shoes" http://www.themtsc.org/safety-resources/video.php select visually impaired resources, then cross the street in my shoes.
- Lives Worth Living video

5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

In addressing issues associated with diversity and cultural needs, the Division has staff who are visually impaired who utilize and are well versed in adaptive technology used by our consumers. DBVI has an agreement with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on referral of individuals who are deaf blind who use American Sign Language (ASL) as their native language. DBVI also has staff with a background specialty in working with individuals who are Deaf Blind; specialty areas of these staff are low vision, orientation and mobility, and vocational rehabilitation. One individual serves as a subject matter expert and consultant for other staff working with consumers who are Deaf Blind and is supported to attend ongoing training in order to maintain her expertise. Recent training included the Helen Keller National Center on-line training group to include the Helen Keller Confident Living Course and the Haptics course. In addition, they serve on the Helen Keller Deaf Blind Steering Committee, and participate in the Helen Keller Tri-State Collaboration meetings, and Dual Sensory Loss chapter meetings.

DBVI staff utilizes certified interpreter services, such as Maine State Interpreters or Catholic Charities Maine, for individuals with language barriers.

DBVI staff participate in webinars that address communication barriers. One such webinar, Assistive Technology for Effective Distance Communications, was provided to staff by the Disability Rights Maine Deaf Services where staff learned about the Maine Relay system, Telecommunication Equipment program and the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Program.

As a partner in the CareerCenters, DBVI clients who come to the centers and need language interpretation will have access to telephonic interpretation through Certified Languages International.

6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

DBVI staff have received training from the Department of Education (DOE) to learn more about the educational system and the local schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614 (d) of the IDEA, to learn best practices to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services and/or transition services to potentially eligible or eligible VR students.

DOE did notify DBVI that as of January 21, 2021, there was an administrative letter that changed the ending date for special education eligibility to the student's 22nd birthday or completion of high school. DOE has provided technical assistance and worked with DBVI and DVR to determine how vocational rehabilitation services can be provided to these students.

J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

The Division and its SRC continue to discuss and explore strategies in an effort to reach out to as many potential consumers as possible. The SRC members represent a broad spectrum of consumer interest groups. These individuals share information pertaining to the constituent groups that they represent. Topics that are discussed are issues related to employment and other vocational rehabilitation services, skills of blindness needed for personal independence and self-sufficiency, mobility and safe travel, personal adjustment to blindness, support groups,

braille, adaptive devices and assistive technology, access to the Internet, audio and digital books, recreation and leisure activities and activities within the Business Enterprise Program. Attendance is open to the public and available statewide through video-conference calls.

DBVI continues to receive input from survey questionnaires that are sent to all closed cases to determine the satisfaction of the consumer for the services that they received. This method has been updated so that the individual can get the survey electronically, through the mail, or receive a phone call. In addition, the DBVI Director (or designee) routinely attends various gatherings of the organized blindness community in Maine (American Council of the Blind of Maine, and National Federation of the Blind of Maine), and various regional meetings with consumers and other stakeholders. DBVI has scheduled meetings throughout the year with a number of partners/stakeholders including Catholic Charities Maine (education for blind children), the Iris Network (blindness rehabilitation), Disability Rights Maine, ALPHA One Center for Independent Living, the DBVI State Rehabilitation Council and members of Maine's three consumer-driven blindness organizations.

DBVI assists eligible individuals with disabilities to prepare for, achieve, retain and advance in employment in competitive integrated employment. DBVI administers the Vocational Rehabilitation program in Maine for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) specifically for Maine citizens who are blind or visually impaired. A comprehensive needs assessment is required every three years and focuses on the Vocational Rehabilitation program for those who are blind and visually impaired and on the needs of individuals eligible for those services. The assessment is designed to answer important questions about the population eligible for DBVI services living in Maine and their vocational rehabilitation needs. Information gathered for the assessment will guide DBVI in its strategic plan and goal development for the years –2021-2023. Specifically, the report responds to federal regulations (34 CFR 361.29) requiring Maine's Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) to jointly conduct a "comprehensive statewide assessment" with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) every three years that describes the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment.

Survey data showed that it is taking longer to close a case and fewer cases are being closed successfully Since the average wage at closure is increasing each year from the average wage at application, a conclusion could be made that VRCs are working with consumers longer to better prepare them for quality employment outcomes. Further, an emphasis on Career Pathways and economic self=sufficiency has resulted in additional time spent in achieving successful outcomes.

DBVI's most recent Comprehensive Statement Needs Assessment – 2020- was completed during the pandemic.

The executive summary report is available and here are a few highlights:

Overall Satisfaction and Expectations

- 89% of consumers are satisfied with the DBVI's program.
- 89% of consumers are satisfied with the services provided by DBVI.
- 85% of consumers feel that DBVI services met their expectations.

Experience with Services Provided by DBVI

- 94% of consumers are satisfied with the choice of services offered.
- 91% of consumers are satisfied with the choice of service providers.

Experience with DBVI Staff and Counselors

- 97% of consumers feel the staff of DBVI is helping them achieve their VR goal.
- Nearly all consumers (99%) feel the DBVI staff treats them with dignity and respect.

DBVI works with the Department of Health and Human Services in supporting clients who in addition to having visual impairment have developmental disabilities, brain injuries, other related conditions and physical disabilities through five Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services 1915c Waivers. Individuals receiving waiver services have significant disabilities and require supports and services to obtain and maintain employment.

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Vocational rehabilitation services to minorities with disabilities in Maine have always been a challenge to DBVI because of the state's relatively homogeneous population and low ethnic diversity. According to the 2020 US Census, residents are primarily White (90.8%) with small representations of Black (1.9%), Asian (1.2%), and Native American (0.6%) individuals in certain geographical areas of the state. According to the most recent American Community Survey, the Native American population represents approximately 8,017 individuals. Tribal members are primarily located in Penobscot, Washington and Aroostook counties. DBVI continues to work collaboratively with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, through its Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation Program. They were awarded a five-year Section 121 grant through 2025.

There continues to be an increase of non-English speaking immigrants and refugees in Maine, especially in the southern part of the state. Those who are dealing with vision loss need costly interpreter services to benefit from available blindness rehabilitation services so that they can better access vocational rehabilitation for gaining employment in their new country. Consumers have identified the need to explore culturally specific service delivery models that respond to issues as they related to blindness and visual impairment.

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

Due to the rural demographics of Maine, transportation presents a significant unmet need in most areas of the state. Specific issues include the lack of information on existing transportation that is available, and concerns regarding the timeliness and safety of some publicly funded transportation programs. In many areas of the state, public transportation is non-existent for medical appointments, transportation to work, and travel options for routine daily activities. Consumers further identified that even in communities where public transportation existed it didn't run during evening hours/weekends and paratransit is not available to those who do not qualify for MaineCare. However, through this pandemic, DBVI staff have learned how to provide many of the services virtually which has allowed more consumers to participate without dealing with transportation needs.

D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

The CSNA survey identified the need to do more outreach to employers about individuals who are blind and visually impaired. Employers will benefit from increased education about consumer's unique strengths and capabilities and the services provided by DBVI. DBVI has a new position that it is currently recruiting for. This position will work with employers to learn of their employment needs and educate them on how those needs can be met with DBVI consumers. The position will advocate for DBVI consumers and explain what/how accommodations to the business can take place.

Co–location in Maine's network of Department of Labor (MDOL) One–Stop CareerCenters has provided DBVI the opportunity to work in partnership with several other programs that are components of the statewide workforce development system and can support the employment of people with disabilities. The CareerCenters provide several employment programs that serve people with disabilities. The Maine Job Link is an online accessible CareerCenter tool to allow job seekers from around the state to be matched with real-time available open (currently over 25,712) positions. Currently, the Job Link shows 1959 job seekers.

While the Bureau of Employment Services (BES) collects data on self-reported disability, it does not require that individuals disclose having a disability. As a result of past work through collaborative efforts including two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative grant funding, there is increased awareness and attention in the CareerCenter to increasing access to expanded services for customers who have a visual impairment. There are concerns about the accuracy of the Maine Job Link's data collection system. The system is designed to support employers and job seekers without focusing on disabling conditions.

The numbers of individuals with disabilities enrolled in WIOA title IB and III programs during PY20 (PY20 Annual Report data):

Program	Enrolled	Disclosed Disability	%
LEX Self-Service	135,733	Not reported	
LEX Employment Srvs	2,494	267	10.71%
ADULT	580	75	12.93%
DISLOCATED WORKER	358	31	8.66%
YOUTH	365	195	53.42%

E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

DBVI has been working extensively with transition-aged youth. This could be the result of the loss of the homemaker closure coupled with the recent requirement to spend 15% of Title I funds on students with a disability. It could also be that the inverse is true and the increase in the transition-aged consumers is the direct result of the increased focus on activities for pre-employment transition services for students with a disability.

Under WIOA an emphasis on Career Pathways and economic self-sufficiency has resulted in additional time spent in achieving successful outcomes. RSA guidance suggested that DBVI staff present students and youth with a career development approach that views minimum wage employment as a work experience and that promotes continuation of vocational rehabilitation guidance and counseling and other services that assist youth in obtaining higher paying careers.

When looking at the responses in the PY2020 CSNA from those individuals under 25:

89% were satisfied/very satisfied with the services

93% were satisfied /very satisfied with the choice of services available

88% were satisfied/very satisfied with the choice of service providers

92% were satisfied/very satisfied with the information provided about choices

These percentages were from a small number of participants.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

While DBVI has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

3. INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES FOR TRANSITION CAREER SERVICES AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH SERVICES ARE COORDINATED WITH TRANSITION SERVICES PROVIDED UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

DBVI continues to look at the needs of each individual who is blind or has low vision taking into consideration his/her strengths, preferences, and interests. DBVI will work with schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614 (d) of the IDEA, to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services to potentially eligible or eligible VR students. Other services may include community experiences, the development of employment in a competitive, integrated setting and other post-school adult living objectives.

Some concerns that were identified in the PY2020 CSNA were those of accessibility, transportation and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) turnover. With work experience, students will begin to identify areas within a workplace that are not accessible. With self-advocacy skills, they will be able to communicate this information and educate employers. DBVI continues to work with students on various modes of transportation but in many rural areas, there are few or no choices. DBVI has now filled all the VRC vacancies and is providing training on Pre-ETS and transition services so they will be well equipped to assist consumers with their employment goal.

K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

Due to the pandemic, the Census Bureau did not release its standard 2020 ACS 1-year estimates. However, based on 2019 ACS data, the 2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium estimates approximately 2% of Maine's population has a visual impairment which is approximately 26,610. The ACS considers individuals with a visual impairment as those who identified as having a 'disability with vision difficulty.'

2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

A. THE VR PROGRAM;

When comparing application data from PY20 and PY21 (July through March), the number of applicants has increased but is down from the same period in PY19. Taking into consideration that there was a pandemic during this timeframe, DBVI estimates that for FFY23 the number of eligible individuals being served in Title I by the Division will remain steady and within the 300-400 range.

B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

The Title VI – supported Employment regulations were affected with the passing of WIOA, allowing states a longer period of time to provide services to youth with a significant disability who required supported employment services. Another change was that costs were not captured as supported employment until the individual was placed in employment status. The

funds were also specifically earmarked for certain populations, restricting spending to adults if the equivalent expenditures were not made within the youth budget. Therefore, there may not be a direct correlation between the number of eligible individuals to the amount spent in each respective budget. In FFY20, there were 25 individuals that were identified as needing supported employment services. The costs of some of these services were not covered in the Title VI but fell in the Title I program as many of the identified individuals were not placed in employment status. Eight of those individuals were youth and seventeen were adults. In FFY21, there were 27 individuals identified as needing supported employment services. Seven of those individuals were youth and twenty were adults. DBVI has determined that many consumers are able to work in the competitive labor market without supports.

Based on the numbers for FFY20 and FFY21, DBVI anticipates serving approximately 25 individuals identified as needing support employment services in both FFY22 and FFY23.

C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

DBVI is not currently under an Order of Selection.

3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

DBVI is not currently under an Order of Selection.

4. THE COST OF SERVICES FOR THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES. IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION, IDENTIFY THE COST OF SERVICES FOR EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY.

DBVI looked at FFY20 expenditures for the VR program (including state VR match and all Pre-ETS expenses) in addition to Supported Employment expenses for both youth and adults to determine what the potential costs of services for the number of estimated individuals for services. In FFT21, the cost of these services was approximately $2,857,548.31.

DBVI anticipates spending this amount or slightly higher for FFY22. DBVI anticipates the cost of services for FFY23 to be around $3M, considering the increase in costs for goods and services.

L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

1. IDENTIFY IF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES WERE JOINTLY DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE STATE VR AGENCY AND THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL, IF THE STATE HAS A COUNCIL, AND JOINTLY AGREED TO ANY REVISIONS

Based upon DBVI's comprehensive statewide assessment, WIOA requirements and reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act, the goals and priorities for the 2020 State Plan were developed and agreed upon by the DBVI and its State Rehabilitation Council.

2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

The following are goals and priorities were developed through the needs identified in the 2020 DBVI CSNA, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (including the common performance measures of section 116 of WIOA), and input from the State Rehabilitation Council:

Goal 1: <u>To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.</u>

Goal 2: <u>To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA common performance measures.</u>

Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

Goal 4: To increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

Goal 5: To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

3. ENSURE THAT THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES ARE BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

A. THE MOST RECENT COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT, INCLUDING ANY UPDATES;

Based on the needs identified in the most recent DBVI CSNA, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (including the common performance measures of section 116 of WIOA), and input from the State Rehabilitation Council, the goals and priorities from the previous DBVI VR state plan were modified and updated to reflect new areas of focus for DBVI.

B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND

The goals and priorities from the previous DBVI VR state plan were modified and updated to reflect new areas of focus for DBVI.

A good example is Goal #2:

Goal 2: To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA deliverables.

Objective: To become more proficient in identifying and capturing Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) and credential attainment.

Strategies:

1. DBVI will continue working with WINTAC and/or providers of technical assistance in educating staff to promote understanding of MSG and credential obtainment.
2. CARNs and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential obtainment. Such training will emphasis career pathways, stackable and stand-alone credentials, as well as how and when these credentials are captured and recorded.
3. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of ME Aware in tracking and recording of MSG and credential obtainment. Training will be offered routinely at VRC Quarterly meetings. Staff competence will be monitored by Regional Managers and CO staff during quarterly case reviews.
4. DBVI will work with HospitalityMaine and other apprenticeship sponsors, including the use of the Workhands App, to track and record MSG and credential obtainment when apprenticeship/OJT is implemented.

C. OTHER AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE OPERATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VR PROGRAM, INCLUDING ANY REPORTS RECEIVED FROM THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MONITORING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED UNDER SECTION 107.

