

## Maine CareerCenters, Maine Department of Labor

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**Focus:** Helping Businesses locate qualified workers, helping job seekers find employment or help with establishing their own businesses, helping connect professional training and development providers, and providing information about employment and business legislation and regulations.

**Geographic Area Served:** Augusta Maine is the headquarters and operates throughout the state. There are four Workforce Investment Boards serving Maine.

**Participant Age Level:** Clients must be of age to be employed.

**Funding Sources:** State funding of the CareerCenters, the scholarship programs and the Small Business Development Centers has allowed them to partner with private organizations, private non-profits, and other funders to expand the services to Maine's citizens. Workforce Investment Act Funds are used to provide the services allowed under the various titles of the Act.

**Key Services Abstract:** The Maine Department of Labor manages a system of services designed to help persons seeking employment and businesses seeking employees. They manage a system of 21 CareerCenters throughout Maine where services are available to citizens. They partner with many organizations such as the Community Colleges within Maine who offer training and the Center for Women, Work and Community who are focused on helping women succeed in business through their 18 centers throughout the state of Maine. They manage the funds for the Life Long Learning Accounts (LILAs) 401K type accounts (Contributions from Employers and Worker) to help individuals gain training for job advancement. Pre Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship programs are managed and encouraged by the DOL as well as Competitive Skills Scholarships to assist citizens in advancing in their chosen occupation.

The Maine Enterprise Option (MEO) is the self-employment focus of the Maine Department of Labor. The Maine Enterprise Option is managed by the 21 CareerCenters to help those who have a specific business idea and are about to exhaust their unemployment benefits. Counselors from Career Centers and other organizations have focused on the belief that low income or unemployed individuals can become self employed even without loans if they are exposed to the correct resources that they need to assist their personal development of their business idea.

Wagner-Peyser Act funds provide for counseling staff who first meet with the unemployed. Funding through Maine's supplemental budget provided funding for "capacity building" for the Maine Employment Opportunity initiative through various organizations involved in making the training possible. Career Centers have found the initiative to be very case intensive.

Leaders of Maine Employment Option (MEO) have used the AEO and TANIF studies to seek ideas that work to help individuals as they enter the microenterprise segment of business. (For example in TANIF women need to be earning at least minimum wage in order to be thought of as being successful)

Because the normal operation of the DOL is to place students into wage jobs the Career Staff had to be constantly encouraged to get beyond the normal culture of achieving core performance measures of placing persons into jobs (wage at placement mentality). They had to refocus as an additional way of helping people to become self sufficient by thinking of how unemployed persons could earn income and create wealth for themselves through self

employment (Business development over time). Career Center Counselors had to come to know in general terms what is required to start a business if they are to direct the clients properly.

Through the MEO initiative they trained career center staff to think entrepreneurially and have one person in each center to be the entrepreneurship program leader to counsel with individuals, sign them up for the initiative and to send them to the small business counselors as needed. The MEO is just another tool in their counseling box for meeting the needs of the clients. Continuing communication with the persons in the career center allowed career center staff to learn from one another and allowed the state leadership to understand the needs that should be addressed as the initiative evolved.

Coastal Enterprises was developed in 1977 as a private non-profit community development organization focused on micro-enterprise financing and business development strategies to help fledging businesses in coastal and natural resources businesses.

The Small Business Development Centers network based at the Southern University of Maine operates out of 31 different offices throughout Maine to provide business counseling, training, and information. They are a key partner for delivering training, counseling and mentoring services as a partner to the One-Stop Centers across the state. Their website MaineWorks allows individuals to see training available and registration on line with the entity offering the training. This has been a great service to the state.

**Summary of Key Benefits and Results:** In the state of Maine the State Department of Labor, the Small Business Development Center, and the Maine Centers for Women, Work and Community have been partnering for several years to ensure that the Maine Enterprise Option (MEO) continues. They developed an Entrepreneurial Working Group to break down the barriers between groups who were all focused on enhancing the economy of Maine. These three groups have partnered to put in place an effective program that the twenty-one One-Stop Career Centers can use to connect those interested in self employment (over 3,000 since its inception) with the appropriate agency. The Small Business Development Centers work from twenty-five locations across the state to counsel and mentor those desiring their assistance. They also offer on line courses, as well as various courses at the universities and in their centers. The women's centers in 16 locations across the state allow for development of assets through personal savings or family development accounts that are matched to help women start businesses. Trainers are provided as needed.

The DOL website has links for those individuals who desire to start their own businesses. Career Center staff help counsel citizens who have interest in developing their own businesses toward the service provider who can assist them advance their dream. The Maine Business Works website operated by the SBDC is an effective vehicle for linking clients to the events available to help them improve their business effectiveness. The website can be searched by service provider, by month of the event, by topic of training, by region or county where the service will be provided. The Maine Business Works website links clients back to the service provider so that clients can learn more about the service provider or register for events/services.

Governor John Elias Baldacci established Maine's North Star Alliance Initiative in 2006. The North Star Alliance Initiative, (NSAI) is an industry-led collaborative, synthesizing business, R&D, education, workforce, and economic development resources to re-skill a workforce and launch a new regional economy in coastal Maine. Referred to as the "Four Pillars of Economic Development", the strategy focuses on building capacity and addressing gaps in Workforce Development, Research and Development, Outreach and Market Development, and Capitalization and Infrastructure Development. The targeted industry sectors of Maine's North Star Alliance include a range of enterprises that make up or support the marine trades and those that utilize advanced composite materials, including boat building, marine/waterfront infrastructure, marine service and repair, building products, sporting goods, and ballistic armor. These industries represent the majority of the economic base of Maine's mid-coast region.

The Small Business Development Centers works with the Governor's office to coordinate regional Small Business Conferences held every two years in various areas of the state. These Small Businesses Conference events provides needed training, allows the small business owners to have a voice in the policies of the State of Maine, provide feedback to policy makers as to what needs to be enhanced through legislation or policy enhancement. The

Governor has used the opportunity to interact with this critical component of the economy as both a listening board and a time to share policy changes.