

§2066. Community Workforce Connections Program

1. Community Workforce Connections Program established. The Community Workforce Connections Program, referred to in this subchapter as "the program," is established. No later than January 1, 2026, the Commissioner of Labor, referred to in this subchapter as "the commissioner," shall implement the program statewide to offer meaningful peer support and workforce navigation to unemployed and underemployed workers via peer navigators employed by community-based organizations. The program must prioritize individuals from populations that may face significant barriers to employment as described in subsection 2, paragraph A and support successful access to Department of Labor resources and maintenance of sustainable employment to increase their economic security. The Department of Labor, referred to in this subchapter as "the department," shall issue a request for proposals in accordance with state procurement law to contract with qualified entities to operate the program under subsection 2. The program shall:

- A. Provide culturally appropriate, person-centered and relationship-focused peer workforce navigation services that are based on a strengths-based case management model and performed by individuals with shared lived experience. The program shall advocate for, and provide sustained and reliable support to, individuals in their transitions to improved economic security through employment, including by providing education about program rules and community resources to facilitate informed self-advocacy and life planning; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]
- B. Work with community organizations, known and trusted by individuals described in subsection 2, paragraph A, and through trusted peer navigators to proactively identify and engage with unemployed and underemployed individuals and provide them with the workforce navigation services under paragraph A and opportunities for education, training, employment and reemployment assistance; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]
- C. Introduce and connect individuals to career centers operated by the department, its workforce partners and educational institutions and help the individuals, as needed, navigate employment services and education and training programs operated by these entities. The program shall help facilitate communication and trust building between the individuals and these entities, including providing help completing applications; assistance with complying with eligibility verification processes; and support for participant progress and persistence; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]
- D. Provide timely, responsive, flexible and individualized support when necessary to help individuals meet basic needs so the individuals are more able to successfully engage with work-related support services and find and retain employment, which includes accessing support from both public and private sources, including support for transportation, utilities and child care; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]
- E. Promote trusted and successful relationships between individuals and government agencies by furthering understanding of employment, education and training programs, public assistance programs and associated rules, regulations, responsibilities and rights, and any socioeconomic barriers to accessing these programs; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]
- F. Conduct outreach to communities with disproportionately low enrollment in unemployment insurance and reemployment assistance. The program shall provide individual assistance, education and referrals for individuals applying for and making ongoing claims for unemployment compensation, including offering assistance connecting with department staff and coaching on self-advocacy for claimants experiencing barriers to services. The program shall inform individuals about provisions of law that may assist low-income and frequently unemployed individuals disproportionately, including the dislocated worker benefits program under section 1043, subsection 5, paragraph B and section 1191, subsection 4, paragraph A, partial unemployment benefits and reemployment services; and [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

G. Identify systemic issues creating barriers to successful employment or reemployment for individuals seeking jobs, including improvements to employment and training programs under chapter 25 and the unemployment compensation system under chapter 13, and work to reduce those barriers. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

[PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

2. Qualified entities. To be eligible to receive a workforce navigation contract under this section, an entity must:

A. Demonstrate that it has existing, trusted relationships with individuals, groups and organizations from populations that may face significant barriers to employment, including immigrants; individuals with limited English proficiency; individuals without postsecondary training or college degrees; low-income and homeless individuals; individuals who have been out of the workforce for an extended period; individuals with low literacy, including digital literacy; individuals with substance use disorder; individuals facing gender-based discrimination; individuals with disabilities; indigenous and tribal populations; single-parent households; and low-income working families; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

B. Have the capability to carry out the duties of this section, including knowledge of eligibility requirements and application processes related to education and training services, including apprenticeship and preapprenticeship programs, reemployment services, the unemployment compensation system under chapter 13 and other resources necessary to help populations that may face significant barriers to employment as described in paragraph A successfully participate in employment and increase their economic security; [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

C. Comply with existing confidentiality standards to ensure the privacy of all information collected from individuals receiving workforce navigation services; and [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

D. Provide services under this section without charge to the individuals receiving those services. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

[PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

3. Commissioner's duties; award criteria; workforce navigation services. The commissioner shall establish standards for the awarding of contracts to qualified entities in accordance with this subsection.

A. The commissioner may award multiple contracts to perform one or more of the services described in this section. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

B. To support the maintenance of relationships between qualified entities and populations that may face significant barriers to employment as described in subsection 2, paragraph A and to ensure a high quality of service, the commissioner shall award multi-year contracts to qualified entities as long as the qualified entities satisfy performance requirements set forth in the contracts. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

C. The commissioner shall give priority for contracts to qualified entities that are a recognized source of support, expertise and community leadership for populations that may face significant barriers to employment as described in subsection 2, paragraph A, including racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with low literacy, individuals with disabilities and other low-income individuals with socioeconomic barriers to employment and education. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

D. Workforce navigation services provided by qualified entities that receive workforce navigation contracts must be coordinated with and supplement, not supplant, services provided by the department. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

E. All workforce navigation services provided under this subsection must be performed in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate to the population served, including individuals with limited English proficiency, individuals with low literacy and individuals with disabilities, recognizing the varying levels of digital literacy and access to technology among individuals in need of services. [PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

[PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

4. Funding. Of the Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund planned yield described in section 1166, at least 12% of the annual planned yield must be used for the program. Any funds not expended in the contract year by the contracted entity must be returned to the Competitive Skills Scholarship Fund, except that any funds for expenses that occurred in that contract year but were not yet paid in that year must remain available to the contracted entity. The department may also seek any available opportunities for funding as needed to support and enhance the workforce navigation services provided under this section.

[PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2025, c. 396, §12 (NEW).

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