New procedures were implemented as a result of two program findings from the 2017 monitoring review. The findings included time to eligibility and time to plan. There are various levels of checks and balances to review how much time has passed prior to eligibility and then from eligibility to plan. In Aware, the VRCs can review their caseloads to see which cases are getting close to the 60 day requirement to eligibility and the 90 day requirement to plan from eligibility. The regional director also reviews the caseload as well as the Assistant Director(AD). If the AD discovers cases that are getting close to the required time, he seeks information to determine the reason that the client has not been found eligible or that an IPE has not been signed. If it is determined that there is an appropriate reason to extend the time, the proper documentation is completed. If the client is not responding to the VRC, the recommendation is (after the required protocol to reach out to the client is followed) to close the case. The process has proven to be effective in meeting both of these requirements.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

2. IF THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS ELECTED TO SERVE ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS, REGARDLESS OF ANY ESTABLISHED ORDER OF SELECTION, WHO REQUIRE SPECIFIC SERVICES OR EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN EMPLOYMENT

DBVI is not implementing an Order of Selection.

N. GOALS AND PLANS FOR DISTRIBUTION OF TITLE VI FUNDS

1. SPECIFY THE STATE'S GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR FUNDS RECEIVED UNDER SECTION 603 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive supported employment services when this is appropriate. An Individual Plan of Employment (IPE) is developed that describes the services provided, the need for extended services, if appropriate, and an assurance that the individual has been able to make an informed choice in the provision of these services and the goal itself.

Priorities for supported employment are services to individuals who need intensive supported employment services because of the nature and severity of their disabilities. In addition to being

blind or having low vision, consumers, with a most significant disability, may also have a secondary disability such as mental illness, traumatic brain injury, intellectual disabilities or a physical disability.

2. DESCRIBE THE ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED, WITH FUNDS RESERVED PURSUANT TO SECTION 603(D), FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING:

A. THE PROVISION OF EXTENDED SERVICES FOR A PERIOD NOT TO EXCEED 4 YEARS; AND

DBVI uses Title VI – Supported Employment funds primarily for job coaching for individuals with vision impairment and mental illness. DBVI will continue to work with relevant stakeholders, i.e., consumers and CRP's, to expand the availability of supported employment services.

DBVI continues to identify more diversified employment opportunities in the supported employment Title VI program. The Division places a small number of blind and visually impaired consumers in supported employment settings. Many clients are able to work in the competitive labor market without supports, due to the increased availability of technology, technology adaptations and both technological and natural supports available in today's market.

DBVI may provide extended services to a youth with a most significant disability for a period not to exceed four (4) years for youth not older than age 24. Extended services are defined as ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support a youth with a most significant disability in supported employment which is competitive and integrated.

B. HOW THE STATE WILL LEVERAGE OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FUNDS TO INCREASE RESOURCES FOR EXTENDED SERVICES AND EXPANDED SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES.

Based on criteria defined in our VR rules for eligibility for supported employment, and utilizing our case management system, DBVI staff will be able to continue to identify those youth with the most significant disabilities who would qualify for supported employment funds. Maine DBVI receives $48,000 in Supported Employment funds annually. VR agencies are expected to reserve and expend 50% of these funds for youth with the most significant disability as well as provide a non-Federal contribution in an amount not less than 10%.

DBVI continues to have access to state funds to use for extended services after the VR case is closed. The purpose of the Basic Extended Support (BES) funds is to provide ongoing support needs to VR consumers with the most significant disabilities once training has been completed. The program provides financial assistance to providers of ongoing support and/or employers to help defray the additional cost incurred providing job coaching, training and supervision on a supported work site. "Extended Support" (for BES funds) is defined as on-going support services provided to a worker in supported employment/work once he has been closed "successfully employed" by the vocational rehabilitation counselor. Other allowable ongoing support services include transportation, personal care services and counseling to family members, employers and co-workers.

BRS (both DVR/DBVI) guidance states: "If the youth does not currently have access to extended support services through a comparable benefit, and DVR or DBVI-funded Basic Extended Support (BES) or Brain Injury Support (BIS) is not available or will not meet the client's support needs, the VRC should follow this process:

A. Come to agreement with the client (and guardian if applicable) on an employment goal that is a good fit and accessible to the client, better ensuring development of natural supports; and

B. Ensure that a funding source for long term extended support services (including natural supports, if appropriate for the participant) will be available after VR funded extended services end; and

C. Ensure that one of the following two circumstances is true for this client:

1. The VRC and Regional Manager agree that the youth is likely eligible for DHHS funded extended support services; and the youth and guardian (if one exists) must agree to apply for DHHS extended support services.

OR

2. Based on the youth's employment and/or assessment experiences, the VRC and youth expect that the extended services provided for the time specified in the plan, with or without assistive technology and job accommodations, will enable the youth to develop adequate natural supports so that extended supports would no longer be needed **or**will reducethe youth's support needs so that they can be met by DVR or DBVI funded Basic Employment Support (BES) or Brain Injury Support (BIS)."

Further guidance states:

"Extended support services can only be funded by DVR or DBVI with written approval by the Casework Supervisor and notification of the Regional Manager.

1. When DVR or DBVI funds cover extended support services, the IPE shall not include more than one year of extended services.
2. In limited individualized circumstances, the plan might be updated for an additional time period, up to one year at a time; but only with written approval by the Casework Supervisor and notification of the Regional Manager. The Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs (CARNS) must also be kept up to date.

DVR OR DBVI cannot extend the plan for more than a total of 4 years of extended services for any youth. DVR OR DBVI cannot provide extended services after the youth turns 25 years old. There are no exceptions; providing DVR or DBVI funded extended services for more than 4 years, or beyond age 24, would constitute expenditures that are not allowed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)."

O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

DBVI has developed goals and priorities based on identified needs from the 2020 DBVI CSNA, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 (including the common performance measures of section 116 of WIOA), and input from the State Rehabilitation Council. For each goal, objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives were established to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.

1.) To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes in a timely fashion based on the needs of the individual.

Objective: Increase employment outcomes that lead to self-sufficiency and/or decreased public benefits of DBVI clients through promotion of Career Pathway planning representing a shift in focus of job attainment to one of a career for economic success.

Strategies:

a. Continue to promote Career Pathway models through staff trainings and use of technical assistance.

b. Prepare DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients to be successful in a full range of secondary or post-secondary education options, including apprenticeships.

c. Improve the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs (CARNS) of clients by providing training to VR counselors on various assessment tools/databases to include use of Labor Market Information (LMI) and workforce trends, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) arenas, use of O*NET and other occupational databases, as well as accessing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partner resources.

d. Increase emphasis in matching skills and abilities of DBVI VR clients with vocational planning that aligns with the skill needs in the economy of the state or regional economy to achieve potential for family sustaining wage growth.

Objective: Increase exposure and use of apprenticeship and self-employment strategies for DBVI VR clients.

Strategies:

a. As part of CARNS training, promote use of Apprenticeship and Self-Employment as a viable/preferred approach to Career Pathways.

b. Work with MDOL Apprenticeship Program and DBVI/DVR partners to ensure that job seekers with visual impairments are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine.

c. Introduce use of Apprenticeship models to the Rehabilitation Center located at the Iris Network and the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) program in an effort to develop additional career pathways for persons who are blind and visually impaired.

d. Reestablish DBVI/DVR Self-Employment Focus Group(s), comprised of VR counselors, Small Business Development Center business consultants, and Client Assistance Program staff, and provide training and technical assistance to DBVI staff and consumers engaged in Self-Employment.

Goal 2: To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA common performance measures.

Objective: To become more proficient in identifying and capturing Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) and credential attainment.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will continue working through Registered Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence, of which SafalPartners is one, for technical assistance and in educating staff regarding understanding of MSG and credential attainment.

b. CARNS and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential attainment.

c. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of Aware – VR's case management system, in tracking and recording of MSG and credential attainment.

d. DBVI will work with Maine Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors such as HospitalityMaine in use of the Workhands App, an online portal that allows a registered apprenticeship sponsor to report an apprentice's progress and completion of competencies outlined in the Schedule of Work to the credentialing organization and/or workforce counselor, to track and record MSG and credential attainment.

Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

Objective: Increase and expand services to blind and visually impaired youth and students.

Strategies:

a. Continue to work with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members such as representatives from Catholic Charities Maine, Iris Network, and the Department of Education, to identify Pre-ETS activities/programs that can be provided to potentially eligible or eligible students.

b. Increase the number of students who are referred to the VR program as part of their individualized educational plan (IEP). This will be done in part through consultation with Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who connect families with transitional and community resources. DBVI staff will be members of the IEP team.

c. Hold regional meetings with DBVI staff, and contracted partners including Catholic Charities Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.

d. Continue to make optimal use and expansion of the Maine-based immersion center and offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Summer programs such as College Prep, some version of Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) Program (101, 102, Living on your Own (LOYO) or LIFE Camp), all include use of Assistive Technology (AT), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC), Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Instructors (O&M). Mission Fit and No Barriers are two new programs run by outside providers with support from our staff (including contracted staff.) Sessions for parents to educate them on resources, independence with their kids, and a question and answer (Q&A) sessions are also to be offered.

e. Continued and increased implementation of Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Pre-Employment Skills Groups where students are encouraged to engage in community, develop Activities of Daily Living (ADL's) and Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL's,) explore area businesses and event centers, and attend information workshops/seminars. School personnel associated with Blind and Visually Impaired students are contacted early each school year and made aware of these planned events and are invited to attend/provide input. Creation a summer youth employment, job shadow, Community Based Situational Assessment (CBSA), job club and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.

Goal 4: To increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

Objective: DBVI will work with WIOA core and other Government partners to address the transportation needs regionally.

Strategies:

a. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation.

b. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings.

c. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify and increased number of individuals eligible to be served by both programs.

Strategies:

a. MDBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseets, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

b. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.

c. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

d. The Wabanaki VR Program will provide technical assistance to Maine DBVI on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native American employment supports.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to cultivate a statewide communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

a. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP's).

b. Collaborate with Helen Keller National Center on resources, outreach, hearing aid access, and availability of funds.

c. Provide feedback and information on new legislation regarding insurance cost for hearing aids to the Division.

d. Designate DBVI staff to attend regional deaf-blind or dual sensory forums (for example 2019 Tri-State Meeting) and identify funding for Support Service Professionals (SSP).

e. DBVI staff will provide training to Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), with an emphasis around learning basic, introductory Orientation and Mobility techniques for supporting deaf-blind or dual sensory clients in the workplace.

f. Collaborate on the creation of on-line webinars on Independent Living (IL) equipment and devices to enhance independence for deaf-blind or dual sensory loss clients and increase access to equipment available through ICANCONNECT.org.

Objective: DBVI will work to expand the number of New Mainers, who are receiving services from the agency.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations, such as American Council for the Blind, National Federation for the Blind, Pine Tree Guide Dog Users, to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services.

b. DBVI will provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to identify minorities with the most significant disabilities who are blind or visually impaired to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility.

b. DBVI will provide outreach to clinics/medical professionals in communities known to serve immigrant communities, such as Lewiston and Portland.

c. DBVI will provide outreach to community support programs known to work with immigrant populations (i.e. Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services and Catholic Charities)

Goal 5: To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Objective: DBVI will become more publicly visible and recognized as a primary source of information and services for individuals with visual impairments, as well as their families and employers.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will finalize and publish a DBVI consumer guide. The intent for this guide is to provide an accessible resource that covers the wide range of services available through DBVI.

b. DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers. With input from the SRC, DBVI's website will be updated and made more helpful to end users. DBVI will continue to focus on accessibility as updates are made.

c. DBVI contractors will be required to include acknowledgement of Rehabilitation Services Administration DBVI grant funding on program materials and public documents.

d. DBVI and contracted partners will provide uniform services across the state.

Objective: DBVI will work with the Maine blindness community to promote the services and resources available to individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers, such as Community Rehabilitation Providers, within their region.

b. Maine DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and organizations within their regions.

c. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT).

d. DBVI will work with its contracted partners to create a more organized and centralized public education effort.

e. DBVI will continue to explore collaboration with the Veteran's Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies.

f. Encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings in an effort to promote DBVI services and resources.

g. Maine DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

Objective: DBVI will develop strategies for stronger communication and enhance connection throughout the provision of services to reduce early exits from the program and to improve successful employment outcomes.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will conduct outreach with unsuccessful closures to determine areas of need and whether they may be interested in reengagement.

b. DBVI will continue to improve its comprehensive system of personnel development to decrease turnover and improve consistency among staff leading to improved outcomes.

c. In an effort to receive additional feedback from consumers, DBVI is updating their consumer satisfaction survey and the methods through which that survey can be completed. Those methods will be online, by mail, or over the phone.

2. HOW A BROAD RANGE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND DEVICES WILL BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AT EACH STAGE OF THE REHABILITATION PROCESS AND ON A STATEWIDE BASIS

DBVI and its contracted partners continue to seek access and training in assistive technology through its collaboration with training and equipment loan programs such as Maine CITE, AllTech and Alpha One, and through equipment demonstrations offered at conferences, seminars and through on-line videos and product dissemination so staff are knowledgeable regarding technology and able to keep up with the ever evolving changes. This allows each team member to provide assistance with technology to DBVI consumers throughout their rehabilitation process, from the VR counselor to the O&M specialist, as well as the contracted Vision Rehabilitation Specialist. This approach is used for all consumers of all ages and across the state.

Assistive technology (AT) may be used to achieve each of the goals outlined as ways to expand and improve services to DBVI consumers. Many consumers will require assistive technology along their career pathway, for measurable skills gains or credential attainment or to gain other pre-employment transition skills or blindness rehabilitation skills. AT skills can increase the employment opportunities for DBVI clients.

3. THE OUTREACH PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO IDENTIFY AND SERVE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE MINORITIES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM

Goal #4 identifies outreach procedures used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities, such as minorities with the most significant disabilities as well as those unserved or underserved:

Goal 4: To increase access to DBVI services for individuals with disabilities who are unserved/underserved or have minority status.

Objective: DBVI will work with WIOA core and other Government partners to address the transportation needs regionally.

Strategies:

a. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route

maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation.

b. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings.

c. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify and increased number of individuals eligible to be served by both programs.

Strategies:

a. MDBVI will provide outreach and training to staff at tribal health or community centers of the four Maine tribes (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Indian Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseets, and Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians) including DBVI/DVR New Counselor Training upon request.

b. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.

c. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

d. The Wabanaki VR Program will provide technical assistance to Maine DBVI on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native American employment supports.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to cultivate a statewide communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

a. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP's).

b. Collaborate with Helen Keller National Center on resources, outreach, hearing aid access, and availability of funds.

c. Provide feedback and information on new legislation regarding insurance cost for hearing aids to the Division.

d. Designate DBVI staff to attend regional deaf-blind or dual sensory forums (for example 2019 Tri-State Meeting) and identify funding for Support Service Professionals (SSP).

e. DBVI staff will provide training to Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), with an emphasis around learning basic, introductory Orientation and Mobility techniques for supporting deaf-blind or dual sensory clients in the workplace.

f. Collaborate on the creation of on-line webinars on Independent Living (IL) equipment and devices to enhance independence for deaf-blind or dual sensory loss clients and increase access to equipment available through ICANCONNECT.org.

