



# Maine's Industry Partnership Program: Preliminary Impact Snapshot

Prepared by: Amy Geren, Sarah Goan, Aaron Rose  
March 2025

## **Maine's Industry Partnership Program:**

### **Preliminary Impact Snapshot**

**March 2025**



This report was developed on behalf of Work Source Maine by the Data Innovation Project (DIP), which is part of the Catherine Cutler Institute for Health and Social Policy at the University of Southern Maine.

Portland, Maine, March 2025.

<https://datainnovationproject.org/>

#### **Authors**

Amy Geren, MCPD, Policy Associate | amy.geren@maine.edu

Sarah Krichels Goan, MPP, Senior Research Associate

Aaron Rose, Research Analyst

Becky Wurwarg, Graphic Designer

#### **DIP Research Disclosure Statement**

*The Data Innovation Project recognizes that the study of the social realm can never be truly neutral. As applied researchers our social positions inevitably influence our experience and interpretation of reality as well as our approach to understanding reality. For this reason, we believe it is our responsibility to be transparent about who we are as meaning makers and producers of knowledge. We are a team of educated, employed, White professionals. We strive to mitigate our biases through continuing education, reflection and self-work, and our study approach and design. If you believe we have overlooked a critical perspective or interpretation in our work, we invite you to let us know so that we may address it.*

# Contents

Introduction..... 1  
Major Highlights..... 4  
Impact: By-the-Numbers..... 6  
Emerging Themes .....7  
Implications and Next Steps..... 8

## Industry Site Profiles

Maine Development Foundation Forestry Workforce Initiative ..... 10  
Children’s Oral Health Network of Maine..... 14  
Maine Tourism Association ..... 18  
Maine Business Education Partnership .....21  
Northeastern University, The Roux Institute .....25  
Maine Labor and Resource Center .....29

# Introduction

Maine's State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) of the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) is responsible for assisting the governor in performing the duties and responsibilities required by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), federal legislation designed to strengthen and improve the public workforce system by helping to get Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment,<sup>1</sup> into high-quality jobs and careers, and by helping employers hire and retain skilled workers. Members of the SWDB are appointed by the governor and represent many facets of workforce development - business, labor, public education, higher education, economic development, youth activities, employment, and training, as well as the Legislature. The SWDB has developed a comprehensive workforce and talent strategy with the intent of continuing the success of businesses and bolstering the labor force by enabling potential workers to enter good paying jobs through providing the necessary work supports and skills that can allow them to thrive.

A high-quality workforce is essential for Maine to better retain existing businesses, attract new businesses that offer high quality and good paying jobs, and draw in new workers to meet Maine's goal of adding at least [75,000 people to the workforce over the next ten years](#). To meet the needs of industries in Maine disrupted by COVID-19, the SWDB launched the Industry Partnerships Program (IPP) in 2022. The \$3.7 million program, part of Governor Mills workforce strategy and a key priority to Maine's long-term economic growth, has funded six industry partnership pilot initiatives. These partnerships unite businesses, industry associations, education and training providers, and community-based organizations to recruit, retain, and advance workers in meaningful careers. As hubs of excellence that grow and attract local talent, the program aligns with Maine's vision as outlined its [WIOA plan for 2024-2027](#).

Through the IPP, the SWDB supports sector-based approaches to identify each industry's most important workforce needs and work with educational organizations to provide trainings. By creating structured career pathways, the program is creating strong pipelines and developing skilled workers to meet industry needs. Each of Maine's industry partnership initiatives are described briefly as follows.

- ◆ **Maine Development Foundation (MDF), Forestry Products Sector** builds a resilient and diverse forest products sector (FPS) workforce by creating workforce and education pathways, mitigating obstacles and misperceptions, expanding education and training programs, and creating recruitment and retention strategies for future workforce development.
- ◆ **Children’s Oral Health Network (COHN), Oral Healthcare Sector** is an innovative approach to supporting the growth of the oral health workforce in Maine. The initiative brings together non-profit, community-based, and employer partners with an aim of increasing access to oral health careers and services for populations historically underserved by the oral health system.
- ◆ **Maine Tourism Association (MTA), Hospitality & Tourism Sector** connects Maine youth, educators, and job seekers to career exploration opportunities in tourism and hospitality. The initiative develops trainings for current and future employees focused on soft and transferable skills and tourism & hospitality career exposure and exploration throughout Maine.
- ◆ **Maine Business Education Partnership (MBEP), Retail Sector** offers recruitment and training that explores best practices to enhance the professional development of new hires and upgrade the skills of incumbent retail workers. It also introduces retail career pathways to students and the new Mainer population.
- ◆ **The Roux Institute of Northeastern University (ROUX), Healthcare Sector** addresses both the short-term and long-term needs of Maine’s health care sector by developing a pilot program to connect pre-clinical, post-baccalaureate students with front-end healthcare opportunities in Maine, and convening healthcare providers in the state to identify critical job openings.
- ◆ **Maine Labor Resource Center (MLRC), Healthcare & Social Services Sector** brings together health and welfare-related community-based nonprofit organizations and small businesses to elevate jobs within the sectors, build career pathways, recruit and support immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in these roles, and provide ESL classes.

## **PURPOSE**

This preliminary snapshot provides an early look at the successes, challenges, and emerging trends within the IPP. This review is based on quarterly reports submitted to the SWDB, which include both quantitative data and narrative summaries, as well as a short electronic survey completed by key personnel at each IPP site in November 2024. The quantitative data was aggregated across all sites to provide an overall measure of program reach, while narrative responses were analyzed and categorized to highlight individual successes and identify common themes across the initiatives.

## Major Highlights

Industry partnerships provide the foundation for Maine's demand-driven workforce strategy designed to meet the workforce needs of businesses, the career goals and training needs of workers, and Maine's economic development goals. Continued investment in, and growth of, industry partnerships will create lasting change in the labor market to the benefit of both employers and workers and contribute to the state's economic growth and the well-being of its communities. The IPP pilot sites reflect a diverse range of industry best practices and workforce preparation strategies. This report is not meant to compare successes and strategies across sites, but rather to highlight each site's unique position and response in terms of barriers to recruitment, retention, and developing career paths.

