

Project: Energy Workforce Training Center

Brief Description:

Montana State University Billings requests continued funding of \$650,000 for further development of its **Energy Workforce Training Center** in Billings to train highly skilled entry-level workers who can fill high priority jobs, as defined by industry and labor partners in the growing energy sector. We will use a combination of delivery modes including classroom, on-line instruction, on-site training, others to address the critical needs of the energy industry.

Executive Summary:

Montana State University Billings continues to field requests by business and industry to create certificate and degree programs to support the needs of the rapidly expanding energy sector. This funding will allow MSU Billings to enlarge and expand existing programs that train welders, diesel technicians, process plant technicians and power plant technicians. In addition, it will provide further applied research resources in the biodiesel field. Programs and coursework will also focus on areas of light industrial equipment operation, safety training, mining certifications, permitting, environmental issues and the challenges of substance abuse in the workplace. This Workforce Training Center will work cooperatively with the Montana BILT project as well as the WIRED initiative in Central and Eastern Montana.

A highlight of our plan will be programs and equipment to complement our **Mobile Energy Training Lab**. The lab can be used to offer training anywhere in the state, including other Montana two-year colleges as well as employer work sites. It is not easy for all students to travel to a central location to receive training; hence, we will use the mobile training lab to expand the reach of this program to underserved areas of the state and to provide on-site training necessary for the industry. When we combine the proposed curriculum with our on-going process plant technology program, construction trades, and other programs we provide an integrated approach to meet the workforce needs of the energy sector. The **Energy Workforce Training Center** will serve the recently DOL funded WIRED Initiative through training programs and degrees that serve the developing biofuels industry. Addressing these needs is one of Montana's highest workforce priorities, and is the reason why the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education's Office of Two-Year Education has strongly supported an initiative to address this need (see support letter in appendices).

Congressional Action Needed: An ongoing appropriation of \$650,000 is requested.

Importance/Outcomes for Montana:

The economy of southcentral and Eastern Montana is increasingly dependant on collaborative efforts to maximize the outcomes of the robust economic sectors including energy development and resulting construction trades. This initiative will develop a reliable pool of trained workers to immediately increase productivity for Montana companies, provide a structured environment for skills development and workforce training and provide a clear path to enter high-paying skilled trades and craft careers. Career pathways would be established linking secondary education, post-secondary education and employment that will result in higher wages and contribute to economic development for the State of Montana

This project provides an unprecedented opportunity to prepare a new generation of workers for these high-skill jobs, especially members of traditionally under-represented groups such as female, nonwhite and immigrant workers as well as mature workers willing to be retrained. In a 2004 regional survey by the Billings area Big Sky Economic Development Authority (BSEDA), when asked if an improved local training program for skilled trades workers was necessary, 100 percent of the respondents reported that local training was vital, with one characterizing the situation as "desperate." In the past, large projects have often required the importation of skilled trades workers from other states while untrained Montanans have remained unemployed or underemployed.

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MSU Billings Energy Workforce Training Center Talking Points

- \$650,000 in continued funding is being requested to further develop training in new skilled trades and crafts degrees to meet new and replacement workforce training needs in the Billings region and Montana.
- Funding will be used to develop the **Energy Workforce Training Center** in Billings that will support growing energy sectors including: Oil & Gas, Coal, Renewable Energy, and Clean Technologies.
- Montana State University Billings works with business, industry and organized labor to create certificate and degree programs as well as short-term training to serve the growing energy sector in Montana.
- This appropriation would benefit Montana in a number of ways. It would help establish a reliable pool of trained workers that would increase productivity immediately for Montana companies by providing a structured environment for skills development and improvement. Montanans would also be provided a clear path to enter high-paying skilled trades and craft careers. In addition, career pathways would be established linking secondary education, post-secondary education and employment
- This project provides an unprecedented opportunity to prepare a new generation of workers for these high-skill jobs, especially members of traditionally under-represented groups such as female, nonwhite and immigrant workers as well as mature workers willing to be retrained.
- The MSU Billings College of Technology is well-placed to train the next generation of workers in Montana's Energy Sector.