Objective: DBVI will work to expand the number of New Mainers, who are receiving services from the agency.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations, such as American Council for the Blind, National Federation for the Blind, Pine Tree Guide Dog Users, to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services.

b. DBVI will provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to identify minorities with the most significant disabilities who are blind or visually impaired to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will continue to provide training to all staff to emphasize Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility.

b. DBVI will provide outreach to clinics/medical professionals in communities known to serve immigrant communities, such as Lewiston and Portland.

c. DBVI will provide outreach to community support programs known to work with immigrant populations (i.e. Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services and Catholic Charities).

4. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND VR SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THE COORDINATION OF SERVICES DESIGNED TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF SUCH STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY LIFE (INCLUDING THE RECEIPT OF VR SERVICES, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES)

DBVI will focus on Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community as a method to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services). The summer programs will provide students with Pre-ETS – job exploration counseling; work-based learning; counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary education programs at institutions of higher education; workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and self-advocacy skills. Work-based learning experiences have been incorporated into many of the programs but there is also an opportunity for summer work experience. The programs provide training in social skills and self-advocacy. Students participant in job shadows, mock interviews, job exploration and even write and practice their elevator speeches. They travel to CareerCenters to learn about various job opportunities and visit some local businesses. The College Prep attendees have the opportunity to take a three credit college course and live on a campus for a number of weeks, getting to experience the campus life.

Objective: Increase and expand services to blind and visually impaired youth and students.

Strategies:

a. Continue to work with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to identify Pre-ETS activities/programs that can be provided to potentially eligible or eligible students.

b. Increase the number of students who are referred to the VR program as part of their educational plan. This will be done in part through the case management by the Blindness

Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who connect families with transitional and community resources.

c. Hold regional meetings with DBVI staff, and contracted partners including Catholic Charities Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.

d. Continue to make optimal use and expansion of the Maine-based immersion center and offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Summer programs such as College Prep, some version of Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) Program (101, 102, Living on your Own (LOYO) or LIFE Camp), all include use of Assistive Technology (AT), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC), Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Instructors (O&M). Mission Fit and No Barriers are two new programs run by outside providers with support from our staff (including contracted staff.) Sessions for parents to educate them on resources, independence with their kids, and a question and answer (Q&A) sessions are also to be offered.

e. Continued and increased implementation of Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Pre-Employment Skills Groups where students are encouraged to engage in community, develop Activities of Daily Living (ADL's) and Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL's,) explore area businesses and event centers, and attend information workshops/seminars. School personnel associated with Blind and Visually Impaired students are contacted early each school year and made aware of these planned events and are invited to attend/provide input. Creation a summer youth employment, job shadow, Community Based Situational Assessment (CBSA), job club and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.

5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

While DBVI has not had the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State, the agency has pursued a new payment structure that is designed to better support contractual agreements with community rehabilitation providers while reinforcing the importance to client outcomes of timely and available services.

6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DBVI is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One-Stop system. DBVI is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act's implementation, and also has staff participating on multiple related sub-committees. DBVI also has representation on the Local Workforce Boards (LWIB).

DBVI will be using wage data from the Maine Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance to establish baseline and initial WIOA performance targets for employment outcomes. In addition to Maine UI wage data, Maine will access State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS was developing a data sharing agreement with Maine's Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. Disruptions to staffing and unprecedented demands presented by the COVID 19 pandemic delayed progress in accessing the SWIS and also finalizing a data sharing agreement but remain as part of our plan.

DBVI presented a is providing ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners; common performance measures, career pathways and best practices in serving the needs of employers. BRS has an intensive technical assistance agreement in place with WINTAC to assist with this effort and to further their expertise on Common Performance Measures, Internal Controls, Career Pathways, Apprenticeships and Peer Mentoring.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine Job Link as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

DBVI participated in the development of a 6-part series with a WIOA overview and partner cross training. There are 13 brief webinar links beginning with "WIOA 101: An introduction to the New Law" and ending with the "Youth Program". Included in the zoom trainings were common performance measures, career pathways, youth programming, Center for Workforce Research and Information, Apprenticeship and working with corrections and Veterans. This cross training provided partners with information about working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

DBVI developed strategies that will help them attain their goals/objectives. DBVI will continue to educate partners, other state agencies, and private organizations about working with blind or visually impaired consumers. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services. DBVI, upon request, will provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

Transportation continues to be identified in the CSNA as on on-going unmet need. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

There was a need for increased awareness of the DBVI services identified in the CSNA. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers within their region. DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and the general public within their regions. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT). DBVI will work with its main contractors to create a more organized and centralized public education effort. DBVI will continue to explore collaboration with the Veteran's Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies. DBVI will encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings. DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

Title I resources continue to be used for development and expansion of assistive technology and low vision rehabilitation services for DBVI consumers in collaboration with all of our blindness rehabilitation services partners throughout the state.

DBVI continues to seek access and training in assistive technology through its collaboration with training and equipment loan programs such as Maine CITE, AllTech and Alpha One, and through equipment demonstrations offered at conferences, seminars and through on-line videos and product dissemination. DBVI O&M instructors seek and disseminate feedback regarding service and equipment needs, available resources and emerging technologies though quarterly meetings and on-line discussion portals. DBVI purchased a number of O & M requested technologies to allow for decreased dependence on loan programs, improved access to technologies for our clients and greater flexibility in providing that access.

DBVI contributes funding to its State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) which includes representation from both the consumer and employers as well as consumer organizations, the state workforce board, Department of Education, Maine Parent Federation and the Maine Client Assistance Program. The council works together to generate innovative ideas to provide more employment opportunities for Maine individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The SRC funding also covers the costs for participants to attend national conferences where they can gain a better understanding of VR regulations and network with other states to learn about their best practices.

C. OVERCOME IDENTIFIED BARRIERS RELATING TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AND PARTICIPATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM AND THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM.

Many DBVI consumers need assistive technology to overcome barriers to have equitable access to services and employment. One example where DBVI assisted a consumer with overcoming a barrier was a reception position within a state facility. Assistive technology (JAWS) was purchased for the individual to provide equitable access to this position. Training was provided to other partners/employees within the building to give them a better understanding of working with an individual who is blind or visually impaired. Other examples include providing Business Enterprise Program (BEP) candidates and managers with technology necessary to operate their facilities/businesses.

P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

1. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE VR PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE APPROVED VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN FOR THE MOST RECENTLY COMPLETED PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

Below are the goals described in the FY 2020 approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year, along with activities that took place and progress made on the goals, and strategies used to help DBVI towards achieving those goals.

Goal 1: To engage Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) clients in Career Pathways that lead to meaningful and quality employment outcomes.

Objective: Increase employment outcomes that lead to self-sufficiency and/or decreased public benefits of DBVI clients through promotion of Career Pathway planning representing a shift in focus from job attainment to one of a career pathway for economic success.

Strategies:

a. Continue to promote Career Pathway models through staff trainings and use of technical assistance.

UPDATE: DBVI has continued to promote the career pathway model over the past performance period. This topic is often discussed at the monthly VRC meeting.

b. Prepare DBVI Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients to be successful in a full range of secondary or post-secondary education options, including apprenticeships.

UPDATE: VRCs meet monthly with the DBVI leadership and trainings on various topics are presented at each meeting. During the last performance period, there has been training on secondary or post-secondary education options as well as on apprenticeships.

c. Improve the Comprehensive Assessment of Rehabilitation Needs (CARNS) of clients by providing training to VR counselors on various assessment tools/databases to include use of Labor Market Information (LMI) and workforce trends, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) arenas, use of O*NET and other occupational databases, as well as accessing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partner resources.

UPDATE: VRCs meet monthly with DBVI leadership and various trainings are provided at each meeting. Also, most of these topics are covered under the New Counselor Training so new counselors can attend or counselors that would just like to refresh their knowledge can attend individual sessions.

d. Increase emphasis in matching skills and abilities of DBVI VR clients with vocational planning that aligns with the skill needs in the economy of the state or regional economy to achieve potential for family sustaining wage growth.

UPDATE: DBVI anticipates hiring an individual whose sole responsibility will be to engage with employers specifically about DBVI consumers and services. This dedicated staff person will allow DBVI to strengthen engagement with employers by matching skills and abilities of DBVI consumers with employer needs.

Objective: Increase exposure and use of apprenticeship and self-employment strategies for DBVI VR clients.

Strategies:

a. As part of CARNS training, promote use of Apprenticeship and Self-Employment as a viable/preferred approach to Career Pathways.

UPDATE: Apprenticeship training/updates were/are offered during New Counselor Training, at staff meetings and during remote webinars such as the employer spotlights and Town Halls offered by the BRS Apprenticeship Planning Committee.

b. Work with MDOL Apprenticeship Program and DBVI/DVR partners to ensure that job seekers with visual impairments are included in the growth and expansion of apprenticeships in Maine.

UPDATE: Apprenticeship opportunities with the State of Maine Agencies are currently being explored. As these opportunities become realized, so too should programs such as the BEP benefit from this educational pathway approach to workforce development.

c. Introduce use of Apprenticeship models to the Rehabilitation Center located at the Iris Network and the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) program in an effort to develop additional career pathways for persons who are blind and visually impaired.

UPDATE: The Maine Apprenticeship Program received a SAEEI grant, allowing for the hiring of a full-time Apprenticeship Navigator dedicated to work specifically with the Bureau of

Rehabilitation Staff and its clients. Additionally, Maine DBVI was able to receive approval to add a new staff member, modeled after Business Engagement Managers in DVR, to work specifically with Maine Employers in educating them in the benefits of working with folks who are blind and visually impaired, educating employers in technology advances that allow persons who are B/VI to perform the essential functions of employment and to engage DBVI staff and its clients with those employers.

d. Reestablish DBVI/DVR Self-Employment Focus Group(s), comprised of VR counselors, Small Business Development Center business consultants, and Client Assistance Program staff, and provide training and technical assistance to DBVI staff and consumers engaged in Self-Employment.

UPDATE: Quarterly Statewide Meetings began in 2020 which included staff and SBDC staff. A prior meeting was held between SBDC staff and BRS Leadership to help frame the meetings and understand each agencies process to better assist the client as they follow the self-employment "pathway,"

Goal 2: To increase measurable skill gains and credential attainment of DBVI clients in alignment with WIOA deliverables.

Objective: To become more proficient in identifying and capturing Measurable Skills Gain (MSG) and credential attainment.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will continue working with WINTAC for technical assistance and in educating staff regarding understanding of MSG and credential attainment.

UPDATE: DBVI staff received training throughout the year on capturing MSGs and credential attainment through our Systems Improvement and Quality Assurance (SIQA) unit.

b. CARNS and New Counselor training will have focused components on MSG and credential attainment.

UPDATE: The New Counselor Training was recently in held December 2021 and had components on MSG and credential attainment.

c. DBVI will increase staff competence in use of AwareVR in tracking and recording of MSG and credential attainment.

UPDATE: The SIQA unit began a weekly Aware question and answer period for all BRS staff in 2021. The tracking and recording of MSG and credential were also provided to new staff through the New Counselor Training.

d. DBVI will work with Maine Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors such as HospitalityMaine and use the Workhands App.

UPDATE: At this time, DBVI does not have any clients enrolled in the Apprenticeship program so the Workhands App has not been utilized.

Goal 3: To deliver Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to youth who are blind and visually impaired, assisting them to successfully live and work independently in the community.

Objective: Increase and expand services to blind and visually impaired youth and students.

Strategies:

a. Continue to work with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members such as representatives from Catholic Charities Maine, Iris Network, and the Department of Education,

to identify Pre-ETS activities/programs that can be provided to potentially eligible or eligible students.

UPDATE: Many of the SRC groups (or their representatives) were involved in the planning of some Pre-ETS programs that were held over the summer of both 2020 and 2021. The programming for the 2020 summer was essentially virtual and covered self-advocacy, and work readiness skills. The 2021 summer programs covered all 5 categories of Pre-ETS – Mission Fit, College Prep, LIFE Camp and No Barriers. There were also Expanded Core Curriculum activities that took place throughout the year. This year they were held virtually which allowed more students to attend. The SRC was kept apprised of all these programs.

b. Increase the number of students who are referred to the VR program as part of their individualized educational plan (IEP). This will be done in part through consultation with Blindness Rehabilitation Specialists (BLRS) who connect families with transitional and community resources. DBVI staff will be members of the IEP team.

UPDATE: The BLRSs (transition consultants) held a number of parent sessions during 2020 and 2021. This gave parents an opportunity to share and network with other partners of students who are blind or visually impaired. There was a Family Day outing for the parents, students and siblings that was held during the summer of 2021.

c. Hold regional meetings with DBVI staff, and contracted partners including Catholic Charities Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) toward the beginning of each school year to determine VR eligibility on all students 14 years of age and older.

UPDATE: Since the start of the pandemic, Region 1 meetings were held monthly, bimonthly and now quarterly with the Iris Community services staff, Director of ESBVIC and Portland DBVI. Meetings are an opportunity to share information and review/improve service delivery. There is a separate scheduled time for individual client team meetings.

Region 2 meetings are monthly as part of the DBVI staff meeting and include the VRT. Time is set aside for client team meetings for those working with the client. Region 2 has quarterly meeting with TVI's present as well as the VRT and DBVI staff. Time is also set aside for individual student team meetings.

Region 3 discusses any students age 14+ with the regional team but the TVIs do not attend the meeting. The transition consultant in that area maintains contact with the local TVIs and keeps us informed.

Region 4 holds two meetings per year in order to discuss specifically the students 14+. This regional meeting includes all of the TVIs in the region. We hold one meeting at the beginning of the school year in September and one meeting at the end of the school year in May.

Region 5 discusses the students with the TVI and BLRS at every team meeting which occurs on the first Wednesday of every month. It is an ongoing discussion.

d. Continue to make optimal use and expansion of the Maine-based immersion center and offer summer programs, including blindness rehabilitation, independent living, work experiences and college preparation. Summer programs such as College Prep, some version of Learning, Independence, Fun, Employment (LIFE) Program (101, 102, Living on your Own (LOYO) or LIFE Camp), all include use of Assistive Technology (AT), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC), Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVI) and Orientation and Mobility Instructors (O&M). Mission Fit and No Barriers are two new programs run by outside providers with support from our staff (including contracted staff.) Sessions for parents to educate them on resources, independence with their kids, and a question and answer (Q&A) sessions are also to be offered.

UPDATE: Unfortunately, the Maine-based immersion center had to close temporarily during the pandemic. Since it reopened for in-person services, Maine has sent 5 consumers to participate in the program. One was only there for an initial assessment, but the rest participated for approximately 12 weeks depending on their individual needs.

DBVI College Prep Program in the past was a program that lasted five weeks, but due to COVID and the desire to have a residential program, the 2021 program was held for three weeks. Seven students completed the program where they were involved in an intensive three-credit college course while they lived on the University of Maine campus and participated in blindness rehabilitation instruction, such as Orientation and Mobility and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy. The students were able to experience new things, such as what it was like to live away from home, to have a roommate, and to learn the expectations of a college level course. Students also participated in a paid work experience.

