

Project: Skilled Trades & Technology Training

Brief Description: Montana State University Billings requests continued funding of \$350,000 for its Skilled Trades and Technology development program, which focuses on workforce development and training to help meet new and replacement workforce demands in the Billings region and Eastern Montana. New two-year degrees and programs will be developed as a collaborative effort with the Billings School District Career Center, local industry, labor and the MSU Billings College of Technology.

Executive Summary: Montana State University Billings has been asked by business and industry to create certificate and degree programs in construction, contracting and other skilled trades to meet growing workforce demands. The coursework would include the areas of carpentry, construction management, masonry, electrical and other relevant trades. The university has limited coursework applicable and relevant to a two-year Metal Fabrication Technology degree and in 2006 won Board of Regents approval for a two-year construction trades program with the support of contractors and local industry leaders. The University, however — particularly the College of Technology — still needs to take steps to assist in meeting the critical long-term need for construction workers in Billings, Eastern Montana and the state at large. Businesses engaged in construction are interested in hiring entry-level graduates in disciplines the University would train, thereby adding new and good paying jobs to the local and regional economics.

According to the 2002-2012 occupational data from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, there were 12,832 carpenters working in Montana in 2002. That is up 3,658 since 1998, an increase of nearly 40 percent in just four years. In 2005, employers report a shortage of carpenters. The overall state employment rate grew 6.2 percent during the same time period. Percentage increases for electricians, boilermakers, masons, sheet metal workers, plumbers and carpet layers are similar to those of carpenters.

While industry support and federal grants have helped in initial development of this, there is still a need for curriculum development, faculty, student scholarships, material handling systems, equipment and staffing to adequately train students in skilled trades and crafts. The degree programs would also be structured in such a way as to provide specific short-term training to those individuals currently in the workplace to give them the knowledge they need to meet and expand the needs of their employers. Workforce development has been a priority of the Billings Area Chamber of Commerce and the Big Sky Economic Development Authority and legislation is currently being considered in the Montana Legislature that would provide much needed facility space for this program. That proposed legislation would complement this project, but neither are contingent on the other. The future of the programs will be sustained through state support, public/private partnerships and other funding sources.

Congressional Action Needed: Continuing funding through an appropriation of \$350,000 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 such as construction trades, automotive repair and energy development. 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, high-demand 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 of homebuilders undertaken by the Billings area Big Sky Economic Development Authority (BSEDA), **all** respondents reported 'significant difficulties' in obtaining skilled trades workers in the past 18 months resulting in construction delays of up to 6 weeks. 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."

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MSU Billings Skilled Trades & Technology Training Talking Points

- Continued funding of \$350,000 is being requested to further develop and initiate training in new skilled trades and crafts degrees to meet new and replacement workforce training needs in the Billings region and Montana.
- New two-year programs and degrees will be developed as a collaborative effort with the Billings School District Career Center, local industry, labor and the College of Technology.
- Montana State University Billings has been asked by business and industry to create certificate and degree programs in construction, electrical, plumbing and other skilled trades to meet growing workforce demands. The coursework would include the areas of carpentry, electrical, masonry and other relevant trades.
- According to the 2002-2012 occupational data from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, there were 12,832 carpenters working in Montana in 2002. That is up 3,658 since 1998, an increase of nearly 40 percent in just four years. In 2005, employers report a shortage of carpenters. The overall state employment rate grew 6.2 percent during the same time period. Percentage increases for electricians, boilermakers, masons, sheet metal workers, plumbers and carpet layers are similar to those of carpenters.
- 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 skilled trades. A new construction trades program is starting up in 2006 with its first cohort of 20-30 students. This appropriation would be used to complement that program and provide further training in areas of high need.