- ◆ **Maine Development Foundation.** MDF addressed workforce shortages in areas like logging equipment operation, trucking requiring commercial driver's licenses (CDL), millwrighting, and forest product innovation. With educational partners, the program developed structured career and education pathways for the seven most highly needed careers across the FPS and training programs that connect students and job seekers with experienced professionals to guide them into long-term careers. A major emphasis is marketing forestry careers to high school students and job seekers, dispelling misconceptions about the field and ensuring a well-trained workforce for future industry needs.
- ◆ **Children's Oral Health Network.** Through the Oral Health Industry Partnership, COHN and partners successfully developed and launched the Oral Health Navigation (OHN) Learning Series. This was an online, self-paced, low-barrier training that enabled staff, working in a wide variety of roles that support children and families, in gaining access to the oral health information and services they need. It was also an introduction to dental careers for people who might be interested in additional education and career exploration. The initiative developed a course and self-guided toolkit for Registered Dental Hygienists (RDH) seeking to become Independent Practice Dental Hygienists (IPDH), enabling them to expand the availability of services reaching rural and underserved communities. This marks a significant step in expanding access to oral health services and addressing workforce shortages in Maine.

- ◆ **Maine Tourism Association.** MTA embraced a media-driven strategy to promote the industry as a whole and attract workers to Maine’s tourism and hospitality sector. Through social media campaigns, YouTube content, and the *MaineLife* TV series, it showcased diverse career opportunities in the industry, with the goal of shifting the public perception of tourism jobs from seasonal work to potential career paths. MTA also hosted large-scale workforce summits, bringing together business leaders, educators, and policymakers to address hiring and retention challenges. In addition, MTA visited school classrooms, brought youth 16-24 on career exploration field trips and trainings, and connected youth with career exploration internships in the tourism industry.
- ◆ **Maine Business Education Partnership.** MBEP’s retail career pathways partnership transformed retail workforce development through large-scale training and credentialing. Over 200 individuals enrolled in RISE Up, a nationally recognized retail training certification that equipped workers with essential skills for career advancement. The initiative also engaged middle and high school students through career events, field trips, internships, and job shadowing, promoting retail as a viable, long-term career with diverse pathways
- ◆ **Northeastern University, The Roux Institute.** The Roux Institute launched a pioneering pilot program connecting pre-clinical, post-baccalaureate students with frontline healthcare jobs in Maine to address immediate workforce shortages and build long-term talent pipelines. The first cohort placed individuals across five employers, and interest surged—including a growing number of new applicants from outside Maine—demonstrating the initiative’s broad appeal and sustainability.
- ◆ **Maine Labor and Resource Center.** MLRC was a critical force in successfully filling gaps in Maine’s health and social service sectors by recruiting, training, and placing immigrant, refugee and asylum seekers in Maine’s healthcare and social service sectors. It provided numerous ESL trainings and created clear career pathways tailored to New Mainers, supporting their transition into stable, in-demand jobs. This comprehensive approach strengthened both the industry and the economic integration of Maine’s growing immigrant population.



## Impact: By-the-Numbers<sup>2</sup>

---

**7,402** workers have been directly affected by IPP strategies, primarily through recruitment, hiring, and training.

**1,212** new individuals hired, particularly into community-based health sectors

**959** unemployed/underemployed individuals hired from priority WIOA populations, particularly from the immigrant, refugee and asylum-seeking populations.

**249** recruitment activities (e.g., job fairs and career days, multi-media and social media campaigns) reached 6568 people

**74** new career pathways have been enhanced or developed across multiple industries

**134** employers engaged in industry partnerships, working closely with the IPP sites

**2,909** individuals were trained in industry-specific skills and/or management best practices

**334** staff received inclusive supervisory/management training related their industry specific needs

**783** employees received a new credential or certification across a wide range of skill areas, such as CDL certification, medical/behavioral specialist licensing, advanced dental skills and customer service

**366** employees or trainees received support services, such as scholarships to offset trainings costs, and childcare or transportation assistance

**1,145** ESL trainings were provided by three sites to support ongoing job training and career advancement

---

<sup>2</sup> These metrics reflect the combined totals from all six IPP sites. However, since data reporting was based on each site's specific focus and priorities, not all sites provided information for every metric.

# Emerging Themes

## 1. Creates Employment Opportunities for Maine Workers

The IPP developed new career pathways and established training programs for needed credentials, which *“helped equip Job seekers, employees and the employers access right trainings/certifications required to be hired and succeed ... as well acquiring those needed competencies to be stable and get promotions.”*

## 2. Exposes Workers to Critical Industries in Maine

IPP funding supported workforce and career pathway education and awareness efforts for critical industries in Maine. One partner shared that *“the training programs and heightened awareness within the workforce have played a crucial role in unlocking people’s full potential. This has not only empowered individuals but has also significantly enhanced their overall capabilities.”*

## 3. Impacts Communities and the Maine Economy

IPP initiatives assisted partnership employers in expanding their workforce, allowing them to meet the needs of the community and Maine’s economy. Hiring through the IPP allowed a participating employer to meet their provider-to-medical assistant ratio goal *“for the first time in years, opening appointments and improving patient access to care.”*

## 4. Provides Cross-Industry Learning and Support

The IPP provided a welcomed opportunity to learn from other partnerships participating in the program, especially for similar industries. Regularly scheduled meetings with the SWDB provided *“a great opportunity to garner perspective from folks ... doing similar work.”*

## 5. Requires Continued Investment to Yield Results

Policy recommendations from IPP partners largely focused on continuing to invest in the initiative so they could continue and expand programming, with one partner indicating that they were only *“just starting to break through in an industry that has a workforce crisis and has historically not been a focus of major workforce initiatives”* and another noting that *“consistent and longer-term funding”* would enhance their impact.

## Implications and Next Steps

While still in the early stages, all six IPP pilot initiatives are already demonstrating promising results, filling critical labor gaps for employers desperate to fill long-term vacancies and establishing new career pathways for job seekers. With **continued investment and support**, they have the potential to expand their reach, deepen their impact, and drive long-term workforce resilience. Moreover, this review suggests that policies to build sustainable workforce pipelines in critical industries should focus on regulatory flexibility, structured career pathways, workforce integration, industry perception shifts, early career engagement, and employer-community partnerships.

This preliminary snapshot has offered an early look at the successes, challenges, and emerging trends within the IPP. In the months ahead, the research team plans to conduct an in-depth examination of each pilot site, capturing case studies of individual achievements, identifying key lessons learned, and assessing the broader impact on both industry partners and program participants. By measuring long-term outcomes and workforce advancements, this research will provide valuable insights to refine strategies, scale effective models, and inform future policy decisions that strengthen industry collaboration and workforce development.

## Industry Site Profiles

The following section presents six program profiles, each highlighting the scope, impact, and key metrics of their reach to date. These profiles offer a comprehensive summary of their successes, challenges, and key insights gained during the first 24 months of implementation.

The IPP pilot sites are distinct in their design and implementation, each tailored to address specific industry demands, workforce gaps, and regulatory frameworks. As such, they reflect a broad spectrum of best practices and workforce development strategies, shaped by the unique economic, social, and policy contexts in which they operate.

