

April 2026

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](#)!



Employer
Lunch n' Learns



Empowering Employers of Youth and Young Adults

Learn More

Generational Differences: Understanding and bridging workplace gaps

Join us for our Tuesday, May 12 Lunch & Learn session! Bethany Williamson, Associated Employers, will discuss on generational differences in the workplace and how you can optimize your workplace practices! [Register here](#).

Data That Drives Change: Join the WBLC Conversation

The WBLC strengthens and expands work-based learning across Montana by ensuring relevant data is accessible to inform programs and policies. This data is available on the [WBLC Data Dashboard](#). WBLC gathers insights from high school and college students, K-12 educators, and employers, focusing on career-connected learning experiences; employer satisfaction with entry-level employees; and how belonging shows up in the workplace.

Attend WBLC Data Presentations in May and June to explore these insights! **Register and find details [here](#).**

American Chemet Celebrates 4th Cohort of Successful Apprenticeship Program

In March, [American Chemet Corporation](#) in East Helena hosted a celebration for the latest cohort of employees to earn the Certified Manufacturing Associate Apprenticeship. Since launching the program in late 2023, these celebrations—complete with food, cake, and recognition—have become a meaningful company tradition, often attended by coworkers, managers, and proud family members.

Apprentices must complete 25 online classes on manufacturing topics to receive a nationally recognized Certified Manufacturing Associate credential. After attaining 2,000 hours of on-the-job training, they receive an Apprentice certificate from the State of Montana. Successful apprentices also receive automatic pay raises when they reach each milestone.

[Montana Manufacturing Extension Center](#) worked closely with the company to develop the program and MMEC staff continue to lead in-person classes and coaching sessions for the apprentices.

After sponsoring more than 30 employees through the program, American Chemet reports strong results. They've seen many benefits, including substantial improvements in retention for first-year employees, growing engagement and mentorship among staff, and improved morale.

"We've seen real, measurable performance growth over time," said Jill Bollier, American Chemet's Human Resources Director. "Employees are proud of what they've accomplished and their growth. Our retention has improved and many have moved into lead roles." In July, American Chemet will launch its 6th apprenticeship cohort. [Read the entire case study](#) about American Chemet's experience.

Montana's Apprenticeship Program Continues to Climb

Montana's workforce pipeline is hitting new highs. Gov. Greg Gianforte says [Montana's registered apprenticeship program](#) saw record growth in 2025 with over 3,400 active apprentices across 65 in-demand careers. State leaders say participation surged in recent years, now backed by more than 800 employers statewide. The program continues to expand into both rural and urban communities. On average, graduates earn more than \$72,000 within a year, and most are still working in Montana five years later. [Read article here](#).



One Partnership, Real Impact: A 3-Minute Story You Don't Want to Miss

How students are gaining real-world skills at Three Forks High School.

Miles City Event Showcases Tech Empowering Rural Communities

By Christina Henderson

The [Montana High Tech Business Alliance](#) and [Montana Jobs Network](#) hosted the Eastern Montana Career Summit at [Miles Community College](#), connecting 20 employers with 200 students from 9 schools, including Bainville, Broadus, Circle, Ekalaka, and Lame Deer.

The week prior, I was in Portland, Oregon, and saw a billboard for ChatGPT showing two farmers fixing a tractor, with cows looking on. My initial reaction was skepticism. Is this really a good thing for farmers to rely on? In Montana, one of our strongest cultural norms is self-reliance. If the tractor breaks, you fix it. You don't call a consultant. You figure it out.

But after spending time with employers, educators, and students in Miles City, I saw something different. Technology, including artificial intelligence, is reinforcing, not replacing, Montanans' get-it-done spirit. People are still building, fixing, and figuring things out. They're just doing it with better tools.

At Miles Community College, there's a sign on the door asking you to remove your spurs before entering. Miles City is, after all, home to the Bucking Horse Sale and the Pioneers rodeo team. Inside, technology is part of everyday learning. Students create paleontology models with a 3D printer, train on medical simulation dummies that cry like real children, and take online courses that allow them to advance their education from anywhere in Montana.

The message to students was simple. You do not have to leave a place like Miles City to build a meaningful, high-paying, technology-enabled career. But you do have to know what opportunities exist to pursue them. And the network of Montanans helping other Montanans succeed is a

powerful support system for those who want to stay and thrive. **Read the entire article and see photos [here](#).**

New Division of Montana ACTE Created

The Work-Based Learning Division of [Montana ACTE](#) is a newly established, inclusive division designed to ensure representation and engagement for CTE professionals whose program areas may not yet meet the minimum membership threshold required for individual division leadership. Under Montana ACTE By-Laws, a division must have at least ten members to hold a seat on the Board of Directors. This division provides a unified home for professionals in Postsecondary and Adult Career Education, Administration, Counseling and Career Development, Health Sciences Education, and Work-Based Learning Coordination.