Life Camp is the 6th iteration of DBVI's original Life101. Students (five) participated in the two-week residential program based at the Iris Network during July. The primary focus of the program was on the five required Pre-ETS activities. Students participated in job shadows, interviewing prep, job exploration and even practiced their elevator speeches. For most of the participants this was their first experience being away from home. This program included DBVI staff, VRTs, O&Ms and TVIs.

NEW! Mission Fit, a new fitness program, included 12 students who participated in the program from March through mid-June 2021 to learn about nutrition and healthy eating habits. A fitness trainer, who also has a visual impairment, taught program students to look beyond their fears, to take ownership, and to develop good habits. TVIs and DBVI staff supported the students as they established and embraced their fitness goals. Guest speakers spoke with the students about being active and the many activities and sports that can be adapted for individuals with visual impairments. These speakers were individuals with a visual impairment who participate in adaptive sports, such as skiing, ice hockey, hiking and rowing.

No Barriers: DBVI contracted with a company to conduct a No Barriers Summit at the UMaine 4-H Camp and Learning Center at Bryant Pond. Nine transition aged blind and visually impaired students participated in the residential program focused on Erik Weihenmayer's No Barriers curriculum. Erik was the first blind climber in history to reach the summit of Mt. Everest and his motto is "What's within you is stronger than what's in your way". The curriculum addresses 7 "Life Elements"designed toempower students to overcome their own personal barriers and included completing a ropes course, using a zip line, rock wall climbing, hiking and other team building activities.

DBVI has a YouTube video of a consumer who attended many of these summer programs and how it helped him in his skill development.

DBVI Family Field Day 2021, DBVI brought families together who have children ages birth to 24 with visual impairments. The goal of the event was to help students and their families make connections with other families experiencing vision loss and to participate in a variety of accessible indoor and outdoor activities adapted for individuals with visual impairments. The event also addressed areas of the Expanded Core Curriculum and Pre-Employment Transition Services, including Independent Living Skills; Orientation and Mobility; Recreation and Leisure; Self-Determination; Social Interaction Skills; Self-Advocacy; and Work Readiness Training. These areas are critical for successful employment outcomes for people with visual impairments.

e. Continued and increased implementation of Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) and Pre-Employment Skills Groups where students are encouraged to engage in community, develop activities of daily living (ADL) and Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL), explore area businesses and event centers, and attend information workshops/seminars. School personnel associated with

blind and visually impaired students are contacted early each school year and made aware of these planned events and are invited to attend/provide input, create a summer youth employment, job shadow, community based situational assessment (CBSA), job club and/or work internship experience for all students by age 16.

UPDATE: Multiple programs focusing on ECC and Pre-ETS have been offered both in person and in a virtual environment. Group programs statewide offering have included: Virtual After School Group, College Prep, Life Camp, Portfolio Making, Mission Fit, No Barriers. There have been regional programs targeting specific students and their needs as well as ongoing individualized programming.

In the northern part of the state, DBVI offered Expanded Core Curriculum programming for students that incorporated orientation and mobility and travel skill development along with career exploration in their local communities.

Goal 4: To ensure that a larger number of individuals, with disabilities, who may be unserved or underserved or have minority status, have access to DBVI services.

Objective: DBVI will work with WIOA core and other Government partners to address the transportation needs regionally.

Strategies:

a. DBVI staff will provide input to DOT, providers of public transportation and to core partners regarding accessibility needs of our consumers. Input shall include for example accessible route maps, large print bus schedules/routes, audible street crossings, tactile pads and lighting/contrast consultation.

UPDATE: DBVI O&M instructors work with local municipalities, advocacy groups, DOT staff and public transportation providers to continually advocate for the needs of people with visual impairments in our communities. Recent projects included Union Street pedestrian signal upgrades in Bangor as well as a pilot study in Central and Southern Maine as well as high contrast crosswalk signs in Fairfield at several crossings.

b. DBVI has designated staff to consult with transportation departments regarding transit studies, bicycle access, bus programming and staff meetings.

UPDATE: DBVI O&M instructors are available to meet and consult on a regular basis. A DBVI O&M instructor is a member of the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) Bus Stop Designation Plan Advisory Workgroup and regularly attends BACTS Policy Committee Meetings. O&M Instructors in the Greater Portland area continue to serve on various public transit committees through Greater Portland Council of Government (also referred to as GPCOG) to increase accessibility and transit needs in general for those with visual impairment.

c. DBVI attends Transportation For All and Public Notice meetings issued by DOT.

UPDATE: DBVI has a representative on the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) where transportation and other employment and independent living challenges for persons with disabilities are part of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) goals and priorities.

A DBVI O&M instructor attends Transportation For All (TFA) meetings monthly in Bangor and advocates for consumer needs in regard to bus transportation. DOT public notices are emailed regularly to all O&M instructors across the state so that they can attend the meetings in their area and advocate for consumer needs in regard to pedestrian safety

Objective: DBVI will work with Maine's Section 121 VR Grant – Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation to identify and increased number of individuals eligible to be served by both programs.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI will include Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation in training and technical assistance opportunities offered or funded by DBVI.

UPDATE: There have been few opportunities with the pandemic but Wabanaki VR was included or invited to attend training opportunities.

b. A representative from the Wabanaki Vocational Rehabilitation will participate on DBVI's State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

UPDATE: The Director of the Wabanaki VR program is a DBVI SRC member.

c. The Wabanaki VR Program will provide technical assistance to Maine DBVI on issues related to cultural competency and best practices in Native American employment supports.

UPDATE: There were few opportunities to provide TA or trainings this year due to the pandemic but there was one offered on Cultural Diversity on August 19, 2021 by John Dennis.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to cultivate a statewide communication network for consumers who are deaf-blind or dual sensory impaired (hearing and vision) to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

a. Work with collaborative partners to increase training opportunities for Deaf-Blind Interpreters and Support Service Providers (SSP's).

UPDATE: Due to the pandemic, there was no progress made on this strategy.

b. Collaborate with Helen Keller National Center on resources, outreach, hearing aid access, and availability of funds.

UPDATE: A list was created with contact information regarding support for hearing aids.

c. Provide feedback and information on new legislation regarding insurance cost for hearing aids to the Division.

UPDATE: There was new legislation passed in Maine in January 2020 that provides some funding for hearing aids through private health insurance. DBVI staff was made aware of this new legislation and shared it with consumers requesting information on hearing aids.

d. Designate DBVI staff to attend regional deaf-blind or dual sensory forums (for example 2019 Tri-State Meeting) and identify funding for Support Service Professionals (SSP).

UPDATE: DBVI O&M staff have attended Dual Sensory Meetings and Tri-State Meetings with HKNC. Maine hosted one of the meetings. No funding has been secured, however, training via HKNC (via Maricar and cost) and possible support ideas from VRT/O&M from DBVI (trainings and webinars to volunteers).

e. DBVI staff will provide training to Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), with an emphasis around learning basic, introductory Orientation and Mobility techniques for supporting deaf-blind or dual sensory clients in the workplace.

UPDATE: Virtual training from VRT and O&M to CRPs have taken place as well as ppt available for review. No in- person training has taken place due to COVID or need at this time.

f. Collaborate on the creation of on-line webinars on Independent Living (IL) equipment and devices to enhance independence for deaf-blind or dual sensory loss clients and increase access to equipment available through ICANCONNECT.org.

UPDATE: A VRT and an O&M collaborated on the development of a ppt to be used for both the IL program and CRPs. Information on ICANCONNECT is part of the ppt.

Objective: DBVI will work to expand the number of New Mainers, who are receiving services from the agency.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will communicate with advocacy organizations, such as American Council for the Blind, National Federation for the Blind, Pine Tree Guide Dog Users, to identify New Mainers who would benefit from DBVI VR services.

UPDATE: Due to the pandemic, some of the annual conferences were held virtually or not at all. DBVI staff did present at the NFB conference, sharing information about services from DBVI and contact information for New Mainers who may have connected with these organizations.

b. DBVI, upon request, provide informational sessions and trainings to service agencies who provide case management and other services to New Mainers. DBVI provides in-person and online orientations describing our eligibility requirements, service delivery and program requirements to job seekers.

UPDATE: The in-person informational sessions were very limited over the past period due to COVID.

8/2/21 A virtual presentation to Alpha One employees in regard to DBVI services. Discussed vision services in Maine, including our partners, referral and qualification for services, eye conditions, O&M, white canes, human guide and supportive strategies. Provided DBVI website information. No questions fielded.

Objective: DBVI will continue its efforts to identify minorities with the most significant disabilities who are blind or visually impaired to assist in their endeavors for employment and independent living.

Strategies:

a. DBVI will provide outreach to clinics/medical professionals in communities known to serve immigrant communities, such as Lewiston and Portland.

UPDATE: Due to the pandemic, there was not much outreach that took place.

b. DBVI will provide outreach to community support programs known to work with immigrant populations (i.e. Maine Immigrant and Refugee Services and Catholic Charities)

UPDATE: DBVI staff reached out to community liaison (also an interpreter from CCME) who referred several people who are refugees/asylum seekers from Rwanda.

Goal 5: To increase awareness of services and resources for individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Objective: DBVI will become more publicly visible and recognized as a primary source of information and services for individuals with visual impairments, as well as their families and employers.

Strategies:

a. With input from the SRC, DBVI's website will be updated and made more helpful to end users. DBVI will continue to focus on accessibility as updates are made.

UPDATE: There was no progress over the last period with this strategy.

b. DBVI contractors will be required to include acknowledgement of Rehabilitation Services Administration DBVI grant funding on program materials and public documents.

UPDATE: Providers for DBVI have worked collaboratively to develop language to include on program materials and public documents that provides written acknowledgement of RSA grant funding.

c. DBVI and contracted partners will provide uniform services across the state.

UPDATE: DBVI has worked closely with contracted partners to ensure that services are consistent throughout the state.

Objective: DBVI will work with the Maine blindness community to promote the services and resources available to individuals who are blind or have low vision.

Strategies:

a. Maine DBVI staff will provide in-service trainings to other service providers, such as Community Rehabilitation Providers, within their region.

UPDATE: DBVI has provided in-service trainings (mostly virtual) to CRP within their region so staff are more familiar with how to provide services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

b. Maine DBVI Staff will provide service awareness and assistive technology/adaptive device activities for consumers and organizations within their regions.

UPDATE: There has been little progress on this due to the pandemic.

10/26/21 – An O&M instructor provided awareness about DBVI services to a local Boy Scout troop. Special googles, hand-on demonstrations and sensory challenges gave the participants a better understanding of individuals with visual impairments.

c. DBVI will coordinate cooperative training with Maine Department of Transportation (DOT).

UPDATE: Trainings were limited due to the pandemic.

d. DBVI will work with its contracted partners to create a more organized and centralized public education effort.

UPDATE: There were a few presentations with the O&M & VRT to group homes and assisted living facilities. We also had O&M and TVI presentations to CDS and a specialized school.

e. DBVI will continue to explore collaboration with the Veteran's Administration Blind Rehabilitation program to streamline the referral process between the two agencies.

UPDATE: Maine DBVI participated in an annual meeting with the Veterans' Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services on April 14th, 2021. In addition, quarterly meetings occur with MDOL Bureau of Employment Services Veteran team, BRS Veteran Liaisons and members from Veterans' Administration Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services. These meetings are to expand collaboration, share resources and facilitate training opportunities.

f. Encourage all staff to regularly attend local Lions Club meetings in an effort to promote DBVI services and resources.

UPDATE: There was limited progress on this strategy due to the pandemic.

g. Maine DBVI staff and contracted partners will provide service awareness to doctors within their region.

PDATE: DBVI sent a letter to all known eye doctors in Maine with a brochure of DBVI's comprehensive services. Staff would then follow up with each doctor's office manager to provide more information and awareness of our services. The list of doctors was divided by region based on city/town. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, there was not a lot of progress on this strategy.

DBVI staff developed a targeted You Tube video explaining services that is posted on the DOL site. It was also sent to some eye docs. This was a DBVI initiative, but we had some input from the VRT's.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Some of the factors that impeded DBVI attaining these goals were resources, both human resources and time. The division experienced a large turnover in VRCs during this past performance period, as well as over 50% turnover in the administrative support to the VRCs. The learning curve for all of these roles has slowed down the process as far as moving cases through the statuses and being able to provide outreach to the unserved and underserved and their families.

UPDATE: The division experienced a 50% turnover in VRCs over the past year due to retirements or resignations. At this time, all VRC positions are filled but the learning curve has had an impact on the progression of services.

Outreach has also focused on the transition-aged students (14 -21) and their families. There has been a larger emphasis on working with families to better understand the abilities of their student, which takes more time and resources.

Geographical challenges have also impeded the attainment of these goals. Transportation in the rural state of Maine is not always readily available making it difficult for consumers to get to the outreach opportunities and therefore lack the knowledge of DBVI services. Transportation also makes it difficult for some consumers to get to their place of employment.

UPDATE: While transportation remains a barrier for many of the DBVI consumers, DBVI staff have learned how to provide many services virtually due to the pandemic. For many consumers, it was easier to participate in services virtually than if they were in-person and the consumer had to deal with the challenge of transportation.

2. AN EVALUATION OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM GOALS DESCRIBED IN THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SUPPLEMENT FOR THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM YEAR WERE ACHIEVED. THE EVALUATION MUST:

A. IDENTIFY THE STRATEGIES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS

Supported Employment Program - The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive supported employment services when this is appropriate. An Individual Plan of Employment (IPE) is developed that describes the services provided, the need for extended services, if appropriate, and an assurance that the individual has been able to make an informed choice in the provision of these services and the goal itself.

The Division identified twenty-four individuals who would benefit from supported employment services in PY19 and twenty-four in PY20. For PY19, there were six youth with a significant disability; one was closed unsuccessfully and the others were still receiving services. Of the eighteen adults, three were closed unsuccessfully, one was closed successfully and the others were still receiving services. For PY20, DBVI continues to work with five youth and fourteen adults. One adult was closed successfully while four were closed unsuccessfully.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Supported Employment (SE) regulations were affected with the passing of WIOA, allowing states a longer period of time to provide services to youth with a significant disability who required supported employment services. However, a change that made the spending of SE funds challenging was that costs were not allowed to be captured as SE until the individual was placed in employment status. This meant that many costs building up to that SE placement were no longer allowed as SE, placing a larger burden on Title I funds. The changes were meant to strengthen the SE program but there was an inverse effect in many ways.

Also, the funds were specifically earmarked for certain populations, restricting spending to adults if the equivalent expenditures were not made within the youth budget. This change also put a greater fiscal burden on the Title I funds.

3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DBVI is a partner with Adult Education, the SWIB, and the larger workforce development system to incorporate and apply the new rules related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including drafting a unified state plan adopting new performance measures and further collaboration with the One-Stop system. DBVI is a member of the Maine WIOA steering committee, which is guiding the Act's implementation, and also has participants on multiple related sub-committees.