Moreover, the pilot sites embarked on their respective initiatives from different starting points. Some have leveraged pre-existing programs, infrastructure, and partnerships, allowing them to build upon established momentum. Others have launched their programs from the ground up, necessitating the development of new approaches and stakeholder relationships.

Given these differences, the following IPP site profiles should not be used to compare successes and strategies across sites. Instead, they illustrate each site's distinctive approach to recruitment, retention, and the creation of career pathways specific to their industry. By examining these varied models, readers can gain insights into the diverse ways in which industry and workforce needs are being met through the adaptability and innovation of the IPP pilot sites.

# Maine Development Foundation (MDF)

***The goal of this partnership is to build a resilient and diverse forest products sector workforce by creating career and education pathways, mitigating obstacles and misperceptions, expanding education and training, and creating recruitment and retention strategies for future workforce development.***

## Summary

MDF strengthens Maine's forest products industry by linking education and career pathways with industry needs. By developing structured pathways and training programs, the initiative addresses workforce shortages in areas like logging equipment operation, CDL trucking, millwrighting, and forest product innovation. With educational partners, the programs emphasize mentorship, connecting students and job seekers with experienced professionals to guide them into long-term careers. A major emphasis is marketing forestry careers to high school students and job seekers, dispelling misconceptions about the field, and ensuring a well-trained workforce for future industry needs.

MDF has supported the industry led Forest Opportunity Roadmap (FOR/ME) to help tackle Maine's critical workforce shortages in the forest products sector and grow the sector since 2015/16. Through collaboration with employers, industry groups, and workforce development agencies, the partnership developed strategies to address challenges in recruitment, retention, and skills development. This initiative created accessible training opportunities, promoted equity in hiring, and fostered systemic changes to ensure the sustainability of the forestry workforce. To date, the program has supported over 400 workers through training programs and facilitated policy advancements that modernize and strengthen workforce practices.

## MDF: BY-THE-NUMBERS

*Over the course of two years, MDF has reported the following accomplishments:*

### Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

- ◆ 4 employers and 8 strategic partners engaged from industry, education and non-profits

### Training & Workforce Development

- ◆ 7 new career pathways developed
- ◆ 703 individuals trained
- ◆ 137 employees received a new credential or certification
- ◆ 29 staff received DEI and supervisory/management training

### Employment & Retention Strategies

- ◆ 105 workers have been directly affected by IP strategies



## Successes

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION**

The MDF Forestry initiative has involved employers, educators, and community organizations to identify workforce gaps and implement solutions. Seven detailed career and education pathways were developed for high-demand forestry roles, including Logging Equipment Operators, Foresters, and CDL-certified drivers. These pathways were designed through extensive engagement with 139 stakeholders via forums, surveys, and focus groups, ensuring they reflected the real needs of the industry. These outreach efforts assessed perceptions of the forest projects industry, which led to findings that MDF used to bolster the case for leveraged funding.

The initiative also leveraged the FOR/ME Workforce and Executive committees to address emerging needs and align efforts across sectors which was critical to their success. Partnerships with organizations like Live & Work Maine, a nonprofit supported by top employers in Maine, and Camoin Associates, a national economic development consulting firm with offices in Maine, helped enhance career profiles and develop actionable strategies. Additionally, community and nonprofit focus groups engaged 139 participants to share insights on workforce challenges and identify collaborative solutions. These efforts provided a unified approach to addressing workforce gaps and advancing sector-wide goals.

### **TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The MDF Forestry initiative's training programs have been instrumental in addressing skills gaps and workforce readiness. Over 703 individuals participated in training activities, focusing on essential skills and introducing youth and adults to careers with the FPS. Programs like the Business of Maine's Forest Products Sector, developed and offered in partnership with Sunrise County Economic Council and Washington County Community College, were supported by grant funds to remove cost barriers, including childcare and internet access, enabling participation for those who needed these services. Future courses, such as the CDL-A and FPS micro-credential will enable additional students to receive training and barrier removal assistance.

Credentialing has been another significant outcome of the initiative, with 137 participants earning certifications that enhanced their employability. The initiative also supported career exploration events for over 100 high school students and adults, showcasing forestry career opportunities. By Q2 2024, MDF had improved the training infrastructure and accessibility of the forestry industry, ensuring the workforce is equipped to meet current and future demands.

As a complement to the partnership program, MDF secured additional outside funding to support three education and training programs, including the Business of Maine's Forest Products Sector (which 86 students completed), CDL-A, and a Forest Products Sector micro-credential. These efforts, in addition to developing career and education pathways for the most pressing careers in the forest products industry, the Forest Products Sector Partnership programs have significantly improved job readiness and career advancement opportunities across the forestry sector in Maine.

## **EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

The MDF Forestry initiative placed a strong emphasis on creating a more inclusive workforce. Outreach efforts targeted WIOA's priority populations, including veterans, women, and minority populations, and addressed barriers such as transportation and financial constraints. One partner re-established workshops dedicated to recruitment of women and girls into the sector through its New Ventures Maine partnership. They also conducted webinars and employer focus groups to gain actionable insights into how recruitment and retention strategies could improve employment outcomes.

A three-part webinar series was developed, focusing on recruitment, retention, and building community partnerships, which attracted 29 industry and community partners to discuss strategies for retention and community engagement. While these efforts have increased awareness and participation, continued work is necessary to translate these strategies into measurable hiring outcomes. The initiative's focus on equity highlights the importance of leaning into the unemployed and underemployed potential workforce.

## **POLICY AND SYSTEM CHANGE**

Policy advancements and process improvements were key to the initiative's success. Stakeholder input and advocacy efforts secured \$113,000 in private funding to support course development and outreach efforts. Partnerships with MDOL, Department of Education (DOE), and Department of Corrections (DOC) strengthened workforce infrastructure and aligned their efforts with statewide priorities of reaching people and communities across the state with jobs and career programs.

The initiative also contributed to Maine's workforce system portal by integrating forestry career pathways, improving accessibility for job seekers and employers. These changes included the development of mentorship programs to address generational gaps and pilot projects that incorporated digital forestry mapping tools. These efforts demonstrate the program's commitment to building a sustainable and competitive forestry workforce that can adapt to evolving industry demands.

## Challenges

Despite its successes, the initiative faced notable challenges, including limited access to training in rural areas and difficulty recruiting younger workers. MDF noted that competition from higher-paying industries and a lack of awareness about forestry career opportunities further compounded recruitment issues. Generational skill gaps, particularly related to technology adoption, required significant investment in training and mentorship programs to facilitate workforce transitions.

