Maine Awarded Grant to Accelerate COVID-19 Workforce Recovery Efforts

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Maine Will Receive Funding Through National Governors Association and Cognizant U.S. Foundation as Part of Inaugural Workforce Innovation Network Cohort

Maine has been selected as the inaugural cohort of states in the Workforce Innovation Network, the National Governors Association (NGA) and Cognizant U.S. Foundation announced today. The state will receive a grant to improve employment outcomes in response to the economic impacts of COVID-19, connecting job seekers to training, education, job opportunities and essential support services.

Maine is one of nine states selected for the inaugural cohort of the Workforce Innovation Network, which is designed to help states build capacity for near-term innovation and longer-term strategies to prepare their workforces for a post-COVID-19 economy. The network serves as a nonpartisan learning and action collaborative for state leaders who have demonstrated strong commitments to building a resilient workforce. In this first round of grants from the Workforce Innovation Fund, states will receive:

- Support developing a state action plan and policy recommendations to develop or scale innovations that increase employment and deliver stronger workforce outcomes;
- Up to $100,000 in grant funding to support personnel and project coordination to carry out state innovations; and
- Virtual or in-person site visits and regular coaching calls from NGA Center staff, as well as national experts and consultants to meet individual state needs and priorities.

Maine's application included a focus on cross-system efforts to implement the state's 10-Year Statewide Economic Development Strategy and change the experience of people who interact with the public workforce system.

> *"There are good paying jobs in the trades, in electrical and plumbing work, in construction and manufacturing, in health care and life sciences and in clean energy that are going unfilled. Our economic recovery depends on our ability to connect Maine workers to those jobs," said Governor Janet Mills. "With NGA's expertise, the State Workforce Board will continue our efforts to develop talent in the State of Maine in partnership with Maine's Community Colleges, the University of Maine System, Adult Education, Career and Technical Centers, private employers and trade unions. On behalf of the people of Maine, I thank the National Governors Association for recognizing and rewarding our commitment to train the workforce of tomorrow."*

This grant award will assist the State Workforce Board in developing an integrated implementation plan for the "Grow Local Talent" strategy. Specifically, the grant proposal seeks to help:

- Coordinate with Maine Adult Education, Maine State Library System, Maine Community College System, University of Maine System, DECD, DHHS and Maine's CareerCenters to establish targeted credentials of value and better integrate delivery of workforce and essential support services focusing on the user-centered approach for connecting displaced workers to available jobs and other needed resources.

- Align public workforce 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.
- Work across state agencies to coordinate business marketing, outreach, and engagement efforts to streamline business access to workforce services and talent.
- Re-brand and re-market Maine's workforce system so that it is easily accessible for Maine employers and workers

> *"Being selected as one of the states in the Workforce Innovation Network will allow Maine to further strengthen the partnerships across state agencies, the Maine Community College System and the University of Maine System, and further align Maine's workforce system to meet the needs of Maine's employers and workers," said Labor Commissioner Fortman. "MDOL is committed to working with all workforce partners to leverage resources and efforts across our workforce system. Removing barriers faced by Maine people entering the workforce and connecting employers with skilled workers is a key priority, and with the assistance from the NGA we are eager to maximize our efforts."*

To receive the grants and qualify as a member of the network, states submitted proposals focused on the creation of new, unified virtual service delivery platforms, digital inclusion and skill development strategies, and equitable access to high-quality work opportunities via the adoption of new state job quality and self-sufficiency standards.

> *"Even as Governors work to defeat COVID-19 in their states and territories by making vaccines available to millions, they recognize that the effects of the pandemic on their workforces are far-reaching and, in some cases, may be permanent," said Timothy Blute, director of the NGA Center. "The effects of the pandemic have been disparate across sectors of society and the workforce, necessitating partnerships among governmental leaders, business and civic communities."*

According to the Center for Workforce Research and Informtion, Maine's swift jobs recovery slowed substantially in the final three months of 2020. December job gains in construction, manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, professional and business services, educational services, healthcare and social assistance, and other sectors were mostly offset by a sharp decrease in the leisure and hospitality sector and public higher education. Across all sectors there were 7.6 percent fewer jobs than in February of 2020 with net job losses concentrated in leisure and hospitality, healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, private educational services and state and local governments (mostly in education, both K-12 and higher ed). These latest trends underscore the importance of breaking down traditional silos in training and service delivery and working collaboratively to advance an equitable and inclusive recovery, particularly for workers in sectors most negatively affected by COVID-19.

> *"Governors have already begun to address high unemployment with innovative policies and practices to more rapidly connect job seekers with the services and supports needed for success in the workforce," said Kristen Titus, executive director of Cognizant U.S. Foundation. "These Workforce Innovation Fund grants will help the states in this inaugural cohort build on early innovations and expand capacity to coordinate cross-agency economic recovery efforts—we look forward to seeing Maine's accomplishments."*

In the coming months, the network will gather Governors, states and external partners to learn more about how states are aligning their reskilling, reemployment and recovery strategies with longer-term trends and the future of work.

About National Governors Association

Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the bipartisan organization of the nation's 55 Governors. Through NGA, Governors share best practices, address issues of national and state interest and share innovative solutions that improve state government and support the principles of federalism. Learn more at www.nga.org.

About Cognizant U.S. Foundation

The Cognizant U.S. Foundation supports organizations working to inspire, educate and prepare people of all ages to succeed in the workforce of today and tomorrow. Since 2018, the Foundation has committed $50 million to ensure all individuals have equitable opportunity to thrive in the digital economy. Learn more at www.cognizantusfoundation.org.

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