In accordance with Section 116(b) of WIOA, as well as the Rehabilitation Services Administration's TAC 19-01, BRS is updating its internal controls and quality assurance processes to assure the accuracy, validity and reliability of its performance data. As part of this effort, BRS is working with its core partners to develop additional data sources that will provide a more complete report of the outcomes achieved by people with disabilities served by DVR and DBVI. In addition to Maine Unemployment Insurance wage data, Maine will access State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) data by submitting regularly scheduled data requests. BRS has contracted with the National Student Clearinghouse and will access data from that source on a regular basis to document credential attainment, both academic and occupational. BRS was developing a data sharing agreement with Maine's Department of Education, to assist with documenting adult, secondary and career and technical credentials and measurable skill gains. Disruptions to staffing and unprecedented demands presented by the COVID 19 pandemic delayed progress in accessing the SWIS and also finalizing a data sharing agreement but remain as part of our plan.

BRS is providing ongoing training to all staff so that they have a solid working knowledge of WIOA and how it impacts the work they do. Training topics have included: an overview of WIOA partners; common performance measures, career pathways and best practices in serving the needs of employers.

BRS and its core partners are using the Maine Job Link as a common data collection tool for performance data regarding Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

For PY2020, Maine DBVI exceeded the negotiated level for MSGs (33.8%) which was mostly due to secondary or post-secondary education completion.

4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

Title I resources continue to be used for development and expansion of assistive technology and low vision rehabilitation services for DBVI consumers in collaboration with all of our blindness rehabilitation services partners throughout the state.

DBVI continues to seek access and training in assistive technology through its collaboration with training and equipment loan programs such as Maine CITE, AllTech and Alpha One, and through equipment demonstrations offered at conferences, seminars and through on-line videos and product dissemination. DBVI O&M instructors seek and disseminate feedback regarding service and equipment needs, available resources and emerging technologies though quarterly meetings and on-line discussion portals. DBVI purchased a number of O & M requested technologies to allow for decreased dependence on loan programs, improved access to technologies for our clients and greater flexibility in providing that access.

In PY20, DBVI spent just over $4000 for I&E for its State Rehabilitation Council on meetings, including administrative tasks and web design.

Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

1. THE QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING YOUTH WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

The Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired continues to provide and expand supported employment services for individuals who are blind or have low vision in Maine. The Division has remained committed to assuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities receive supported employment services when this is appropriate. An Individual Plan of Employment (IPE) is developed that describes the services provided, the need for extended services, if appropriate, and an assurance that the individual has made an informed choice in the provision of these services as well as the employment goal and that extended employment services will be in a competitive, integrated setting. If the individual chooses not to pursue employment in a competitive, integrated setting, he/she will be referred to other systems for services.

Quality of Supported Employment Services:

The Division made the commitment to participate in the further development of its electronic information system – AwareVR, the case management system that captures these services and streamlines the case management process in the VR Program. The staff now have access to up-to-date information on weekly wages, hours worked, public assistance at the time of application and closure, the cost per case, and the average cost by counselor, region, and state. DBVI is now able to track the individuals who are eligible for VR but for whom the lack of long-term support prevents the development of a plan. The system enables us to evaluate who is being served, costs related to supported employment, its benefit to the client, and other systemic issues.

The Division gets technical assistance in supported employment that is available through the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University.

The agency remains committed to continuous quality improvement to provide better services to our customers.

Scope of Supported Employment:

The primary service provided to clients in a supported employment plan continues to be job support. This service is provided by a job coach who also engages with supervisors and peers towards helping the individual integrate into the company's social environment. Other services which are provided when a need has been identified include: supplemental assessments, job development and placement, social skills training, specific skills of blindness training, transportation, support services to parents, spouse and children, and/or facilitation of natural supports. Trial work settings are available to assess the consumer’s ability to work in an integrated, competitive setting. The agency provides whatever is required to achieve and maintain integrated, competitive employment.

The Division focuses on greater utilization of natural supports and the various SSI/SSDI work incentives as well as trying to explore new ideas for extended support to best utilize the limited resources available.

The Division has access to a state-funded Long-term Support Program, which allows funding for extended support services for individuals who are blind or have low vision after the VR case is closed. In addition, DBVI receives state funds for extended support for individuals with brain injuries, who are also blind or visually impaired. Both appropriations are very limited in the number of people who can be supported.

Extent of Supported Employment Services:

The Division identified twenty-four individuals who would benefit from supported employment services in PY19 and twenty-four in PY20. For PY19, there were six youth with a significant disability; one was closed unsuccessfully and the others were still receiving services. Of the eighteen adults, three were closed unsuccessfully, one was closed successfully and the others were still receiving services. For PY20, DBVI continues to work with five youth and fourteen adults. However, one adult was closed successfully and four were closed unsuccessfully.

2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

In day-to-day practice, a team approach is used to determine when an individual has stabilized and reached an acceptable level for transitioning to competitive, integrated employment.

This process calls for continual communication between the DBVI VR counselor, a representative of the state agency providing extended support and the job coach. The team determines each agency's responsibility, estimates of costs, time in training and the criteria for extended support. Once the agreement to provide extended support is signed, the team meets a minimum of every three months to evaluate progress, and, if needed, amend the agreement. The Division will pay the cost of the rehabilitation services only when the extended support will lead to competitive, integrated employment.

The transition to extended services begins after all supported employment services are complete. Extended services may be provided for a period of up to four years or until such time that a youth reached the age of 25, and thus, no longer meets the definition of a "youth with a disability" under 34 C.F.R. §361.5 (c) (58), whichever occurs first.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

The Maine Department of Labor

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT

ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Maine Department of Labor

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Laura Fortman

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Commissioner, Department of Labor

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

FOOTNOTES

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	Laura Fortman
Title of Signatory	Commissioner

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Date Signed	3/15/22

ASSURANCES

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or	

The State Plan must include	Include
Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	No
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	Yes
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	
4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program	

The State Plan must include	Include
under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:	
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act	
7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:	Yes
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the	

The State Plan must include	Include
Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	44.0%	45.0%	46.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	43.0%	43.0%	44.0%	44.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4325	$4325	$4541	$4541
Credential Attainment Rate	34.0%	34.0%	35.0%	35.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	48.0%	48.0%	49.0%	49.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	69.1%	69.1%	70.0%	70.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	65.8%	67.4%	66.9%	67.5%

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$6,599.00	$6,599.00	$6,750.00	$6,750.00
Credential Attainment Rate	66.2%	67.2%	67.0%	68.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	47.9%	47.9%	48.1%	48.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	72.0%	74.0%	73.0%	74.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	76.4%	76.4%	77.0%	77.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$8,900.00	$7,800.00	$8,950.00	$8,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	65.5%	66.0%	66.0%	66.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	55.5%	55.5%	56.0%	56.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES - YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	67.6%	67.6%	68.0%	68.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	69.3%	70.5%	70.0%	71.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4,000.00	$4,000.00	$4,050	$4,050.00
Credential Attainment Rate	55.9%	56.5%	56.0%	57.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0%	50.0%	51.0%	51.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

WAGNER-PEYSER ACT - WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	54.5%	55.5%	55.3%	56.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	56.8%	57.0%	57.3%	58.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$5,950.00	$5,950.00	$6,000.00	$6,000.00
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM - ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	34.0%	34.0%	35.0%	35.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	32.0%	33.0%	33.0%	34.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$ 4,250	$ 5,275	$ 4,300	$ 5,300
Credential Attainment Rate	32.0%	34.5%	33.0%	35.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	36.0%	38.0%	37.0%	39.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

1

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	44.0%	45.0%	46.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	43.0%	43.0%	44.0%	44.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4325	4,325	$4541	$4541
Credential Attainment Rate	34.0%	34.0%	35.0%	35.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	48.0%	48.0%	49.0%	49.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

[1]

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (BLIND) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Performance Indicators	PY 2022 Expected Level	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Expected Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	44.0%	44.0%	45.0%	46.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	43.0%	43.0%	44.0%	44.0%
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	$4325	$4325	$4541	$4541
Credential Attainment Rate	34.0%	34.0%	35.0%	35.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	48.0%	48.0%	49.0%	49.0%
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]	Not Applicable [1]

[1]

"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

Additional Indicators of Performance
N/A

OTHER APPENDICES

Acronym	Definition
ACAP	Aroostook County Action Program
ACCUPLACER	Assessment to identify student academic readiness
ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADATAC	Americans with Disabilities Act Technical Assistance Center
AE	Adult Education; Maine Department of Education
AEFLA	Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
AJC	American Job Centers
AJLA	America's Job Link Alliance, makers of Maine Job Link (MJL)
ALC	All Learning Counts; Grant received by the University of Maine system from the Lumina Foundation
ANI	Adult Numeric Instruction
AOP	Agriculture Outreach Plan
ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act of 2021
ARS	Agricultural Recruitment System
ASPIRE	Additional Support for People in Retraining and Employment
ATEC	Aroostook Training and Education Coalition
BES	Bureau of Employment Services; Maine Department of Labor
BRS	Bureau of Rehabilitation Services; Maine Department of Labor
BUC	Bureau of Unemployment Compensation; Maine Department of Labor
CASAS	Competency-based Assessment System or eCASAS
CAST	Center for Applied Special Technology
CCR-SIA	College Career Readiness- Standards in Actions
CCRS	College and Career Readiness Standards
CCWI	Coastal Counties Workforce Board
CDE	Commission on Disability and Employment; a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board
CEDS	Community Economic Development Strategy
CEO	Chief Elected Officials; County Commissioners who sit on the Local Workforce Boards (LWB)
CRA	Complaint Resolution Administrator

Acronym	Definition
CTE	Career and Technical Education
CTE	Career and Technical Education part of Maine Department of Education
CWMWDB	Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
CWRI	Center for Workforce Research and Information; Maine Department of Labor
DAFS	Department of Administration and Financial Services
DBVI	Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired; part of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services in the Maine Department of Labor
DECD	Department of Economic and Community Development
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
DOC	Department of Corrections
DVOP	Disabled Veterans Outreach Program
DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; part of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services in the Maine Department of Labor
DWG	Dislocated Worker grant
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EFL	educational functioning level
ELA	English language arts
EMDC	Eastern Maine Development Corporation
EPTL	Education Provider Training List; list of providers approved to provide WIOA funded training
ES	Employment Services
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages aka ELL. Replaces the term ESL (English as a Second Language)
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
ETPL	Eligible Training Provider List
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
FAME	Finance Authority of Maine
FLC	Foreign Labor Certification
FSET	Food Supplement Employment & Training
GEPA	General Education Provisions Act
H2A	Temporary work visa for migrant workers
H2B	Temporary visa which used primarily for seasonal workers
HiSet	High school equivalency exam
HOPE	Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment
IELCE	Integrated English Literacy Civics Education
IET	Integrated education and training

Acronym	Definition
INA	Indian and Native American (programs)
IRP	Individualized Reemployment Plan
IT	Information Technology
ITAC	Information Technology Accessibility Committee
JVSG	Jobs for Veterans State Grant
LIFT	Leveraging Investments in Families for Tomorrow
LVER	Local Veterans Employment Representatives
LWB	Local Workforce Board
MaineEARNS	Maine Education and Attainment Research Navigation System
MAP	Maine Apprenticeship Program
MCC /MCCS	Maine Community College (system)
MCCA	Maine College and Career Access is a program offered by Maine Adult Education
MCT	Maine College Transition
MDOL	Maine Department of Labor
MEMA	Maine Emergency Management Association
MEP	Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnerships
MIS	management information systems
MJL	Maine Job Link system which is used as case management system by CareerCenters. Built by AJLA and replaced Maine's JobBank system.
MJRP	Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan of 2021
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MQC	Maine Quality Centers a program of the Maine Community College System
MSFW	Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers
NAMI	National Alliance on Mental Illness
NASWA	National Association of State Workforce Agencies
NCCER	National Center for Construction Education and Research
NEG	National Emergency Grant
NETAAC	New England Trade Adjustment Assistance Center
NFJP	Farmworkers Jobs Program
NIST	National Institute of Standards and Technology
NRS	National Reporting System for Adult Education
NVME	New Ventures Maine
NWDB	Northeastern Workforce Development Board
OCTAE	Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education; US Department of Education
OJT	On the Job Training

Acronym	Definition
OSHA-10	Occupational Safety and Health Administration training
OWC	Older Worker Committee; a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board
RAP	Reading Apprenticeship Program
RESEA /REA	Reemployment Service and Eligibility Assessment
RFP	Request for Proposal
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
RSI	Reemployment and Systems Integration
SBE	Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment
SCSEP	Senior Community Services Employment Program
SMA	State Monitor Advocate
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SNAP E&T	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education and Training
SSI/ SSDI	Social Security Insurance/ Social Security Disability Insurance
STAR	Student Achievement in Reading training
SWA	State Workforce Agency
SWAT	State Workforce Assistance Team
SWB	State Workforce Board
SWIS	State Wage Interchange System
TAA	Trade Adjustment Assistance
TAC	Technical Assistance Circular document provided by USDOL to expand or clarify regulations
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; a DHHS program
UI	Unemployment insurance may refer to either the program and the agency
UMS	University of Maine System
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture (federal)
USDOL	United States Department of Labor (federal)
VETS	Veterans Employment and Training Services
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation; could stand for either the agency Division of Vocational Rehabilitation or the service provided.
WARN Act	Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act
WDQI	Workforce Data Quality Initiative
WDS	Workforce Development System
WEC	Women's Employment Committee; a subcommittee of the State Workforce Board
WIA	Workforce Investment Act, predecessor to WIOA
WIC	Women Infants and Children program

Acronym	Definition
WINTAC	Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WIPC	WIOA Implementation Policy Committee
W.O.R.K. Services	Workforce Opportunities, Referrals and Knowledge services is a software application connecting the systems of Adult Education, Bureau of Employment Services and Vocational Rehabilitation
WOTC	Work Opportunity Tax Credit
WOWI	World of Work Inventory; career assessment
WPRS	Worker Profiling Reemployment Services
YBA	Youth Build

Member	Affiliation	Position
Kimberly Moore	MDOL	Director, Bureau of Employment Services
Dawn Mealey	MDOL	Deputy Director, Bureau of Employment Services
Ginny Carroll	MDOL	Division Director, Policy & Evaluation, Bureau of Employment Services
Gail Senese	MDOE	State Director, Adult Education & Family Literacy
Megan Dicther	MDOE	Adult Education Workforce Development
Karen Fraser	MDOL	Director, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
Libby Stone-Sterling	MDOL	Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Brenda Drummond	MDOL	Director, Division for the Blind & Visually Impaired
Joanna Russell	LWB	Executive Director, Northeastern Workforce Development Board
Blaine Flanders	LWB	Interim Executive Director, Central/Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Antoinette Mancusi	LWB	Executive Director, Coastal Counties Workforce Inc.
Jillian Sample	LWB	Director of Operations, Coastal Counties Workforce Inc.
Christopher Quint	MDOL	Director, State Workforce Board
Isaac Gingras	MDOL	Workforce Development Program Coordinator, State Workforce Board
Cheryl Moran	MDOL	Labor Program Specialist, State Workforce Board

This group meets monthly to monitor and review progress of the implementation of the plan, update necessary elements, and provide strategic support when required. Using a matrix of initiatives, the group can track the progress of elements as they move towards completion.