Addressing these challenges highlighted the importance of sustained investment in training infrastructure and targeted outreach efforts. These challenges underscore the need for innovative solutions to ensure the constant development of the forestry workforce. Although unrelated to the IPP directly, MDF also noted that market volatility and the spruce bud worm crises have made it challenging as the industry is managing priorities.

## Takeaways

MDF underscores the importance of collaboration, targeted training, and broad recruitment practices in continuing to address workforce challenges. Stakeholder engagement was critical in identifying gaps and implementing effective solutions.

The combined initiatives along with an understanding of industry needs laid a strong foundation for continued workforce development. MDF noted that they would like sustained investment with the “flexibility to tweak and change course as necessary,” which relates to the need to invest in changing workforce needs and emerging technologies. Continued investment in the program would ensure Maine’s forestry workforce is well-prepared to meet both current and future demands and is adaptable to unforeseen circumstances affecting the industry. The programs demonstrate the value of public-private partnerships in fostering a skilled workforce for forest products and marketing different career opportunities in the sector. By addressing challenges and leveraging collaborative strategies, this initiative provides a blueprint for workforce development in its own and other industries.



# Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN)

*The goal of this partnership is to support the growth of the oral health workforce in Maine. This innovative approach brings together non-profit, community-based, and employer partners with an aim of increasing access to oral health careers and services for populations historically underserved by the oral health system.*

## Summary

COHN and partners successfully developed training programs for Registered Dental Hygienists (RDH) to become Independent Practice Dental Hygienists (IPDH), enabling them to expand the availability of services reaching rural and underserved communities. This marks a significant step in expanding access to oral health services and addressing workforce shortages. The initiative also developed and launched the Oral Health Navigation (OHN) Learning Series and Maine Dental Careers Center website. The website serves as a first of its kind platform for exploring dental careers in Maine. The learning series provides accessible, self-paced, low barrier oral health education for workers in a variety of healthcare and community-based settings.

## Successes

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

COHN brought together employers, educators, and community organizations to align workforce strategies and address systemic barriers. By the end of the reporting period, 11 employers and ten strategic partners are actively engaged; a total of 45 partners have participated at different stages over the duration of the initiative.

### COHN: BY-THE-NUMBERS

Over the course of two years, COHN has reported the following accomplishments:

#### Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

- ◆ 11 employers and 34 strategic partners engaged

#### Training & Workforce Development

- ◆ 2 new career pathway and 1 career exploration website developed
- ◆ 72 individuals trained
- ◆ 10 recruitment activities reached 485 people from WIOA priority communities
- ◆ 49 employees received a new credential or certification
- ◆ 91 staff received inclusive supervisory/management training

#### Employment & Retention

- ◆ 35 employees or trainees received support services
- ◆ 3 individuals hired

Stakeholder collaboration extended to policy discussions that clarified supervision rules under standing orders for the Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program, enabling expansion of oral health services into more schools statewide. These efforts showcased the program's ability to integrate industry needs with systemic reforms.

## **TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Workforce training was central to the initiative's efforts to address skill gaps and support career advancement. The RDH-to-IPDH course, developed by subject matter experts from the dental hygiene field and offered through the University of Maine Augusta's dental hygiene program, provided RDHs with opportunities to advance along an otherwise limited dental hygiene career pathway. The inaugural course enrolled 30 participants, with 29 completing the program (96% completion rate). An additional 34 more people had been trained by the end of 2024. COHN also assisted 28 participants in accessing full tuition reimbursement through a partnership with the Department of Labor's Tuition Remission Program, making the program more accessible for income-limited participants.

Additionally, the initiative completed two career pathway maps and a first of its kind website with detailed information about careers in the dental field in Maine, providing employers with tools to develop sustainable workforce pipelines. These maps served as templates for addressing critical workforce gaps across the sector, which the upskilling in the pathway aimed to address. COHN also indicated the program connected their participating partners much more concretely to the public workforce system, a system that is notoriously difficult to conceptualize for workers and employers alike. In COHN's words, IPP funding "provided important opportunities to fill clear gaps in the public health dental workforce career pathway." The high completion rates in the RDH to IPDH course and the structured approach to career pathways reflect the program's success in creating tangible opportunities for skill development for incumbent workers as well as career exploration opportunities to attract new candidates into the field. They also demonstrate the value of removing financial barriers to participation.

## **EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

The initiative focused on reaching priority populations by targeting underrepresented groups in recruitment efforts. Outreach activities, including attending summits, career exploration events, and strategic partner activities reached 485 individuals from WIOA priority communities, including BIPOC individuals, young people, and economically disadvantaged job seekers. Training programs underwent equity audits to improve accessibility for multilingual speakers and for those with limited prior experience in oral health.

To date, three individuals from these priority groups were hired during the reporting period, although tracking this indicator was challenging and there may be others in the program who leaders are not aware of. One reason for the lower-than-expected rate of conversion from outreach to hiring was COHN's strategic shift from creating new positions to developing an incumbent worker strategy. Through the beta-testing process of the OHN Learning Series and extensive collaboration with partners, COHN learned that there was a great need for oral health skills development for incumbent workers in a variety of community-based and healthcare settings. COHN is currently working with 16 employers and partners to adopt the OHN Learning Series into their workplace and expand existing job descriptions to add OHN functions based on the upskilling that can be supported by the training and micro-credential. The equity audits improved the inclusivity of training programs, setting a precedent for future workforce initiatives. Based on their experience with the IPP, COHN recommends additional efforts to address systemic barriers that hinder oral health employment in community-based settings in order to implement larger scale hiring initiatives. However, in the next phase of IPP work, COHN expects the full rollout of the OHN Learning Series to significantly increase its use as a career exploration tool, which COHN predicts will have a greater impact on future new hires.

## **POLICY AND SYSTEM CHANGE**

The Oral Health IPP made significant strides in addressing barriers through policy discussions and stakeholder engagement. COHN reflected that program partners appreciated impactful conversations about workforce needs in the dental field which allowed for the development of a robust strategy for incumbent worker training in the broader healthcare and social services industry. Efforts focused on resolving regulatory issues affecting workforce roles. Key policy changes included clarifying supervision rules under medical standing orders, enabling more effective contribution to school-based care models. These policy advancements aligned workforce strategies with industry requirements, demonstrating the program's capacity to address immediate challenges while establishing a framework for long-term reforms. The integration of workforce goals with regulatory updates showcased a structured approach to tackling entrenched barriers.

## **Challenges**

The initiative faced several challenges over the course of its initial implementation. Resource constraints and the complexity of equity-focused updates required a lengthy revision process which slowed the rollout of the OHN learning series. Additionally, the Maine CDC School Oral Health Program, a key employer partner, shifted their service implementation strategy toward contracted services with partners, which resulted in the evolution of the school-based oral health service delivery model.

