



Date: 10/3/2022

Source of Report: LD 1684, Resolve 2021, Chapter 68, An Act To Strengthen Maine's Workforce by Expanding English Language Acquisition and Workforce Training Programs

Topic: Funding for English language acquisition and workforce training programs

Context

LD 1684 directs the Department of Education's office of adult education to establish a statewide competitive grant process for English language acquisition and workforce training programs. Section two further outlines an inclusion of intensive industry-specific English language and vocabulary classes for participating potential employees, including immigrants, newly hired employees, and incumbent employees. Section three identifies the criteria for grant applicants to have demonstrated expertise and experience in English language acquisition training, vocational assessments, and developing partnerships with employers and state agencies. The Department of Education will develop a nonlapsing fund for the purposes of administering state grants funded by state and federal allocations and other sources. The Department of Education is further directed to deliver a report on the analysis and subsequent findings to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. This report shall include the number of grants awarded; the training services provided; aggregate demographic information about immigrant participants, participating employers, employment opportunities, placement, and retention; and an evaluation of programs and services most effective in carrying out the purposes of this resolve.

Actions

In the summer of 2022, a Request for Proposals (RFP) went out for the Strengthening Maine's Workforce Grant allowing adult education programs to apply for grant awards within the range of \$10,000-\$500,000 with a total amount of eligible funds of \$4,000,000.00.

Under this RFP, the Department of Education may fund Strengthening Maine's Workforce applications that do one or more of the following:

1. Develop, implement, continue, and/or expand, workforce training programs in collaboration with employers in at least one of the eligible industries (healthcare, hospitality (restaurants and lodging), retail, and manufacturing);
2. Partner with employers to address workforce shortages in employment sectors in at least one of the eligible industries identified as suffering deep economic declines due to COVID-19 (healthcare, hospitality (restaurants and lodging), retail, and manufacturing);

3. Develop and provide English language acquisition services; and/or
4. Improve availability, relevance, and access to English language acquisition courses, including reducing waitlists for English language acquisition services

Adults eligible to be served by these Strengthening Maine's Workforce funds have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and are defined by one or more of the following:

1. People or communities of color;
2. Low-income;
3. Immigrants;
4. People with low levels of literacy;
5. Women;
6. The underemployed and unemployed

Nine proposals were submitted by July 25, 2022, and eight of the nine proposals were approved for funding. The list of approved awardees are as follows with a brief description of the grant goals and amount awarded:

Portland Public Schools/Portland Adult Education: Extended Language Access Project.

The Extended Language Access Project will enable Portland Adult Education, the largest adult education provider in Maine, to extend English language learning opportunities to a greater number of students disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through innovatively addressing the waitlist, expanding English instruction, and addressing barriers to participation.

Total award amount: \$489,850.

Portland Public Schools/Portland Adult Education: English and Digital Skills Integration.

The English and Digital Skills Integration programming will increase relevance and accessibility of English language acquisition and workplace preparedness for multilingual learners through 1) improving remote instruction, 2) adequate access to loaner devices and hot spots and 3) integrating a multi-pronged approach to digital skills building at all levels of the organization that includes a digital skills lab, targeted workshops and digital skills integration into traditional English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESO) classes.

Total award amount: \$490,650.

Portland Public Schools/Portland Adult Education: Healthcare Pathways

Portland Adult Education's Healthcare Pathways Program will create English language acquisition and workforce training opportunities in the healthcare industry for individuals disproportionately affected by COVID-19 including people of color, individuals with low-incomes, low English literacy levels, and women who may also be unemployed or underemployed, or currently out of the labor force. Portland Adult Education will work closely with healthcare employers to design and implement programming and connect students to employment opportunities. Portland Adult Education will take a customized approach to meeting students' education and training needs by offering a range of healthcare focused training opportunities and supports, and ensuring appropriate placement based on English level, professional backgrounds, and career aspirations.

Total award amount: \$500,000.