11/12/2019

Central Western Workforce Development Board

Central Maine Community College, Auburn, ME

Name	Organization
Joy Gould	Community Concepts
Michelle Hawley	Central Maine Community College
Diane Frigon	Maine Department of Labor
Mary LaFontaine	Maine Department of Labor
Jim Trundy	Western Maine Community Action
Jeff Sneddon	Kennebec Valley Community College
Tina Christophenson	Maine School Administrative District 17 Adult Education
Sean Crothers	Maine Prisoner Re-entry Network
Patti Gray	Maine Department of Labor
Joan Dolan	Maine Department of Labor
Kelly Aho	Bonney Staffing
Cary Tyson	Kennebec Valley Council of Governments
Dale Merrell	Central Western Maine Workforce Development Board
Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Smith	Maine Department of Labor
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Jane Gilbert	Maine Department of Labor
Grant Provost	Iron Workers Local 7
Amy Landry	Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments
Julia Sleeper	Tree Street Youth Center
Bill Grant	Lewiston Adult Education

11/14/2019

Northeastern Workforce Development Board

Brewer Community Center, Brewer, ME

Name	Organization
Susan Cerini	Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Jon Farley	Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Lisa Shaw	Maine State Library
Nichole Sawyer	Washington County Community College
Rob Brown	Cooperative Development Institute
Leah Buck	Northern Maine Community College
Erin Benson	Aroostook County Action Program
Liz Russell	Eastern Maine Community College
Michael Carroll	Associates for Training and Development
Ander Theboud	Regional School District 24 Adult Education
Renee Doble	City of Brewer
Christina Breen	Senator Angus King
Joanna Russell	Northeastern Workforce Development Board
Rebecca Bryant	Northeastern Workforce Development Board
Dawn Mealy	Maine Department of Labor
Patty Perry	Maine Department of Labor
Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Smith	Maine Department of Labor
Paul Ruggiero	Maine Department of Labor
Melissa Harvey	Maine Department of Labor
Andrea Bickford	Maine Department of Labor
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Megan Dichter	Maine Department of Education

11/15/2019

State Workforce Board;

MDOL Augusta, ME

Guy Langevin	Dead River
Tracey Cooley	Job Corps
John Fortier	State Farm Insurance
Mary LaFontaine	Maine Department of Labor
Jason Shedlock	Maine Building and Construction Trades Council
Steve Gorden	Cumberland County Commissioner
Mary Kate Reny	Renys
Jen Fullmer	Boots 2 Roots
Nathan Pelsma	Jobs for Maine Graduates
Gail Senese	Maine Department of Education
Karen Fraser	Maine Department of Labor
Ashley Pringle	Maine & Company
John Herweh	MMG Insurance
Jon Mason	Bath Iron Works
Jim Nimon	Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council
Colleen Hilton	Northern Light Health
Peter Baldacci	Penobscot County Commissioner
Dan Belyea	Maine Community College System
Deputy Commissioner Sarah Gagne-Holmes	Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Deputy Commissioner Denise Garland	Maine Department of Economic and Community Development
Grant Provost	Iron Workers Local 7
Greg Sweetser	Sweetser Orchards
Luanne Ballesteros	The Jackson Laboratory
Mike Sylvester	State Representative, Maine Legislature
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Joshua Howe	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor
Christopher Quint	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor

11/15/2019

Commissioner Designees from State Agencies

MDOL Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME

Name	Organization
Joan Cohen	Maine Department of Professional and Financial Regulation
Dawn Mealey	Maine Department of Labor
Commissioner Randy Liberty	Maine Department of Corrections
Deputy Commissioner Denise Garland	Maine Department of Economic and Community Development
Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Smith	Maine Department of Labor
Evelyn de Frees	Maine Department of Labor
Joshua Howe	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor
Holly Pomelow	Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services
Anna Black	Maine Department of Corrections
Liz Ray	Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Tamara Ranger	Maine Department of Education
Emily Doughty	Maine Department of Education
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Christopher Quint	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor
Mary Anne Turowski	Governor Janet Mills
Dan Belyea	Maine Community College System

11/21/2019

Coastal Counties Workforce Development Board

MRRA Community Room, Brunswick, ME

Name	Organization
Dawn Self Cooper	Maine Department of Labor
Damas Rypaba	Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
Christopher Arbour	Maine Department of Corrections
Kim Moore	United Way of Greater Portland
Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Smith	Maine Department of Labor
Jason Shedlock	Maine State Building and Construction Trades Council
Joni Boissonneault	Portland Housing Authority
Mary Ellen Barnes	Lincoln County Regional Planning Council
Mary Bouvier	Westbrook Housing Authority
David Wurm	Goodwill Industries of Northern New England
Julia Trujillo	City of Portland
Kaylin Kerina	Learning Works
Scott Christman	Bath Iron Works
Richard Clark	York County Commissioner
Mufalo Chitam	Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition
Thomas Nickerson	University of Maine at Augusta
Beth Campbell	United Way of Greater Portland
Jim Whitten	Southern Maine Community College
Antoinette Mancusi	Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc.
Shelli Pride	Gorham Adult Education
Michelle Love	Androscoggin Bank
Samantha Fenderson	Maine Department of Labor
Mary LaFontaine	Maine Department of Labor
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Deputy Commissioner Kimberly Smith	Maine Department of Labor
Joshua Howe	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor

12/18/2019

State Workforce Board ; Dead River Company, South Portland, ME

Name	Organization
Guy Langevin	Dead River
Peter Anania	Anania & Associates
Tarlan Ahmadov	Catholic Charities of Maine
John Fortier	State Farm Insurance
Ned Claxton	State Senator, Maine Legislature
Jason Shedlock	Maine Building and Construction Trades Council
Steve Gorden	Cumberland County Commissioner
Mary Kate Reny	Renys
Jen Fullmer	Boots 2 Roots
Nathan Pelsma	Jobs for Maine Graduates
Gail Senese	Maine Department of Education
Karen Fraser	Maine Department of Labor
Ashley Pringle	Maine & Company
John Herweh	MMG Insurance
Jon Mason	Bath Iron Works
Jim Nimon	Sanford Regional Economic Growth Council
Colleen Hilton	Northern Light Health
Bob Dorko	Sappi North America
Dan Belyea	Maine Community College System
Deputy Commissioner Sarah Gagne-Holmes	Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Deputy Commissioner Denise Garland	Maine Department of Economic and Community Development
Grant Provost	Iron Workers Local 7
Greg Sweetser	Sweetser Orchards
Luanne Ballesteros	The Jackson Laboratory
Scott Good	Crescendo Consulting
Robert Sezak	Somerset County Commissioner
Rosa Redonnett	University of Maine System
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Joshua Howe	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor
Christopher Quint	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor

12/18/2019

Youth Focused

Florence House, Portland, ME

Name	Organization
Adrian Cohen	Goodwill Industries of Northern New England
David Dorr	Somerset Career & Technical Center
Mercedes Pour	Maine Community College System
Nikki Williams	State Workforce Board - Youth Committee
Robyn Raymond	Spruce Mountain Adult Education
Tracie Travers	Jobs For Maine Grads
Nate Pelsma	Jobs For Maine Grads
Sandra Goss	Goodwill Industries of Northern New England/Take Two YouthBuild
Karen MacDonald	Boys & Girls Clubs of Maine
Kaylin Kerina	Learning Works/Youth Building Alternatives
J. Duke Albanese	Great Schools Partnership
Karen Keim	Maine Educational Opportunity Center
Heather Stott	Goodwill - Workforce Solutions
Phoenix Escobedo-Winkle	Youth from JMG
Ryan Morris	Youth from JMG
Angie Hassapelis	Youth from JMG
Nathan Heatley	Youth from JMG
Carlo Bufano	Jobs For Maine Grads
Marquise Parland	Learning Works/Youth Building Alternatives
Shirley Palma	Learning Works/Youth Building Alternatives
Jeff Nevers	University of New England
Kim Moore	United Way of Greater Portland/Greater Portland Workforce Initiative
Rebecca Bryant	Northeastern Workforce Development Board
Joanna Russell	Northeastern Workforce Development Board
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Christopher Quint	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor
Joshua Howe	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor

12/19/2019

Employer Focused

MDOL 45 Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME

Name	Organization
Peter Gore	Maine State Chamber of Commerce
Steve Hewins	Hospitality Maine
Hope Perkins	Associated Builders & Contractors
Brian Whitney	Maine Technology Institute
Steven Michaud	Maine Hospital Association
Rick Erb	Maine Health Care Association
Lisa Martin	Manufacturers Association of Maine
Jan Kearce	Maine Development Foundation
Curtis Picard	Retail Association of Maine
Elizabeth Vanderweide	Finance Authority of Maine
Cynthia Murphy	Coastal Enterprises
Dan Coffey	Cianbro
Jennifer O'Leary	MaineHealth
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Christopher Quint	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor

12/19/2019

Advocate Focused

MDOL 45 Commerce Drive, Augusta, ME

Name	Organization
Chris Hastedt	Maine Equal Justice Partners
Ann Danforth	Maine Equal Justice Partners
Jennifer Hutchins	Maine Association of Non-Profits
Kim Moody	Disability Rights Maine
Gilda Nardone	SWB - Women's Employment Committee
Darcy Shargo	Maine Primary Care Association
Don Harden	Catholic Charities
Barbara Babkirk	SWB - Older Workers Committee
Dwight Littlefield	Department of Education - State Director for CTE
Joanna Russell	Northern Maine Workforce Development Board

Name	Organization
Jeff Nevers	University of New England
Holly Couturier	Maine Principals Association
Kate Leveille	MaineSpark
Beth Stickney	Maine Business Immigration Coalition
Jared Cash	University of Southern Maine
Claire Sullivan	University of Maine System
Rosa Redonnett	University of Maine System
Cherie Galvean	Maine Community Foundation
Joy Gould	Community Concepts
Jim Horn	Auburn School District
Luisa Deprez	University of Southern Maine
Jonathan Henry	University of Maine at Augusta
Lisa Cooper	Maine Development Foundation
James Myall	ME CEP
Rachel Knight	Destination Occupation
Dick Dyer	Destination Occupation
Rhonda Corson	Destination Occupation
Rebecca Conrad	RSC Consulting/Maine Business Immigrant Coalition
LeeAnne Larsen	Department of Education
Debbie Gilmer	Syntiro - Gear Up
Nate Wildes	Live & Work in Maine
Kelley Heath	Maine Adult Education
Karen Keim	MEOC
Mary Adley	Maine Department of Education
Amy Winston	Coastal Enterprises
Commissioner Laura Fortman	Maine Department of Labor
Christopher Quint	State Workforce Board/Maine Department of Labor

Public

Maine Community College System https://www.mccs.me.edu/

- Central Maine Community College https://www.cmcc.edu/

- Eastern Maine Community College https://www.emcc.edu/
- Kennebec Valley Community College https://www.kvcc.me.edu/
- Northern Maine Community College https://www.nmcc.edu/
- Southern Maine Community College https://www.smccme.edu/
- Washington County Community College https://www.wccc.me.edu/
- York County Community College https://www.yccc.edu/

Maine Maritime Academy https://mainemaritime.edu/

University of Maine System https://www.maine.edu/

- University of Maine - Orono https://umaine.edu/
- University of Maine at Augusta https://www.uma.edu/
- University of Maine at Farmington https://www.umf.maine.edu/
- University of Maine at Fort Kent https://www.umfk.edu/
- University of Maine at Machias https://machias.edu/
- University of Maine at Presque Isle https://www.umpi.edu/
- University of Southern Maine https://usm.maine.edu/

Private

Bates College https://www.bates.edu/

Beal College https://bealcollege.edu/

Bowdoin College https://www.bowdoin.edu/

Colby College http://www.colby.edu/

College of the Atlantic https://www.coa.edu/

Husson University https://www.husson.edu/

Purdue Global https://www.purdueglobal.edu/

Maine College of Art https://www.meca.edu/

Maine College of Health Professions https://www.mchp.edu/

Maine Media College https://www.mainemedia.edu/

New England Bible College https://www.nebc.edu/

Saint Joseph's College https://www.sjcme.edu/

Southern New Hampshire University - Brunswick/Winter Harbor https://www.snhu.edu/

Thomas College https://www.thomas.edu/

Unity College https://www.unity.edu/

University of New England https://www.une.edu/

TEGL 17-16 Infrastructure Cost Sharing:

Janet T. Mills
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
STATE WORKFORCE BOARD
55 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0055
www.Maine.gov/SWB

Laura Fortman
COMMISSIONER

MAINE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM			
Subject:	**Infrastructure Funding Agreement MOU Phase II**	Policy No:	**PY-19-04**
To:	• State WDB • Local WDBs • Chief Elected Officials • WIOA Required Partners	From:	State Workforce Board
Issuance Date:	**June 12, 2020**	Status:	**ACTIVE**
Authority:	• WIOA (Pub. L. 113-128) Sections:121(b)(1)(B); 121(b)(2)(B); 121(h) • 20 CFR 678.400, 678.700 thru 678.760; • 34 CFR 361.400, 361.700 thru 361.760; • 34 CFR 463.400. 463.700 thru 463.760 • TEGL 17-16; PM-OCTAE 17-03; RSA-TAC 17-03 • Infrastructure Cost Sharing FAQs		
Key:	**CEO** = Chief Elected Official, **IFA** = Infrastructure Funding Agreement; **IFM** = Infrastructure Funding Mechanism; **LB** = Local Board; **PM** = Program Memorandum; **RP** = Required Partner; **SFM** = State Funding Mechanism; **TAC** = Technical Assistance Circular; **TEGL** = Training and Employment Guidance Letter		

Purpose

To provide guidance to Local Boards (LBs), Chief Elected Officials (CEOs) and Required Partners (RPs) regarding development and implementation of a local Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA). An IFA identifies how onestop infrastructure costs jointly benefitting required partner programs will be equitably shared. This guidance also identifies: roles and responsibilities; timelines by which components of the cost-sharing negotiations process must be completed; requirements for documenting the negotiations process; and an overview of cost allocation methodologies based on proportionate use and relative benefit received.

Background

WIOA requires that each entity that carries out a program or activities in a local area use a portion of its funds available to establish and maintain the local one-stop infrastructure. Local partners may also agree to negotiate cost sharing for other activities, such as shared staff who provide common functions. All required partners must provide access to their services from at least one comprehensive one-stop in each local area. With the agreement of Chief Elected Officials, WIOA directs local boards and required partners to work together to design and implement a streamlined, customer-centric, integrated system of services.

In collaboration, required partners, CEOs and LBs identify the types of centers that will make up the one-stop delivery system in each local area (comprehensive, affiliate, and specialized) and the partner services that will be made available through each. Once the service delivery design phase is complete (see PY16-01 for MOU guidance https://www.maine.gov/swb/laws/policies/PY16-01_MOU_Phase_1.pdf) a second phase commences in which local boards and one-stop partners identify and determine how infrastructure and other costs will be shared, this phase is referred to as the Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA). The infrastructure funding agreement portion of the overall MOU must be reviewed and renegotiated annually.

Timelines

• 07/30/2020 - date local area must provide a notice of failure to reach agreement to MDOL

• 09/30/2020 - date local area must submit signed IFA, using either the LFM or SFM to MDOL

• 01/01/2018 - date US Departments of Labor and Education require IFAs be in place in local areas.