Therefore, in consultation with subject matter experts from the oral health field regarding the greatest opportunities for community impact, along with recognizing the realities of licensing and insurance constraints, the initiative intentionally pivoted toward an incumbent worker upskilling strategy versus a new hire approach. For this reason, while outreach efforts were extensive to promote the OHN Learning Series, the conversion of training participants into new hires remained limited. However, COHN expects that both new entries into dental positions and the elevation of job descriptions that added oral health services will increase as the training moves out of beta-testing and is fully launched.

## Takeaways

COHN's workforce initiative demonstrates the importance of collaboration, targeted training, and equity-focused recruitment in addressing oral health workforce challenges. Stakeholder engagement has been instrumental in developing innovative solutions to both employment shortages in the industry and opportunities for advancement along a dental hygiene career pathway, such as the OHN training and IPDH course, improving access to dental care for Maine's children.

Policy advocacy and systemic changes, including regulatory adjustments and the development of service agreements, have strengthened the sector's infrastructure. COHN indicated that they are "just starting to break through in an industry that has a workforce crisis and has historically not been a focus of major workforce initiatives." By addressing challenges and prioritizing equity, COHN is building a sustainable and inclusive workforce that meets the critical needs of Maine's oral health sector.

# Maine Tourism Association (MTA)

*The goal of this partnership is to connect students, parents, and job seekers to jobs in hospitality and tourism. The initiative develops trainings for current industry employees focused on retention of valuable staff and highlighting the opportunities for growth within the hospitality and tourism sectors.*

## Summary

MTA embraces a media-driven strategy to attract workers to Maine’s tourism and hospitality sector. Through social media campaigns, YouTube content, and the *MaineLife* TV series, it showcases diverse career opportunities in the industry and shifts the public perception of tourism jobs from seasonal work to potential career paths. MTA also hosts large-scale workforce summits, bringing together business leaders, educators, and policymakers to address hiring and retention challenges, visits school classroom, brings youth on career exploration field trips and trainings, and connects youth with career exploration internships in the tourism industry.

## Successes

### STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Collaboration has been central to MTA’s workforce development strategy, bringing together industry leaders to address shared challenges and identify solutions. Initial efforts began in late 2022 with an Industry Partnership Roundtable involving board members and industry partners. Over the subsequent years, four business roundtables were held to educate MTA members about grant activities and gather feedback on workforce needs. Presentations at the annual MTA meeting and grant advisory committee reviews further engaged stakeholders and strengthened partnerships.

### MTA: BY-THE-NUMBERS

Over the course of two years, MTA has reported the following accomplishments:

#### Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

- ◆ 16 employers and 6 strategic partners engaged

#### Training & Workforce Development

- ◆ 105 individuals trained
- ◆ 91 recruitment activities reached 4,662 people from priority communities
- ◆ 34 employees received a new credential or certification
- ◆ 44 staff received inclusive supervisory/management training

#### Employment & Retention Strategies

- ◆ 37 new individuals hired from WIOA priority communities
- ◆ 4,765 workers directly affected

In the fall of 2023 and 2024, MTA hosted the Tourism Workforce Summit, which brought together 140 business leaders, associations, service providers, and other stakeholders to discuss workforce challenges and solutions. The formation of a leadership committee to explore the creation of a leadership institute demonstrated MTA's commitment to developing incumbent workers into future leaders.

Feedback from partners both within the industry and from business engagement was positive, and, as a result, other hospitality-related organizations signed on to the IPP and has following MTA's lead.

## **TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

MTA's training initiatives have addressed critical skills gaps in the hospitality and tourism sectors. In total, 91 individuals received training through IPP activities, and 34 employees earned new credentials or certifications. Training topics have included supervisory skills, and industry-specific technical skills. In addition, 44 staff members participated in supervisory/management training, promoting inclusivity and effective leadership across the sector.

These efforts were supported by partnerships with the Maine Community College System (MCCS) and other training providers, which enabled the development and delivery of targeted programs. The Tourism Workforce Summit served as a platform to connect business partners with training opportunities, further integrating workforce development into the industry's strategic goals. MTA's video stories of successful internship placements are a unique example of exposing the tourism industry to a broader audience of potential employees. Through these activities, MTA has improved job readiness and professional growth opportunities for employees across the sector.

## **EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

MTA's workforce initiative has emphasized equity in recruitment and hiring, particularly among workers from priority communities. The program successfully hired 37 new individuals, all from WIOA priority communities, demonstrating its commitment to fostering a more inclusive workforce. Tracking placements through the program was limited, however, because businesses did not always report when they hired a program participant, and some activities, like field trips, led to students applying to positions directly through the company rather than through MTA. Recruitment efforts also included 91 activities that reached 4,302 individuals, further expanding opportunities for underrepresented populations. Many placements were seasonal positions and internship opportunities that were designed to terminate at the end of the busy tourism season, but engaging new interest in the benefits of these seasonal opportunities was accomplished.

While the initiative has made strides in recruitment and training, challenges remain in creating career pathways and providing additional support services to enhance inclusivity. Continued focus on targeted recruitment efforts and expanded training opportunities will be essential to addressing these gaps and ensuring equitable workforce development within the tourism sector.

## **POLICY AND SYSTEM CHANGE**

Systemic change has been a key focus of MTA's efforts, with initiatives aimed at aligning industry needs with workforce development strategies. Through partnerships with MCCA and other stakeholders, MTA has advanced discussions around skill-gap-focused training and leadership development. Efforts to integrate tourism career pathways into Maine's workforce system portal have progressed, with initial career mapping results available on the MTA website: [TourismforME.com](https://www.tourismforME.com).

Despite delays in the development of comprehensive career pathways due to an ongoing request for proposal (RFP) process, the program has continued to emphasize the importance of long-term workforce planning. Initiatives like the leadership committee and plans for a leadership institute reflect MTA's commitment to building a sustainable and adaptive workforce infrastructure for the tourism industry.

## **Challenges**

MTA's workforce initiative has faced challenges in coordinating activities during the busy tourism season, which limited stakeholder participation in meetings and training sessions. Additionally, delays in the release of the RFP for Maine's workforce system portal have hindered the development of comprehensive career pathways. The lack of support services, such as childcare and transportation, and the absence of ESL training programs also highlight areas for improvement in addressing workforce barriers.

Despite these challenges, MTA has made significant progress in recruitment, training, and collaboration. Continued efforts to address these barriers will be critical to ensuring the program's long-term success.

## **Takeaways**

MTA's workforce development initiative underscores the importance of collaboration, targeted training, and equitable recruitment practices in addressing workforce challenges. Stakeholder engagement has been instrumental in aligning efforts to meet industry needs, while training programs have provided valuable resources for professional growth and inclusivity.

