

Montana

Clear Outcomes in Action

The state initially established the decision-making processes and structures for an education-to-employment data system, then transitioned toward creating actionable data products.

Since 2023, Montana has made significant progress advancing its postsecondary education-to-employment data systems and continues to improve.

The state initially focused on establishing the decision-making processes and structures needed for effective operation of an education-to-employment data system. It then transitioned toward developing the technical infrastructure and creating actionable data products. This deliberate pacing follows best practices outlined by the Data Quality Campaign,¹ ensuring that progress is aligned with state priorities and can be sustained across leadership changes.

From this foundation, Montana can build a robust system with dedicated capacity for generating insights into all post-high school education programs and labor market opportunities. The state is undertaking a major effort to capture all noncredit programs and is working toward establishing processes for external researcher access to integrated education-to-employment data.

- ➔ Montana publishes integrated education-to-employment data for public four-year institutions, community colleges, and for-credit nondegree credentials.



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I Montana's approach

Data collected

Montana collects enrollment and credential outcomes data for college-issued, for-credit nondegree certificate programs and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-eligible training providers. Through the Montana University System's Student Success Dashboard, the state publishes employment outcomes for learners who earn these certificates.²

Data integrated across sources

Montana participates in two national and multistate initiatives to assess employment outcomes for learners who relocate or work outside the state — the U.S. Census Bureau's Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes project³ and the State Wage Interchange System through the U.S. Department of Labor.⁴

Data provided to the public

Montana publishes integrated education-to-employment data for public four-year institutions, community colleges, and for-credit nondegree credentials. These education-to-employment outcomes are available as open data files and as a public interactive reporting tool through the Montana University System's Student Success Dashboard.⁵ The data are disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, and family income/economically disadvantaged status.

Data used for impact

Accelerate Montana, a statewide economic development entity affiliated with the University of Montana, received SkillsFWD⁶ grant funding to develop and pilot statewide adoption of learning and employment records.⁷ As part of this initiative, Accelerate Montana also launched the Montana Credential Registry. This centralized platform enables all Montanans to explore and understand the full spectrum of educational and professional credentials available in the state, including degrees, nondegree credentials, and short-term training opportunities.

Alignment with goals of state leadership and key partners

In 2023, Montana enacted House Bill 949, establishing the Education and Workforce Data Governing Board. The board's five members include the director of the Department of Administration, the superintendent of public instruction, the commissioner of higher education, the commissioner of labor and industry, and the presiding officer of the Board of Public Education. Gov. Greg Gianforte, Montana's legislature, and the relevant agencies recognize the critical role data plays in aligning education opportunities with industry needs, and this initiative is deeply connected to state leaders' priorities. House Bill 949 emerged from a recognized need to improve coordination and especially data-sharing across the state's education and workforce agencies.

Accelerate Montana, a portfolio of workforce and economic development programs affiliated with the University of Montana, leads another initiative to empower learners to access and use their own verified education and employment achievements to navigate lifelong learning. The team is engaging with the Blackfeet Nation and small business community to ensure the technology and processes implemented are responsive to the needs of learners. Accelerate Montana, in partnership with Credential Engine, launched the statewide credential and skills registry. The registry directly connects to Montana state leadership's goals for educational attainment, workforce development, and economic growth by providing user-friendly online tools for learners to explore available credentials and their completion rates, employment outcomes, and industry validations. This information particularly benefits adult learners upskilling or reskilling, as well as employers looking to identify candidates with in-demand skills.

Strategy

Montana's recent efforts center around the operationalization of House Bill 949. The board is responsible for drafting policies and processes related to education-to-employment data sharing and data requests. For example, the board collaborated to prioritize the state's education and employment policy questions into a research agenda. According to the board, "the research agenda reflects a shared commitment among contributing agencies to engage in partnerships in order to improve the interconnection between education pathways and employment opportunities in Montana." In July 2024, the board published the research agenda,⁸ prioritizing the employment outcomes of high school graduates as a critical research question to be addressed.

Implementation

The Office of the Commissioner for Higher Education detailed three concurrent workstreams related to the state's education-to-employment data infrastructure:

- Contributing agencies are onboarding to a cloud platform for secure data sharing and analytics. This technical solution will improve data access across departments.

- Additionally, the state continues to conduct outreach around the Student Success Dashboard, with a particular emphasis on postsecondary advisors. The goal is to ensure that the dashboard plays a central role in institution and student decision-making.
- Finally, the state is inventorying its noncredit data collections. One person from the Office of the Commissioner for Higher Education is traveling across the state, meeting with local education and training providers. The goal is to centralize and standardize these data before evaluating completeness and quality.

I Measuring success

While the current focus is on implementation and infrastructure, Montana defines success as making incremental progress on cross-agency data sharing and improving the usability of information for stakeholders.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Montana has developed several tools and resources to support its efforts:

- [Montana University System's Student Success Dashboard](#) is an interactive reporting tool that provides an accessible, public-facing platform for exploring postsecondary education-to-employment data. In addition to displaying in-state employment and earnings, the dashboard incorporates national employment outcomes from the Census Bureau's PSEO project.
- [The Montana Credential Registry and Learner Employment Records](#) are pilot efforts funded by a SkillsFWD grant. They lay the foundation for the technology and data interoperability systems that can empower individuals to use their own verified education and employment achievements to navigate lifelong learning pathways.
- Formal, cross-agency data governance, like [Montana's Education and Workforce Data Governing Board](#), is a foundational step to ensuring data are used in education-to-employment decision-making.

Endnotes

- 1 “WHAT NOW? A VISION to Transform State Data Systems to Inform People’s Pathways through Education and the Workforce.” (Washington, DC: Data Quality Campaign, 2023). https://dataqualitycampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/DQC-What-Now_A-Vision-to-Transform-State-Data-Systems.pdf.
- 2 MUS Student Success Dashboard. (Helena, MT: Montana University System, Accessed April 29, 2025). <https://mus.edu/data/WorkforceTool/index.html>.
- 3 Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, accessed April 29, 2025). https://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/pseo_experimental.html.
- 4 Wage Interchange Systems. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, accessed April 29, 2025). <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/performance/swis>.
- 5 MUS Student Success Dashboard. <https://mus.edu/data/WorkforceTool/index.html>.
- 6 SkillsFWD. (New York, NY: Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, accessed April 29, 2025). <https://www.skillsfwd.org/about/>.
- 7 LER Ecosystem Map (Learning & Employment Records). (Washington, D.C.: Learn & Work Ecosystem Library, March 22, 2025). <https://learnworkecosystemlibrary.com/initiatives/ler-ecosystem-map-learning-employment-records/>.
- 8 Research Agenda. (Helena, MT: Education and Workforce Data Governing Board, July 30, 2024). https://ewdgb.mt.gov/_files/7-30-24-Research-Agenda.pdf.

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