

November 2025

Collaborative Partner News

The Work-based Learning Collaborative includes 30 partner organizations that cover the gamut of work-based learning from the student, employer, and educator perspectives, as well as direct-service, capacity, and policy levels. We are proud to share highlights of our WBLC partners - state agencies, industry associations, colleges, high schools, and nonprofit organizations. Find the list of the WBLC members [here!](#)



WBLC Members Win Awards - Congratulations!

Paddy Flemming received the Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Year award from the [Montana Ambassadors!](#) This esteemed award recognizes exemplary service and leadership to the organization of Montana Ambassadors and the State of Montana. Paddy was recognized for his remarkable contributions to Montana and the manufacturing sector, and his commitment to Montana's growth and vitality.

Jennifer Owen, Alicia Doney, and Donnie Wetzel from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry all received the [Governor's Award for Excellence](#), a statewide program to honor and recognize the exceptional accomplishments of outstanding state employees.

Each year, the governor and state leaders acknowledge the impact of employees and celebrate their successes and notable accomplishments over the past year. Jennifer, Alicia, and Doney were recognized for their impact and dedication.

Miles Community College Named as a Top 200 Community College Eligible for the 2027 Aspen Prize

Congratulations to **Miles Community College** (MCC) on their recognition as a top community college! The Aspen Institute recently named Miles Community College (MCC) as one of the 200 institutions eligible to compete for the \$1 million Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, the nation's premier recognition of high achievement and performance among two-year colleges. The colleges were selected based on their student outcomes data, including retention, completion, transfer, and bachelor's attainment rates.

"Miles Community College is thrilled to be invited to apply for the 2027 Aspen Prize," stated Dr. Ron

Slinger, president of MCC. “Our selection for invitation demonstrates that the outstanding work of our Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff is being recognized nationally.”



WBLC Members Recently Featured on The Vault podcast

Christina Henderson on Storytelling, Entrepreneurship, and the Power of Connection

Christina Henderson, Executive Director of the [Montana High Tech Business Alliance](#), shares her journey from growing up in rural Iowa with community-minded parents to building a career that’s taken her from teaching and marketing to economic development leadership across multiple states. She talks about her move to Montana, the connections and experiences that led her to launch and lead the statewide tech alliance, and her role in telling the stories of Montana’s growing high-tech sector. With an entrepreneurial spirit, a keen sense for storytelling, and a talent for connecting people, Christina offers insight into building strong business ecosystems and why place matters in entrepreneurship. [Listen to the podcast with Christina Henderson](#)

Made in Montana: Paddy Fleming on Leadership, Legacy & Manufacturing

Paddy Fleming, Director of the [Montana Manufacturing Extension Center](#) (MMEC), shares his journey from growing up in small-town Montana to leading manufacturing operations across North America and Europe. He talks about leadership, learning from others, and the experiences that shaped his career—from solving complex problems to managing teams and driving improvement. As Paddy puts it, “There’s something quite satisfying watching trucks roll out full of material that you made.” Today, through MMEC, he’s helping Montana manufacturers strengthen their businesses, innovate, and build the next generation of industry across the state.



[Listen to the podcast with Paddy Fleming](#)

Montana Manufacturing Reports

The Montana Manufacturing Extension Center recently released several new reports including 2025 Manufacturing in Montana and State of the Economy, Artificial Intelligence: Key Considerations and Effective Implementation Strategies, perspectives from Montana manufacturers, and more! [View reports here.](#)

From High School to Junior Developer: Rae’s Journey with Vocational Rehabilitation and Pre-ETS

Rae began working with her Pre-ETS Specialist during her senior year of high school, receiving job exploration counseling and support through a Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) with Cedar Mountain Software. Funded by [Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services](#) (VRBS), Rae earned \$12.50/hr while learning web design. Her performance led to a part-time job offer and continued growth. Though she initially enrolled in college, Rae found the structure challenging and chose to focus on her career. She transitioned to PantrySoft, where she received mentorship and online coding training. Today, Rae is a full-time Junior Developer earning \$65,000/year.

“My biggest takeaway from Voc Rehab (VR) is that it changed the trajectory of my life. If I didn’t connect with VR in high school and receive the support VR provided, I don’t think I would be in a meaningful career today, doing what I am doing now. The support from my Pre-ETS Specialist and VR staff was amazing for me, and I am so appreciative of it,” shares Rae.