Policy advocacy and process change, such as career pathway development and contributions to Maine's workforce system portal, have strengthened the sector's workforce infrastructure. By addressing challenges and leveraging partnerships, MTA has laid the groundwork for a skilled and sustainable workforce that supports the long-term success of Maine's hospitality and tourism industry.

# Maine Business Education Partnership (MBEP)

***The goal of the Retail Career Pathways Partnership is to collaborate with retail businesses and assist in training, recruiting, and exploring best practices that will enhance the professional development of new hires and upgrade the skills of incumbent workers in the retail sector. The program also introduces retail career pathways to students, showcasing the diverse career pathways available in the retail industry.***

## Summary

MBEP's retail career pathways partnership is transforming retail workforce development through large-scale training and credentialing. Over 200 individuals have enrolled in the National Retail Federation's RISE Up credentialing and training program, which includes five independent or stackable courses that equip workers with essential skills for career advancement. The initiative also engages middle and high school students through career events, field trips, internships, and job shadowing, promoting retail as a viable, long-term career. These efforts enhance professional development while addressing Maine's retail labor shortages.

MBEP currently collaborates with 30 employers and 44 strategic partners, working together to support workforce development and retention strategies crucial for the retail sector's success.

## MBEP: BY-THE-NUMBERS

*Over the course of two years, MBEP has reported the following accomplishments:*

### Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

- ◆ 30 employers and 44 strategic partners engaged

### Training & Workforce Development

- ◆ 2 new career pathways developed
- ◆ 394 individuals trained
- ◆ 104 recruitment activities reached 86 people from WIOA priority communities
- ◆ 183 employees received a new credential or certification
- ◆ 220 incumbent workers received skills-specific training
- ◆ 104 staff received inclusive supervisory/ management training

### Employment & Retention Strategies

- ◆ 100 new individuals hired
- ◆ 19 workers from WIOA priority communities hired
- ◆ 369 workers directly affected
- ◆ 136 employees or trainees received support services
- ◆ 46 ESL trainings provided



## Successes

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION**

MBEP brings together employers, educators, and community organizations to align recruitment and training efforts. Regular meetings and planning sessions ensured that employer input shape workforce development programs. Major events, including the Retail Association of Maine and Maine Grocers and Food Producers Association (RAM/MGFPA) Summit, Maine Tourism Association Workforce Summit, Inclusion Maine, and MDOL Employer Summit, served as platforms for collaboration and knowledge sharing among the partners.

Despite scheduling challenges during peak retail seasons, MBEP continued facilitating one-on-one consultations and smaller virtual gatherings, ensuring alignment with shared workforce goals. By Q1 2024, two all-day training workshops allowed partners to learn more about and discuss the multigenerational workforce, and employee recruitment and retention.

Student engagement is also a focal point, with career activities that include field trips, presentations, career fairs, internships, RISE Up courses, and mentoring that introduce students to dynamic retail careers. These activities foster a talent pipeline while building partnerships between schools and employers.

High school engagement remains a focal point, with recruitment events and field trips introducing students to retail careers. These activities foster a talent pipeline while building partnerships between schools and employers. Despite challenges in scheduling during peak retail seasons, MBEP continued to facilitate one-on-one consultations and smaller virtual gatherings, maintaining alignment with shared workforce goals. By the start of 2024, two all-day training sessions allowed partners to discuss recruitment, communication, and retention strategies, providing actionable insights to strengthen the sector.

### **TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Training initiatives under the MBEP partnership have significantly advanced workforce readiness. More than 200 individuals have enrolled in the National Retail Federation RISE UP training program, which offers nationally recognized credentials in Retail Fundamentals, Customer Service & Sales, Business of Retail & Profit, Supply Chain & Inventory, and Customer Conflict and De-escalation. These training courses have directly contributed to increased employee retention and satisfaction. Additionally, employers reported improved workforce morale and greater professional growth opportunities for participants, noting that many employees who earned credentials were able to move into other roles or positions within their companies.

The program's scalability is evident in its ability to address skills gaps for incumbent workers. By the end of 2024, 220 workers had received skills-specific training, while 183 earned new credentials. Promotional efforts, including informational flyers and Learner Guides, boosted engagement.

Community and Adult Education partners also utilized the RISE UP program to help new Mainers develop employment skills and enhance their English language abilities. among employees and employers alike. To further enhance workforce readiness, MBEP shifted its training platform to Kaleidoscope in Q3 2023, improving accessibility and enrollment tracking. These efforts culminated in 58 additional enrollees in Q1 2024, highlighting the program's sustained impact.

In addition to the RISE Up credentials, further training was and will continue to be offered for employer partners. In Q1 2024, employer partners had the opportunity to attend a separate full-day workshops that concentrated on essential aspects of workforce development: Employee Recruitment and Retention, Employee Engagement, and Understanding the Multigenerational Workforce. In Q4 2024, MBEP began collaborations with the Maine Community College System to establish a Retail Leadership Badge; this course will be available in Spring 2025.

## **EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

MBEP prioritized inclusive recruitment and hiring by targeting underserved populations, including rural residents and economically disadvantaged individuals. Since the RISE Up training is available online, many participants could complete the course at home or at a partnering office, facilitating easier access to training. These initiatives contributed to a measurable increase in workforce diversity, with 19 workers from priority communities hired through the partnership.

The program's commitment to inclusivity extended to training programs, with 46 ESL trainings and 104 inclusive supervisory/management sessions delivered. These efforts ensured that participants from diverse backgrounds could fully engage in and benefit from workforce development opportunities in the program, specifically on the new Mainer population as well as on secondary students receiving exposure to retail careers. While these initiatives addressed systemic barriers, ongoing work is required to strengthen connections between recruitment activities and direct job placements, particularly in rural areas.

## **POLICY AND SYSTEM CHANGE**

MBEP influenced policy and systemic improvements across Maine's retail sector by advocating for standardized onboarding and training practices. These changes helped to reduce turnover rates and improve employee engagement. By demonstrating the value of public-private collaboration, MBEP encouraged increased investment in retail workforce development.

The introduction of RISE Up credentials established a benchmark for industry-recognized training, promoting consistency and quality in workforce readiness. Additionally, the partnership's input on the development of Maine's workforce system portal has set the stage for long-term improvements in career pathway mapping and accessibility.

## Challenges

Competition from higher-paying industries and the retail sector's demanding schedules have made recruitment efforts more difficult. Additionally, the rapid pace of technological change in retail has necessitated ongoing upskilling to ensure employees remain competitive in the evolving job market.