Required Partners

A. WIOA title I programs (29 U.S.C. chapter 32):

-
    - Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth formula programs;
    - Job Corps;
    - YouthBuild;
    - Native American Programs;
    - National Farmworker Jobs Program

B. Employment Services authorized by the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.) as amended by WIOA title III

C. Senior Community Service Employment Program, authorized under title V of Older Americans Act of 1965; D. Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), authorized under chapter 2 of the title II of the Trade Act of 1974;

E. Unemployment Compensation (UC) programs;

F. Jobs for Veteran's State Grants (JSVG) programs, authorized under chapter 41 of title 38, U.S.C.; and

G. Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) programs, authorized under sec. 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532) and WIOA sec. 169;

H. Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) program, authorized under WIOA title II;

I. Career and technical education programs at the postsecondary level, authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV); and

J. The State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.), as amended by WIOA Title IV;

K. Employment and Training Programs funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Developed

L. Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) programs (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.); and

M. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, authorized under part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.), unless exempted by the Governor under 20 CFR 678.405(b), 34 CFR 361.405(b), and 34 CFR 463.405(b);

Roles and Responsibilities

The Governor, through the **State Workforce Board** is responsible for creating the framework for infrastructure cost sharing that required partners and local boards must follow.

The State Workforce Agency (MDOL) is responsible for monitoring local area fiscal operations and ensuring the conditions of the MOU and IFA are implemented according to these requirements.

Local Boards and CEOs are responsible for:

➢ Working to achieve consensus on cost sharing between one-stop partners;

➢ Negotiating the IFA and/or implementing the SFM if unable to achieve consensus;

➢ Ensuring required partners adhere to the IFA/SFM guidelines;

➢ Providing technical assistance to partners to ensure they understand MOU/IFA requirements;

➢ Ensuring one-stop infrastructure costs are paid according to the provisions of the MOU/IFA; and

➢ Consulting with appropriate parties as directed under WIOA.

Required Partner Programs must provide access to their services through the comprehensive one-stop in each local area and must use a portion of its funds to maintain the one-stop delivery system, including payment of infrastructure costs. Required partners must work collaboratively and in good faith with LBs and CEOs to: enter into a memorandum of agreement that identifies the services to be provided in the local one-stop system; identify one-stop centers in the local area, including comprehensive, affiliate and if applicable specialized one-stops; and agree to methods of calculating the amounts each partner will contribute toward one-stop infrastructure costs.

Local Funding Mechanism (LFM)

The LFM provides partners with the most flexibility in how they can leverage their resources and come to consensus on an Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA); consensus on the infrastructure budge and partner contributions must be reached by all partners for the local

funding mechanism to work. If consensus cannot be reached, the State Funding Mechanism is triggered. Under the LFM, LBs, CEOs and required partners negotiate and agree to the methods to be used and the amounts each partner will contribute to one-stop infrastructure costs. The sharing and allocation of infrastructure costs are governed by WIOA sec. 121(h), its implementing regulations, and the Federal cost principles contained in the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal awards at 2 CFR part 200 and 2 CFR part 2900. WIOA requires that one-stop partner programs contribute to infrastructure and certain additional costs based on their proportionate use and relative benefit received. Partner contributions must be allowable, reasonable, necessary and allocable to the partner program, consistent with Federal cost principles set forth in the Uniform Guidance.

Under the LFM, there are no specific caps on the amount or percent of overall funding a partner may contribute, except that administrative costs may not exceed the amount available under each partner's authorizing statute. Cash, non-cash, and third-party in-kind contributions may be provided by one-stop partners, or by other agencies on behalf of one-stop partners, to cover their proportionate share of cost.

State Funding Mechanism (SFM)

In the event the LB, CEOs and RPs in a local area do not reach agreement on methods of sufficiently funding infrastructure costs for a program year, the SFM will be used for that local area. Under the SFM, the Governor determines partner contributions and calculates the statewide caps by considering total partner program funding against the statutory caps specified in WIOA and regular funding distribution formulas. Each required partner must provide information on the total amount of funding they receive for the SFM calculation to be figured, local boards are responsible for gathering this data when calculating the local one-stop system operating costs and partner contributions.

Required Elements of an Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA)

The IFA is a mandatory component of the local MOU, the IFA must include the following elements:

A. The timeframe the IFA is in effect, which may differ from the timeframe the overall MOU is in effect;

B. Identification of an infrastructure and shared services budget, which will be periodically reviewed and accordingly adjusted to ensure it reflects a cost allocation methodology that appropriately charges costs to each partner in proportion to their use of the one-stop center and the relative benefit received by their program; it is a component of the overall one-stop operating budget;

C. Identification of all one-stop partners, CEOs, and LBs participating in the IFA, including signatures of the individuals with the authority to bind the agreement;

D. Documentation of steps the LB, CEOs and RPs used to reach consensus, and if unable to reach consensus, assurance the local area has followed the SFM process;

E. A description of the process to be used by partners to resolve issues related to infrastructure funding during the IFA duration period; and

F. A description of the periodic modification and review process to be implemented to ensure equitable benefit among one-stop partners.

Steps for Developing an Infrastructure Funding Agreement

1. Identify full cost of operating the one-stop system in the local area, including infrastructure costs and additional costs;

2. Create the one-stop operating budget that includes the infrastructure and additional costs budgets;

3. Develop reasonable cost allocation methodologies, including the identification of cost pools and allocation bases and select those that are to be applied;

4. Determine estimated partner contributions;

5. Allocate costs by each partner's proportionate use and relative benefit received and determine the method each partner will use to cover their cost;

6. Prepare and agree to the IFA(s) (Note: you may want a single IFA for the comprehensive one-stop center and separate IFAs for affiliate centers);

7. Identify how and how often (at least twice a year) a reconciliation will be conducted to be sure costs are allocated appropriately; and

8. Document and evaluate the negotiations process in full, including meetings, partners conferred with, meeting outcomes and final decisions.

One-Stop Operating Budget

To provide a starting point for negotiating cost sharing, each local area must identify the total cost of operating the local one-stop delivery system and the resources that will support those costs. The one-stop operating budget acts as the master budget that contains sets of individual budgets for infrastructure costs, the cost of providing career services, shared operating costs, shared services costs, and additional costs related to the operation of the one-stop. The one-stop operating budget must be included in the IFA.

Infrastructure Cost Budget

Infrastructure costs are the non-personnel costs necessary for the general operation of the one-stop center and which may include: facilities rental costs; utilities and maintenance; equipment (including assessment-related and assistive technology for individuals with disabilities); and technology to facilitate access to the one-stop center, including technology used for the center's planning and outreach activities. It may also include common identifier costs and the cost of supplies to support the general operation of the one-stop center. Non-personnel costs are all costs that are not compensation for program partner personnel. For example, technology related services performed by outside vendors or contractors are non-personnel costs and may be identified as infrastructure costs. Such costs would include service contracts with vendor or contractors of equipment and supplies.

Personnel costs include salaries, wages, and fringe benefits of employees of partner programs or their subrecipients, for example costs of partner program staff who use MIS systems to identify common performance and reporting outcomes would be personnel costs. The cost of a shared receptionist is a personnel expense and would not be included in the cost budget for

SFM purposes but may be included in the local area IFA if partners agree to include shared services costs.

Infrastructure costs may be funded through cash and fairly-evaluated non-cash and third-party in-kind partner contributions. Partners' share of costs must be based on reasonable cost allocation methodologies that ensure costs are charged to each partner program in proportion to its use of the one-stop center and relative to its benefits received. Such costs must be allowable, reasonable, necessary and allocable.

The requirements that govern infrastructure costs apply to each one-stop center in the local delivery system, whether the center is a comprehensive, affiliate, or specialized center. Required partners must provide access to their services through at least one comprehensive one-stop center in each local area and as such must contribute to the infrastructure costs of the comprehensive center. Only those partners that participate in affiliate centers are required to contribute toward the infrastructure costs of those centers.

Types of Contributions		
Cash	Non-Cash	Third-Party / In-kind
Funds provided to the LB or its designee by one-stop partners, either directly or by interagency transfer or by third party.	Expenditures incurred by one-stop partners on behalf of the one-stop center; and Non-cash contributions of goods or services contributed by a partner program and used by the one-stop center.	Contributions of space, equipment, technology, non-personnel services or other like items to support the infrastructure costs associated with one-stop operations by a non-one-stop partner to: • Support the one-stop in general • Support the proportionate share of a specific partner
	Must be valued consistent with 2 CFR 200.306 to ensure they are fairly evaluated and meet the partners' proportionate share. Partners must fairly value contributions on a periodic and annual basis.	
Examples of the above can be found in the guidance documents issued by US Departments of Labor and Education via the links in the Reference section of this document.		

Funding Limitations

Partner contributions are subject to that partner programs' administrative cost limitations and restrictions: • Native American programs may contribute to infrastructure costs, but are not required to;

• Job Corps may only use program funds toward shared infrastructure costs;

• Adult Education and Postsecondary Carl Perkins recipients may only use admin funds toward such costs;

• Wagner Peyser, Unemployment Compensation, Jobs for Veteran's State Grant and Vocational Rehabilitation programs do not distinguish between program and admin funds; and

• Title IB, YouthBuild, National Farmworker Jobs Program, Senior Community Service Employment Program, Trade Assistance Act, and REO programs may use either admin or program funds to support shared infrastructure costs.

• Other partners carrying out employment and training activities with their funds (HUD, CSBG, etc.) must consult their authorizing documents;

• The Governor has excluded TANF from this requirement.

• Additional partners whose services are accessed through a one-stop must also participate in infrastructure cost sharing of the IFA but will not be subject to the State Funding Mechanism if it is triggered.

Proportionate Use

"Proportionate use" refers to a partner program contributing its fair share of the costs proportionate to:

1. The use of the One-Stop center by customers that may include reportable individuals and participants in its program served through that One-Stop center;

2. The amount of square footage occupied by the partner program in that One-Stop center; or

3. Another allocation base consistent with Uniform guidance.

Relative Benefit

The "relative benefit" received from participating in the one-stop delivery system is another step in the cost allocation process. Determining relative benefit does not require partners to conduct an exact or absolute measurable benefit, but rather to measure a partner's benefit using reasonable methods that are agreed to by all partners.

Cost Allocation

Prior to determining the method of cost allocation, it is necessary to determine if the costs are direct or indirect. Direct costs are costs that are identified specifically with a cost objective and charged directly to that objective. Direct costs may be classified as assignable or shared. Shared direct costs cannot be readily assigned to a final cost objective but are directly charged to an intermediate cost objective or cost pool and subsequently allocated to final cost objectives. These costs are incurred for a common or joint purpose benefiting more than one funding stream. Indirect costs are costs that have been incurred for a common or joint purpose and cannot be readily identified with a final cost objective. A method of allocation must be used to distribute the indirect costs to the various direct activities that benefited. To distribute indirect costs equitably and consistently, a cost allocation plan must be developed. A cost may not be allocated as an indirect cost if that cost or any other cost incurred in the same circumstance and for the same purpose has already been assigned to the program as a direct cost.

Measuring benefit

Measuring benefit is the critical requirement and central task to be performed in allocating costs. Costs are allocable to a cost objective based on the benefits received by that cost objective. When the direct measurement of benefit cannot be done efficiently and effectively, then it is appropriate to pool the costs for later distribution. 6 The allocation base is the mechanism used

to allocate the pooled costs to final cost objectives. Care should be taken to ensure that the basis chosen does not distort the results.

Allocability

For a cost to be allocable to a cost objective, it must be treated consistently with other costs incurred for the same purpose in like circumstances. Any cost allocable to a grant or other cost objective under these principles may not be shifted to other Federal grants to overcome funding deficiencies, to avoid restrictions imposed by law or grant agreement, or for other reasons. Costs that are prohibited by a funding source may not be paid or used as offsets under a pooled cost agreement.

Allowability

To be allowable, a cost must be necessary and reasonable for the proper and efficient administration of the program. To reduce the risk of accumulating and being held accountable for disallowed costs, program operators should carefully review anticipated program expenditures, the terms and conditions of the award, and applicable regulations before any program costs are incurred.

Reasonableness

For a cost to be reasonable under an award, it cannot exceed that which would be incurred by a prudent person under the same circumstances. In determining the reasonableness of a given cost, consideration should be given to:

• Whether the cost is a type generally recognized as ordinary and necessary for the operation of the organization or the performance of the award.

• The restraints or requirements imposed by such factors as generally accepted sound business practices, armslength bargaining, Federal and state laws and regulations, and terms and conditions of the award.

• Whether individuals concerned acted with prudence in the circumstances considering the responsibilities to the organization, its members, employees and clients, the public at large, and the government.

• Significant deviations from the established practices of the organization that may have unjustifiably increased the award's costs.

Cost Allocation Plan (CAP)

Once pooled costs to be shared among partners are identified, a basis of allocation must be agreed upon that is: fair to benefiting programs, measurable, consistent, and supported by ongoing data collection. Different bases may allocate different pools. A cost allocation plan is required to document the allocation process and is to include at least the following elements:

• Organization chart that identifies all partners, types of services provided, and staff functions.

• A description of the type of services and programs provided by the One-Stop system.

• A copy of the official budget that includes all costs of the system.

• The methods used in allocating the expenses to benefiting cost objectives. This requires identifying the basis for allocating each type of pooled cost, and the documentation for supporting each basis of allocation.

Cost Allocation Parameters

• Each partner must contribute its portion of pooled costs in addition to paying its own direct costs.

• The One-Stop system cannot deviate from existing federal, state, or local regulations. Costs that are prohibited by a funding source (federal, state, or local) may not be paid or used to cover costs identified under a pooled cost agreement.

• Components of the cost pool are limited to costs incurred during the period of operation.

• Required contributions are based on cost. In the case of staff, use actual salary and benefit costs in calculations, not number of staff and function performed. If different individuals will perform the function, then an average of their actual salaries and benefits may be used. Square footage will generally become the allocation basis for space. The cost per square foot becomes a pooled cost that is a direct charge to the partners.

Common costs must be divided up so that partners pay the share that is attributable to their program. Such costs must be allocated only to those programs that benefit and partners must agree to a method to divide up the 7 common costs. Costs may be allocated using any methodology agreed upon by the partners and which reflect the best method of benefit received by the partner programs. Costs may be allocated:

➢ In the aggregate. A big picture-based methodology where the common costs of the center are totaled, and each partner pays their fair share of the total of all common costs. For example, all shared costs of the one-stop center are pooled and allocated using a cost per hour of operation basis.

➢ On an activity basis. Using this approach, the costs associated with a common activity are pooled (such as common intake) and the partners pay their fair share of the cost of that activity. The costs for each activity being allocated would be added together for the total shared costs by partner. For example, the costs of a combined intake and eligibility determination system could be pooled and allocated based on data bytes on common forms attributable to each program.

➢ On an item of cost basis. Using this methodology, each item of cost is allocated to the benefitting partner program using a separate allocation methodology. For example, using rent as a cost and allocating it among partners based on square footage.