South Portland Adult Education: Adult Multilingual Program

This program will address the English language needs of immigrants and asylum-seekers who have little or no English language proficiency. The program will seek to build a culture of success by 1) providing scheduling and transportation that fits with the needs of parents who have children enrolled in school, 2) developing a childcare program for children too young for school, 3) translating materials and using language interpreters as needed to conduct outreach, recruitment and evaluation, and 4) increasing the relevance of English language acquisition courses by using a culturally aware model that builds towards readiness for workforce participation.

Total award amount: \$260,450.

Maine School Administrative District 01 Adult and Community Education: Aroostook Hospitality Workforce Training Program.

The goal of the Aroostook Hospitality Workforce Training Program is to develop sustainable and reliable career pathways within the hospitality (lodging and restaurants) industry in Aroostook County that will provide entry level employees, both current and prospective, the opportunity to receive high quality and meaningful training in order to grow and enhance the skills necessary to excel at their job. The focus will be on building skills in customer service, industry specific technology and skills, as well as leadership training opportunities. In addition, education regarding the wide variety of careers available in the hospitality industry as well as an individualized career ladder plan will help participants meet their professional goals.

Total award amount: \$398,408.

Westbrook Adult Education/Westbrook School Department

Westbrook Adult Education will partner with Luke's Lobster to build an employer-based and contextualized English Language Acquisition program for multilingual learners employed at the Luke's Lobster production facility in Saco, Maine. Funding from this grant will pay for multilingual instruction on-site, as well as support for a program coordinator who will assess the needs and potential barriers for employees, provide intake and scheduling and onboarding students with technology. Luke's Lobster employees are in need of English Language Acquisition that fits with their constantly changing schedule and needs. The production schedule varies from day to day depending upon the amount of product coming in from the boats. This will require a flexible program with various training options from onsite training to virtual training, both including various online tools, i.e. EnGen, Zoom. With their ever-changing schedule, transportation and childcare become constant barriers for employees to attend area adult education program's English Language Acquisition classes. Other barriers include the lengthy waitlists at various programs.

Total award amount: \$199,319.

Regional School Unit 25, serving Bucksport, Orland, Prospect, and Verona Island

These funds will be utilized to offer certified medical assistant courses and certified medical administrative assistant courses to address employee shortages in Washington and Hancock counties. Recruitment efforts will be targeted to both new to the field and incumbent workers. These will include a hybrid Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Plus program that will incorporate live online classroom and in-person labs utilizing the centrally located Hancock County Technical Center Health Occupations lab and in person clinical sessions at healthcare employers throughout Hancock County.

Total award amount: \$486,080.

Five Towns Schools Adult Education for Midcoast Adult Education-HUB 7: Bridge to Employment

Bridges to healthcare training, hospitality/retail employment, and manufacturing training will focus on workforce training in collaboration with employers. Existing programs will be expanded, and new programs will be developed and implemented with significant input from area employers. Bridge or gap funding will be provided to eligible students who don't already meet eligibility requirements through other sources. The bridge to employment for immigrants will focus on the goal of workforce training but will also be directed towards developing and providing English language acquisition services; and improving availability, relevance, and access to English language acquisition courses. A hub-wide training for English for Speakers of Other Languages/Multilingual Learner (ESOL/ML) conversation partner volunteers will be developed and provided as a means of sustainable capacity building. These services will further aid workforce training and English language acquisition students by providing financial support in areas of transportation, childcare, and training costs not covered under Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) partner and Department of Health and Human Services financial resources. These will include gas cards, taxi vouchers, on-site childcare, childcare reimbursement, and training scholarships for students while attending adult transitions or college transitions classes, certification programs, or on-the-job training programs. In addition, earn-as-you-learn incentives will be offered to those eligible students who do not qualify for employer or grant-sponsored coverage of their time that would otherwise be spent working to support themselves and their families.

Total award amount: \$378,077.

Recommendations

As of the time of this writing, the grant contracts are being signed with funds being allocated to each of the awardees by the end of October of 2022. Since these funds have yet to be dispersed and programming not yet commenced, we recommend that data be collected and reported out after at least one quarter of data reporting has passed, in accordance with the contracts, and shared with the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. This report shall include aggregate demographic information about immigrant participants, participating employers, employment opportunities, placement, and retention; and an evaluation of programs and services most effective in carrying out the purposes of this resolve.

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