Efforts to overcome these barriers included offering RISE Up training courses online and at Adult Education and community partner locations for individuals lacking access to technology at home, changing perceptions of retail careers, and highlighting the diverse pathways and benefits available in retail.

Due to busy and diverse work schedules, MBEP found it somewhat challenging to convene the business partners for quarterly meetings. However, they valued the regular grantee meetings. Despite the differences in industries, these meetings offered an opportunity to gain insights from others involved in similar work.

## Takeaways

MBEP's partnership highlights the significance of aligning workforce development initiatives with industry needs while prioritizing inclusivity and accessibility. Collaboration among employers, educators, and community organizations played a crucial role in recruiting, training, and retaining workers. The success of RISE Up credentials in raising professional standards underscores the value of nationally recognized training programs.

The program's achievements highlight the need for sustained investment and targeted strategies to address challenges such as training, employee recruitment, and retention in one of Maine's most important sectors. MBEP's efforts provide a valuable framework for strengthening Maine's retail workforce and ensuring its long-term growth and sustainability.

# Northeastern University, The Roux Institute

***The Roux Institute partnership focuses on addressing both the short-term and long-term needs of Maine's health care sector. The initiative has been developing a pilot program to connect pre-clinical, post-baccalaureate students with front-end healthcare opportunities in Maine and convening healthcare providers in the state to identify critical job openings.***

## Summary

The Roux Institute has launched a pioneering pilot program connecting pre-clinical, post-baccalaureate students with frontline healthcare jobs in Maine. By placing candidates in entry-level roles before they enter advanced medical programs, the initiative addresses immediate workforce shortages and long-term talent pipelines. The first cohort placed 23 individuals across five employers, and interest has surged, with applications doubling year over year, including a growing number from outside Maine, demonstrating the initiative's broad appeal and sustainability; the second cohort placed 31 individuals across seven employers.

### ROUX: BY-THE-NUMBERS

Over the course of two years, Roux has reported the following accomplishments:

#### Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

- ◆ 8 employers engaged in industry partnerships
- ◆ 2 strategic partners engage in industry partnership

#### Training & Workforce Development

- ◆ 2 new career pathways have been developed
- ◆ 52 individuals were trained due to IP activities
- ◆ 2 recruitment activities
- ◆ 13 employees received a new credential or certification

#### Employment & Retention Strategies

- ◆ 54 new individuals hired
- ◆ 54 workers have been directly affected by IP strategies
- ◆ 25 workers from priority communities hired
- ◆ 52 employees or trainees received support services

## Successes

### **TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

The Roux Institute's workforce development efforts focus on equipping aspiring healthcare professionals with the skills and experience needed to excel in clinical roles. Participants gain access to professional development programming, community-building activities, and educational opportunities at the Roux Institute and partner academic institutions. This holistic approach enhances participants' readiness for healthcare careers and strengthens retention within the industry.

By Q4 2024, the program had successfully connected 52 individuals to healthcare positions through its IIP strategies. Additionally, two new career pathways were developed, outlining opportunities for progression from front-end roles to advanced clinical positions. Training initiatives included professional certifications and wraparound support services, ensuring participants were well-prepared to meet the demands of Maine's healthcare sector.

The Roux Institute collected data from partners that showed over 90% of the employees hired through their program completed their year-long commitment. Additionally, Roux reported that approximately 40% of employees continued to work beyond the 12-month mark with the partner. Filling open roles was an important success of The Roux Institute's program, which created a pathway for healthcare partners to review and evaluate applicants they may not have otherwise considered. This component of the program provided "a new source of quality employees dedicated to a healthcare role in Maine." They shared that one program participant met their goal ratio of provider to medical assistant of 1:1.5 for the first time in years due to their participation in the program, which opened appointments and improved patient access to care.

### **EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

The initiative prioritizes inclusive recruitment and hiring, focusing on engaging workers from priority communities. Many of the 54 individuals hired through the program's IP strategies were from priority populations, reflecting the program's commitment to fostering diversity in Maine's healthcare workforce. Recruitment activities have included outreach to underserved communities and collaborations with partners to reduce barriers to employment. Although the program has made strides in creating equitable hiring practices, additional efforts are needed to enhance access to wraparound services and address challenges faced by underrepresented groups. These efforts are critical to ensuring long-term inclusivity and workforce sustainability in Maine's healthcare sector.

## **POLICY AND SYSTEM CHANGE**

The Roux Institute has contributed to improvements in Maine's healthcare workforce through career mapping, active recruitment strategies, and academic partnerships. Providing information to program participants on the development of two new career pathways by two partner organizations highlights the program's commitment to aligning entry-level healthcare roles with opportunities for professional advancement. Collaboration with the DOL and industry partners has ensured that these pathways are both practical and responsive to sector needs.

The program's focus on integrating wraparound services, such as on-the-job professional development programming and educational augmentation through healthcare partners, further underscores its commitment to systemic change. These services provide participants with the resources needed to navigate career progression while fostering retention within the industry. Continued advocacy and collaboration with healthcare employers and policymakers are essential to scaling these efforts and sustaining their impact.

### **Challenges**

The initiative has faced several challenges, including the need to balance immediate workforce demands with the development of long-term solutions. Recruiting participants for front-end roles has required significant effort due to the competitive nature of the healthcare job market. Additionally, the program is still in the early stages of integrating wraparound services, and the availability of funding for these services remains a constraint.

Workforce challenges in less populated, rural areas affected the number of staff Roux could realistically supply and support, which proved to be "a fraction of their overall need." As well, the rural location for many recruitment opportunities was cited as a challenge, with the supply and cost of housing, especially in the Greater Portland region where most program participants were attracted to, contributing to this barrier.

Despite these challenges, the Roux Institute has successfully established a framework for addressing workforce gaps through collaboration and targeted interventions. Continued efforts to secure resources and refine program strategies will be critical to overcoming these barriers and achieving sustainable outcomes.

### **Takeaways**

The Roux Institute's healthcare workforce development initiative highlights the importance of collaboration, targeted training, and equity-driven recruitment strategies in addressing Maine's healthcare workforce challenges. Stakeholder engagement has been essential in aligning efforts and fostering partnerships to address immediate needs while building a sustainable workforce pipeline. As well, The Roux Institute found it helpful to connect with other groups in the IPP to learn about their challenges and successes, noting that it was helpful to connect with others in similar industries, referencing COHN as a peer in the program.

The program's contributions to career pathway development and systemic improvements underscore its role in advancing Maine's healthcare sector. Despite challenges supplying and supporting a workforce in rural areas, Roux indicated that hiring through the program made significant positive impacts on smaller healthcare providers, where additional support staff make a huge difference in morale and patient care access. By addressing barriers to employment and prioritizing inclusivity, the Roux Institute has laid the groundwork for a more resilient and equitable healthcare workforce that supports both short-term and long-term sector needs.