Expanding What Counts: Blackfeet Living Principles as Workforce Skills

On November 4, [Accelerate Montana](#) hosted a watch party and community discussion for our micro-documentary [Blackfeet Living Principles as Open Data](#). This project emerged from a simple but powerful realization: national skills libraries that inform job descriptions and hiring practices don’t capture the full range of competencies that Montana communities value and teach.

Working with a community group that included the Blackfeet Nation Personnel Director and a Blackfeet Tribal Council member, alongside partners at Credential Engine and 4 Poles Educational Consulting Group, we developed a model for how communities can write themselves into workforce data systems, ensuring their values and ways of knowing are recognized as legitimate workplace qualifications. Over six months, the group worked from oral storytelling and translated the first nine principles, which have been reviewed by tribal elders and are now being incorporated into job descriptions and hiring practices within the Blackfeet Nation. For Indigenous youth considering career pathways, this work creates space for their cultural identity to be valued as workforce skills rather than something separate from professional development. Contact [Accelerate Montana](#) to learn more.

View the [Watch Party & Discussion](#). Check out the [8-minute Documentary](#).

Did You Know? We Love Data!

The Work-based Learning Collaborative hosts a [Data Dashboard](#), and we just released version 2.0. We work to ensure Montana career-connected learning (CCL) and work-based learning (WBL) data is available and accessible to inform programs and policies across the state.

The [Data Dashboard](#) shares youth and young adult perspectives and experience with career-connected learning opportunities; youth workforce participation trends; and employer and educator interest and experiences with CCL. It also shares data on employer satisfaction regarding recruitment, readiness, and retention of entry-level employees. Prefer a quick look at data? View

We appreciate the WBLC members who help collect data and our partners who share data, making this project possible. *Note: the Data Dashboard is only viewable on desktop computers, not on mobile devices.*

Knowledge Nugget

Work-Based Learning Goals for Learners

- **Discover Careers** - Explore personal interests and strengths to help inform education and training options that meet individual career goals.
- **Create Professional Contacts** - Make and grow professional connections to open doors, learn from mentors, and improve job and career prospects.
- **Develop Practical Skills** - Develop employability and technical skills through hands-on learning that connects structured instruction with real-world workplace activities.



Work-based learning supports people of all ages to build the skills they need to access quality jobs and meet their career goals. At its core, work-based learning is a comprehensive career preparation strategy that connects structured instruction with valuable workplace experiences, giving people a direct route to better jobs. You can enter or exit a work-based learning experience at any stage in your career, making it a powerful tool for both early exposure and lifelong advancement. When done well, it transforms educational concepts into practical skills that help high school students, college learners, and adults at all stages of life. [WBL Framework from JFE](#).



News You Can Use

- [The New Science of Raising Successful Adults](#)
- [Taking Student Survey Data Seriously: Insights From 15,000 High Schoolers](#)
- [Falling Behind: How Skills Shortages Threaten Future Jobs](#)
The nation will need an additional 5.25 million workers with postsecondary education through 2032.
- [Manufacturing in Rural America: A Plan for K-12-Industry Partnerships](#)

A seismic threefold increase in advanced-manufacturing investment could transform rural America by driving economic growth, creating high-quality jobs, and revitalizing communities.

- [Real Income Growth Shifts Down, Especially for the Young](#)
- [What My Students With Disabilities Taught Me About Career-Connected Learning](#)
- [The Guy Who Runs The Dump Knows the Secret to Finding Meaning at Work](#)
- [Occupational Mobility Explorer](#)

This interactive tool sheds light on career pathways in the U.S. labor market.



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Work That Matters

Work-based learning Work-based learning (WBL) is learning about work, at work and is a key component of career-connected learning.

In addition to building employability skills, WBL experiences help students develop **meaning** from their classroom learning and explore **purposeful** career opportunities. Employers who intentionally cultivate **belonging** in the workplace for young workers can gain access to future workforce talent. The Montana Work-Based Learning Collaborative works to promote belonging, meaning, well-being, and purpose for all young Montanans by building capacity for high-quality WBL experiences.

There are components of work-based learning in the K-12 education system, the postsecondary education system, and the public workforce system – but no single entry point for students or employers to access them. Our work to improve coordination among agencies and WBL partners benefits Montana’s emerging workforce and Montana’s businesses.



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