➢ On a combination basis. Partners may also allocate costs on a combination of above bases by allocating some costs on an activity basis and other shared costs on an individual item of cost basis. Whatever cost allocation methodology is used, it must be consistent with: the GAAP, applicable OMB Cost Principles, applicable administrative requirements, be accepted by each partner's auditors and be supported by actual cost data. Cost allocation must not shift costs to a program that are not allocable to that program and/or do not benefit that program.

Periodic Review and Reconciliation

Partner shares must be periodically reviewed (no less than twice a year) and reconciled against actual costs incurred and adjusted to be sure actual costs charged to any one-stop partner are proportionate to the use of the one-stop center and relative to the benefit received by the one-stop partner, their programs or activities.

Documenting the IFA negotiations process

Local areas must document the process they used to reach agreement on infrastructure cost sharing; such documentation may include: meeting agendas and minutes showing who attended and what transpired; tools or forms created to facilitate the process and activities undertaken to reach agreement on infrastructure cost sharing so that the process is transparent to all involved parties.

Shared Costs:

Local areas may decide to include joint funding of other shared costs in the local IFA. In such cases, partners must identify what the shared costs are, the dollar values they represent, and how they will be funded by each partner. Centers with co-located partners that collaborate to provide up-front services, such as intake, orientation, assessment and service referral, may share the cost of staff providing those services on behalf of all co-located partners.

Sample Cost Pools and Allocation Bases

Cost Pools	Allocation Bases
Facilities: building rent, maintenance costs, utilities, tenant improvements, or any other similar costs related to the physical structure or housing the one-stop center.	Square footage occupied by each partner agency as compared to the total space, workstation usage by partners as compared to total workstations.
Telecommunications: monthly telephone costs, telephone system equipment, data lines etc.	Dedicated telephone units as compared to all units. Equal access to Internet for data costs.
Information Technology: shared equipment, software, IT maintenance costs, Internet access, and other costs.	Number of dedicated computers (including all necessary equipment) as compared to total.
Resource Center: costs of shared equipment, displays, computer learning, specialized software for computer learning, furniture, copier, fax machine, may also include related staff costs.	Equal access by customers of all programs results in equal costs for each partner. Customer attributable by partner program. Number of customers receiving services within the resource center.
Common Intake System: cost of developing common intake data formats, preparation and interview of customers and similar costs.	Use of common data formats and bytes of information for each program. Time study to determine amount of time required for specific program data compared to the time needed to complete the process for an individual.
One-Stop Center Management: cost of center director, receptionist, staff of the resource center.	Number of customers eligible for or receiving specific program services. Direct costs by partner. Total costs by partner as compared with total of all partners.
Shared Equipment and Supplies: staff copier, fax, associated supplies, furniture.	Usage by staff of each partner program. Occupancy (square footage) basis; numbers of work stations.
Common Basic Services: Staff and benefit costs	Time distribution (time sheets). Number of clients eligible for specific program. Weighted participant numbers.

Sample Budget Sheets

Cost Item	Cost Basis	Monthly Cost	Yearly Cost
Facilities			
Rent	Actual	$5,000	$60,000
Utilities (Electric, gas, water ,sewer)			
Building Maintenance			
Building Security			
Operations			
Telephone			
Data / Communications			
IT Maintenance			
Shared Equipment (assistive tech, assessment tech)			
Copiers			
Fax Machines			
Computers			
Other Equipment used to serve all center customers			
Equipment Maintenance			
Resource Center			
New AJC Signage			
Supplies			
Software			
Hardware			
Printed Materials			
Other (List each cost)			
Common Staff (position)			

Summary of Total Infrastructure Costs to be Shared by Co-located Partners	
Cost Category	**Total Cost**
Subtotal: Rental Costs	
Subtotal: Utilities and Maintenance Costs	
Subtotal: Equipment Costs	
Subtotal: Technology to Facilitate Access Costs	
Subtotal: Common Identifier Costs	
Total Infrastructure Costs for this AJC Network	

Proportionate Share: Infrastructure Costs this AJC Network				
Partner	**Compute Methodology**	**Partner Program Share in Cost**	**Source by Cash**	**Source by In-Kind**
#1		**$**	**$**	**$**
#2		**$**	**$**	**$**
#3		**$**	**$**	**$**
Total Budget				

Sample Share of Other Costs

SERVICES Optional partner agreement to share other AJC costs: initial intake, assessment of needs, appraisal of basic skills, identification of appropriate services to meet needs, and referrals to other AJC partners. This may include costs of personnel, technology, and tools that increase integrated service delivery through sharing of information and service delivery processes.		
Line Item	**Budget Detail**	**Cost**
		$
		$
	Total Budget:	**$**
Agreed upon cost allocation methodology to share these costs:		

Proportionate Share: Initial Intake, Assessment, Basic Skills Appraisal, Services, Referrals, etc.				
Partner	Compute Methodology	Partner Share	Source by Cash	Source by In-Kind
Adult		$	$	$
Dislocated Worker		$	$	$
Youth		$	$	$
Job Corps		$	$	$
YouthBuild		$	$	$
Wagner Peyser		$	$	$
Adult Education		$	$	$
Vocational Rehab		$	$	$
DBVI		$	$	$
SCEP		$	$	$
TAA		$	$	$
JSVG		$	$	$
UI		$	$	$

BUSINESS SERVICES Optional partner agreement to share other AJC costs: Business Services, which may include costs related to a local or system business services team that has one or more partners or has delegated one partner to provide these services on behalf of the other partners.		
Line Item	Budget Detail	Cost
	Total Budget:	$
Agreed upon cost allocation methodology to share these costs:		

Proportionate Share: Initial Intake, Assessment, Basic Skills Appraisal, Services, Referrals, etc.				
Partner	Compute Methodology	Partner Share	Source by Cash	Source by In-Kind
Adult		$	$	$
Dislocated Worker		$	$	$
Youth		$	$	$
Job Corps		$	$	$
YouthBuild		$	$	$
Wagner Peyser		$	$	$
Adult Education		$	$	$
Vocational Rehab		$	$	$
DBVI		$	$	$
SCEP		$	$	$
TAA		$	$	$
JSVG		$	$	$
UI		$	$	$

Please note: the one-stop financial management technical assistance guide offers several other budget sheets, tools, and example allocation bases and scenarios; links to this and other good resources are printed below.

State Funding Mechanism (SFM) Appeals Process

When the local area has informed the State that they are at an impasse regarding infrastructure cost sharing the State Funding Mechanism (SFM) will be applied. The SFM applies only to infrastructure costs.

Under the SFM, the Maine Department of Labor, in consultation with the chief elected officials, the local

workforce board and the State workforce board, will determine each required partner's proportionate share of infrastructure costs for that local area, using guidelines pertaining to the State Funding Mechanism, which will be put forth for the Governor's review and approval as a final determination.

A required partner may appeal the final determination because of a claim that:

a. The Governor's determination is inconsistent with the infrastructure cost proportionate share requirements of 20 CFR 678.735;

b. The Governor's determination is inconsistent with the infrastructure cost contribution caps described in 20 CFR 678.738

1.
    a.
        i.
            1. An appeal must be made in writing within 21 days of the Governor's determination and must include specific evidence that the amount determined by the Governor is inconsistent with a. and/or b. above.
            2. Written appeals must be submitted to:
2. Appeals
3. Maine Department of Labor
4. Bureau of Employment Services
5. 55 State House Station
6. Augusta, ME 04333-0055
    a.
        i.
            1. The appeal will be reviewed by the executive committee of the State workforce board and within 30 days of receipt, the appellant will receive a letter either denying or accepting the appeal.

2. If the appeal is found to be without merit, it will be denied, and no further action taken.
3. If the appeal is merited, the executive committee will make a revised determination. The executive committee may consult with the chief elected official and local board to attempt to negotiate a mutually

agreed upon revised determination. The revised determination will only pertain to infrastructure cost sharing and will be presented to the State workforce board for review and approval.

1.

a.

i.

1. Upon full approval of the State workforce board, the revised determination will be considered final throughout the cost sharing agreement period of duration, until such time as local area infrastructure cost sharing is renegotiated.

Resource Links:

➢ FAQs Infrastructure Cost Sharing - USDOL: https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/docs/FAQs-Infrastructure-FundingGuidance-Dec-27-2016.pdf ;

➢ FAQs Infrastructure Cost Sharing - USDE: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/one-stopcosts-faq.html

➢ One-Stop Comprehensive Financial Management Technical Assistance Guide Part I (2002)

https://www.doleta.gov/grants/pdf/FinalTAG_August_02.pdf

➢ One-Stop Comprehensive Financial Management Technical Assistance Guide Part II (2011)

https://www.doleta.gov/grants/pdf/TAG_PartII_July2011.pdf

➢ PM OCTAE 17-3: https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-17-3.pdf

➢ PY16-01 Change 1: MOU Policy:

➢ PY17-03 SFM Policy:

➢ Resource Sharing for WIA One-Stop Centers: Methodologies for Paying or Funding Each Partner Program's fair Share of Allocable Costs: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2001-05-31/pdf/01-13426.pdf

➢ RSA TAC – 17-03: https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/rsa/subregulatory/tac-17-03.pdf

➢ Sample Infrastructure Cost Tool Kit:

https://ion.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/03/23/13/30/Sample_MOU_Infrastructure_Costs_Toolkit

➢ TEGL 17-16 Infrastructure Cost Sharing:
https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=4968

Inquiries pertaining to this policy may be addressed to:

State Workforce Board

120 State House Station

Augusta, Maine 04333-0120

207-621-5087 TTY users call Maine Relay 711

SWB.DOL@maine.gov

MOU between the state monitor advocate and National farmworker jobs program

Memorandum of Understanding

Between

Maine Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Standards

State Monitor Advocate

And

PathStone Corporation

National Farmworker Jobs Program Grantee

Pursuant to guidance in TEGL No. 8-17 which outlines requirements for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between State Monitor Advocates (SMA) and the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) Grantee, PathStone Corporation, per the following Wagner-Peyser Employment Service regulations on services to MSFWs:

-
    - 20 CFR 653.108(k): The SMA must establish an ongoing liaison with the WIOA sec. 167 NFJP grantee and other organizations serving farmworkers, employers and employer organizations in the state.
    - 20 CFR 653.108(1): The SMA must meet (either in person or by alternative means), at a minimum, quarterly, with representatives of the organizations pursuant to paragraph (k) of this section, to: receive complaints; assist in referrals of alleged violations of enforcement agencies; and receive input on improving coordination with Employment Service (ES) offices or improving the coordination of services to MSFWs. To foster such collaboration, the SMAs must establish MOUs with the NFJP grantees and may establish MOUs with other organizations serving farm works as appropriate.

Purpose:

The purpose of this Agreement is to ensure the MDOL, through the SMA, and PathStone, will effectively coordinate trainings, information sharing and outreach activities to efficiently and equitably serve MSFWs in compliance with 20 CFR 653.107 and 20 CFR 653.108. This MOU is a non-financial agreement.

Responsibilities: It will be the responsibility of the MDOL and PathStone, the WIOA Section 167 Grantee, to ensure contact and make employment and training services available to farmworkers in the state of Maine. Both parties agree to the following responsibilities, which will enhance and facilitate the cooperative working relationship:

1.

    a. MDOL and PathStone shall ensure that information on both agencies' services and the MDOL Employment Services complaint system is available for dissemination to the farmworkers (i.e., posters, pamphlets, use of the media, workshops, etc.)

    b. MDOL shall provide training at least once a year on issues that affect MSFWs or the One-Stop Delivery System, such as the Employment Services and Employment Related Law Complaint System of the Wagner-Peyser Act, the SMA and PathStone will assure that all MSFW participants are equitably treated and properly enrolled in the Maine JobLink system.

    c. PathStone shall inform the MDOL's SMA of any apparent violation, whether PathStone staff attempted resolution of the apparent violation, and/or if the apparent violation was referred to any enforcement agency. PathStone shall also inform the SMA of any complaints.

    d. MDOL and PathStone shall ensure that non-confidential data gathered regarding MSFWs and Labor Market information is shared for planning purposes.

    e. MDOL and PathStone shall develop cooperative efforts, which are mutually beneficial in serving MSFWs, and pursue avenues on how to avoid duplication of services and maximize each other's effectiveness in meeting MSFW needs.

    f. MDOL and PathStone will refer MSFW clients to each other when appropriate. Referrals will be sent via email providing the following information:

        i.

            1.

                a. Client Name;

                b. Contact Information;

                c. Address; and

                d. Brief description of need

    g. MDOL's SMA will meet with PathStone staff on a quarterly basis, either in person, video conference or by telephone to discuss outreach activities and coordination efforts.

h. MDOL's SMA will conduct outreach in conjunction with PathStone's outreach staff to farmworkers and/or employers at least three times during peak agricultural season.

i. MDOL will provide, on request, information on services provided to clients referred by PathStone. This will include:

    i.

        1.

            a. Training;

            b. Counseling;

            c. WTW;

            d. Job Referral;

            e. Placement; and

            f. Job Development Contacts

j. PathStone will provide, on request, information on services provided to referrals from the MDOL. This will include, but is not limited to:

    i.

        1.

            a. Training;

            b. Supportive Services;

            c. Job Counseling; and

            d. Job Placement

k. PathStone will inform the MDOL via e-mail communication on a quarterly basis as required for SMA reporting purposes, data reflecting outreach outcomes including number of MSFW contacts made during the quarter and number of outreach staff days associated with those contacts. This data does not require and will not include Personal Identifiable Information (PII).

Meeting Frequency: At minimum, the SMA and PathStone staff will meet the first month of each quarter of the federal program year. However, if necessary, and, in order to provide specific programmatic services to MSFWs, impromptu meetings may be arranged by either PathStone or SMA.

Meeting Format:

-
    - PathStone or the SMA may connect in person or via teleconference or via video conference if need be. To better coordinate outreach efforts, outcomes and outreach reviews the SMA and PathStone will have a quarterly call and/or video Teams meeting. The PathStone and the SMA shall take turns arranging meeting logistics such as meeting invitations and agendas. Impromptu meetings may take place during the peak agricultural growing season.
        - Required Attendees: The SMA or designee and the NFJP administrator will attend or call or otherwise inform the other of unavailability, making

arrangements for an alternate person to attend. Required attendee will be NFJP administrator, PathStone staff, and the SMA.

Terms or Duration of the Agreement:

This agreement shall be in effect from December 20, 2021 through the end of the current WIOA Section 167 NFJP grant. The terms of engagement outlined within this agreement may be modified and/or renegotiated as necessary by mutual consent of all the parties.

Certification:

By signing this agreement, all parties agree that the provisions contained herein are subject to all applicable Federal, State and local laws, regulations and/or guidelines relating to nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, displacement, privacy rights of participants, and maintenance of records and other confidential information relating to the BES CareerCenter (AJC) system or MSFW customers.

2-10-22

Elizabeth Grout Date
Regional Administrator: NFJP
PathStone Corporation

2/10/2022

Jorge Acero Date
Maine Department of Labor
State Monitor Advocate

02/10/2022

Jeffrey Lewis Date
Senior Vice President, Direct Services
PathStone Corporation

2/10/2022

Mike Roland Date
Maine Department of Labor