# Maine Labor and Resource Center (MLRC)

*The MLRC workforce initiative brings together health and welfare-related community-based nonprofit organizations and small businesses to form a sustainable partnership in the healthcare and social service sectors. The partnership focuses on elevating jobs within the healthcare and social services sectors by working directly with employers to build clear career pathways to advancement, and recruiting and supporting immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in these roles, as well as providing ESL classes.*

## Summary

MLRC has become a critical force in meeting Maine's workforce gaps by successfully recruiting, training, and placing immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Maine's healthcare and social service sectors. It has provided over 1,000 ESL trainings and created clear career pathways tailored to New Mainers, supporting their transition into stable, in-demand jobs. By partnering with employers and community groups, MLRC bridges labor shortages while advancing equitable workforce development. This comprehensive approach strengthens both the industry and the economic integration of Maine's growing immigrant population.

MLRC is addressing workforce challenges in Maine's healthcare and social services sectors by fostering collaboration among 57 employers and 49 strategic partners. The partnership's goals include creating sustainable career pathways, expanding recruitment efforts for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, and providing critical training and support services to underserved populations. Through its initiatives, MLRC has supported hiring and workforce development efforts that focus on equity, accessibility, and systemic change, ensuring that Maine's healthcare and social services sectors remain competitive and resilient.

## MLRC: BY-THE-NUMBERS

Over the course of two years, MLRC has reported the following accomplishments:

### Stakeholder Engagement & Collaboration

- 57 employers and 49 strategic partners engaged

### Training & Workforce Development

- ◆ 60 new career pathways developed
- ◆ 1,317 individuals trained
- ◆ 42 recruitment activities reached 2,147 people from WIOA priority communities
- ◆ 386 employees received a new credential or certification
- ◆ 66 staff received inclusive supervisory/management training

### Employment & Retention Strategies

- ◆ 1,040 new individuals hired
- ◆ 875 workers hired from WIOA priority communities
- ◆ 1,911 workers directly affected
- ◆ 163 employees or trainees received support services
- 1,097 ESL trainings



## Successes

### **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION**

MLRC's work has brought together 75 companies and 22 nonprofit organizations to create a resilient and effective partnership. In Q4 2022, MLRC formally established its collaborative structure and secured \$15,000 in private funding for skills development. Partnerships with organizations like the New Mainers Public Health Initiative and LA Youth Network have bolstered efforts to address workforce needs, including career mapping, peer workforce development, and job placement. MLRC also hosted an event that brought together over 50 partners including business, community organizations, employers, employees and job seekers, and State of Maine leaders to discuss the sector's challenges and recommend solutions.

By mid-2023, each Industry Partner had chosen a field of specialization, and efforts shifted toward building infrastructure and capacity. In Q4 2023, collaboration led to the hiring of 215 New Americans, primarily Angolans, while Q1 2024 saw 286 additional hires in the healthcare and social services sectors. These milestones underscore the strength of the collaborative approach, with partners working collectively to meet the needs of Maine's evolving workforce.

### **TRAINING AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

MLRC's training programs have significantly advanced workforce readiness by addressing critical skills gaps. In Q2 2023, the program provided training for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), Behavioral Health Professionals (BHPs), and agency administrators. Training efforts expanded in Q3 2023 with the establishment of a collaborative of Black immigrant-owned translation and interpretation firms to deliver English language classes, addressing the most pressing need identified by participants.

Training agencies fielded more than 30 individual requests for career development assistance in the final quarter of 2023. By Q3 2024, the program trained 928 individuals, offering specialized training sessions, certificate programs, and ESL classes. These efforts have provided job seekers with the skills and credentials necessary to advance in healthcare and social services roles, strengthening Maine's workforce and addressing sector-specific challenges. MLRC highlighted the success of one participant, a mother who needed several certificates to be employable in her field, who was able to afford them with the assistance of the IPP opportunity. According to their reports, she is now earning an income to support her family.

## **EMPLOYMENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION**

MLRC has prioritized equity in recruitment and hiring, focusing on immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Initial outreach in 2022 included 25 interviews to assess workforce awareness and opportunities. By early 2023, the program expanded its focus to include interviews with women, healthcare business owners, and newly laid-off workers, tailoring its support to meet diverse needs. By the end of the reporting period, financial support for credentialing and job placement facilitated employment for over 90 individuals.

By the end of 2024, MLRC's targeted outreach efforts reached over 500 refugees and asylum seekers and over 2,000 individuals from target communities were reached by involvement from partners, volunteers, and staff. These activities emphasized a "pull" recruitment strategy, engaging companies seeking to diversify their workforce. MLRC noted that the IPP was able to reach minority and less privileged communities and has a far-reaching impact to their community and economy. These efforts reflect MLRC's commitment to building an inclusive workforce while supporting employers in implementing effective hiring practices.

## **POLICY AND SYSTEM CHANGE**

Policy and systemic improvements have been central to MLRC's strategy. In Q2 2023, MLRC began pre-testing a plan to reach unemployed and underemployed workers with employers. By early 2024, four plans had been developed, fostering more inclusive workplace practices to support getting workers into a sustainable career pathway. Partnerships with organizations like Cross Cultural Community have provided expert training and resources to support these efforts.

MLRC's contributions to Maine's workforce system portal have also enhanced accessibility for job seekers and employers. The development of 17 career pathway maps in Q2 2024 detailed critical job roles, skill requirements, and training opportunities, providing a roadmap for career advancement in healthcare and social services. By Q4 2024, 23 additional career pathways were developed in coordination with private partners in the community health sector. These systemic advancements ensure that Maine's workforce infrastructure remains robust and adaptive.

## **Challenges**

Despite its successes, MLRC faced challenges, including limited access to training resources in rural areas and high demand for job placement assistance. The influx of new arrivals with work permits created additional pressure to meet hiring needs while maintaining quality outcomes. MLRC noted the lack of training partners for some certifications, and they pointed to the need for more support with individual barriers, such as learners' languages. Addressing these challenges required innovative solutions, such as creating collaborative training initiatives and expanding support services.

Efforts to integrate recruitment pipelines with platforms like Maine JobLink have been ongoing, highlighting the need for improved technological integration. These challenges underscore the importance of sustained investment and coordination to ensure the initiative's long-term success.

## Takeaways

Despite its successes, MLRC faced challenges, including limited access to training resources in rural areas and high demand for job placement assistance. The influx of new arrivals with work permits created additional pressure to meet hiring needs while maintaining quality outcomes. Addressing these challenges required innovative solutions, such as creating collaborative training initiatives and expanding support services.