By bringing these professionals together, the Work-Based Learning Division creates a collaborative network that amplifies their collective voice, supports shared priorities, and strengthens their impact across Montana's education and workforce systems. It serves as both a pathway to representation and a professional community where members can connect, share best practices, and advance high-quality work-based learning experiences for students and adult learners.

OTHER MONTANA UPDATES

University of Montana Embeds Career Readiness Across Curriculum

The University of Montana students, faculty, and staff have collaborated to create ElevateU, a campus-wide effort that integrates career preparation into coursework across departments. This structural shift moves career readiness from a senior-year afterthought to a continuous thread throughout the student experience.

Through the Career Champions Initiative, faculty and staff work to ensure that lectures, labs, and assignments help students bridge the gap between "learning" and "doing." Career readiness is embedded into General Education classes. And, in the "You at UM" program, career competencies act as a throughline for the entire first-year experience. **Read the full article [here](#).**

AI for Everyone: Code Girls United Launches YouTube Academy

Code Girls United has launched a free, accessible way to bring AI education to more students through its new AI Academy YouTube series. Designed with middle school, high school, and young adults learners in mind, the series introduces what artificial intelligence is, how it works, and how it's shaping the world around us. Each lesson goes beyond surface-level explanations, connecting AI concepts to foundational computer science skills like pattern recognition, data, and logical thinking. Students explore real-world impacts of AI across industries while building confidence in understanding and questioning the technology they interact with every day with hands-on learning, making it a valuable resource for classrooms, after-school programs, and families. By offering this content for free on YouTube, Code Girls United is helping ensure more students have early access to the knowledge and skills needed to navigate and shape an AI-driven future. **Watch [here](#).**



EVENTS

Build a Dynamic Workforce: Join the 2026 Montana Disability Employment Summit

May 13–14 in Helena

Montana's workplaces are evolving—and so is our understanding of what makes them thrive. This May, the Montana Disability Employment and Transitions Division is proud to host the 2026 Montana Disability Employment Summit, a two-day gathering that brings together business leaders, policymakers, educators, students, and advocates to focus on one goal: strengthening Montana's workforce by embracing the full potential of people with disabilities.

This year's Summit highlights the powerful role disability employment plays in building resilient industries, innovative teams, and a competitive statewide economy. With nationally recognized speakers, Montana-based innovators, and voices from our own communities, the 2026 Summit promises to be our most dynamic yet. **[View the agenda here.](#)**

The summit is free, and registration is now open. **[Visit 2026 Montana Disability Employment Summit to secure your place at this year's conference.](#)**

Educator Learning Workshop: Building Workforce Pipeline Infrastructure

May 4 and May 7, 2026

TalentSHIFT™: Advanced Manufacturing Collaborative is excited to partner with Specialized Career Guidance to offer a no-cost, two-part series designed to help educators build stronger employer partnerships with a clearer, more sustainable strategy. **[Learn more and register here.](#)**

Knowledge Nugget

[Watch: Best Practices for Hosting Work-based Learning Experiences](#)

Hear from Montana businesses - Collaborative Design Architects, Immanuel Living, and Jackson Contractors - about strategies for overcoming challenges and the benefits they gain when hosting work-based learning experiences. This is the second session in the WBLC Lunch & Learn series.



[Watch: Apprenticeships as the On-Ramp: How Cities and Counties are Building Skills-Based Talent Pipelines](#)

[Watch: Navigating the Gen Z Shift: Adapting to New Student Expectations](#)

Discussion from several post-secondary institutions about the unique challenges of working with this generation to prepare them for the workforce.

News You Can Use

[The American Affordability Tracker Releases 2026 Data](#)

Explore data on Americans' finances and everyday costs. Key takeaways include:

- Nearly half of people in American families cannot afford the true cost of living. Urban research finds 49% of people in American

families don't have the resources to cover essential expenses to live securely in their community in 2023. This figure is even higher in Montana at 55%.

- The cost of essential goods and services is rising faster than earnings. Since 2017, average earnings have grown about 43% nationwide. Over the same period, home sale prices have increased 81% and rents 54%. The lowest-cost Silver health plan on the Affordable Care Act Marketplace has risen 77%, and child care costs have grown faster than earnings.
- Rising everyday expenses, including energy and transportation, are adding new pressures on households. Residential electricity costs have increased faster than earnings across much of the country, leaving customers paying about \$40 more in December 2025 on average than they did in December 2017. Gas prices have also risen sharply, with the national average growing by a dollar per gallon since early February.
- **In Montana:** The monthly price of health insurance is \$681 in Montana, up 26.1% compared with \$540 in 2025. The average home sale price is \$537,000, compared with \$486,000 nationwide. The average monthly rent has increased by 2.0% and the average cost of groceries has increased by 2.9% since January 2025.



Maximizing the Value of Internships: Advice From Employers

Data: Most Employers Still Value College Degrees

How AI may reshape career pathways to better jobs



Questions? Contact:
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Work That Matters

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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