



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

HEATHER JOHNSON
COMMISSIONER

January 15, 2024

Committee on Housing and Economic Development
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: Maine Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program Report for 2023,
pursuant to 5 MRSA §13056-I.

Dear Joint Committee on Housing and Economic Development:

Title 5 MRSA §13056-I, enacted in the first session of the 130th Legislature, directed the Department of Economic & Community Development (DECD) to implement a Rural Workforce Recruitment and Retention Grant Program. The grant program was established within DECD to provide grants for local economic development initiatives in rural regions of the State, specifically Aroostook, Piscataquis, Somerset and Washington Counties, to assist businesses in locating, recruiting and retaining qualified staff to meet workforce needs. The fund requires that an entity receiving a grant secure matching funds for the initiative on a one-to-one basis.

Pursuant to 5 MRSA §13056-I, DECD is submitting the following information constituting the annual report for this program for calendar year 2023.

A. The number of applications for grant funding submitted to the department: Four

The Department shared the grant guidelines and public announcement of a competitive grant process with eligible economic development agencies that service the designated counties listed above. The deadline for proposals was May 10, 2023 and the Department received four grant applications. The RFA evaluation team met on May 24, 2023 to determine successful applications and award amounts.

On July 17th, 2023, DECD notified four applicants of their selection as grant recipients. As of December 15th, 2023, all contracts were fully awarded and all \$400,000 in available funds were encumbered.



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The following entities were awarded grants:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY	COUNTY	AMOUNT REQUESTED	AWARD AMOUNT
Sunrise County Economic Council	Washington	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Somerset Economic Development Corp.	Somerset	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Eastern Maine Development Corp.	Piscataquis	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Northern Maine Development Commission	Aroostook	\$ 200,000	\$ 100,000
		\$ 500,000	\$ 400,000

Note: NMDC requested \$200,000 to service both Aroostook and Washington Counties. However, DECD opted to award Sunrise \$100,00 to service Washington County, allowing NMDC to focus solely on Aroostook County.

B. Progress Report:

Under the terms of their two-year contracts, each awardee is required to report semi-annually to the Department on progress and expenditures. Awardees may request funding in \$50,000 per year increments with the submittal of their first report, including ledger of expenses.

As of January 15, 2024, the Department received reports from Sunrise County Economic Council (Washington County) and Eastern Maine Development Corporation (Piscataquis County). Somerset Economic Development Corporation (Somerset County) and Northern Maine Development Commission (Aroostook County) each signed their contracts in mid-December 2023 and their first reports will be due July 15th, 2024.

Sunrise County Economic Council (SCEC):

Activities from September 30, 2023 through December 31, 2023 included:

- Onboarding the new part-time Coastal Opportunities Advisor
- Team meetings
- Connecting community members and small business with resources (community events, job fairs, virtual outreach)



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- Attending fisherman forums and aquaculture expositions to gain industry knowledge and learn more about diversification and career opportunities
- Working with commercial fisheries-dependent families around financial literacy and management resources
- Attending technical assistance provider network meetings and industry training opportunities to meet resource providers and build referral relationships

During this period, the new part-time employee was in the orientation phase. The Small Business & Entrepreneurship Team is working closely together with the new employee to build the metrics-gathering process and implement workplan.

Eastern Maine Development Corp. (EMDC):

Using the Hub and Spoke model, with EMDC serving as the Hub, EMDC has partnered with locally based organizations who will actively engage with businesses to increase workforce participation and business attraction. Spoke partners will provide recruitment and direct services under the leadership of the Hub. The following organizations have partnered with EMDC on this project:

- Piscataquis County Economic Development Corporation
- Piscataquis Chamber of Commerce
- Moosehead Lake Region Economic Development Corporation
- Helping Hands with Heart working in collaboration with the Maine Highlands Working Communities Challenge Group

EMDC has met with project partners to create individual Spoke work plans. The plans have been approved for each partner, with a contract established to formalize their commitment to this project. Each entity will be responsible for tracking activities including outreach, one-on-one counseling, and workshop events. Project plans directly tie into existing workforce development programs including those managed by EMDC to avoid duplication and enhance the partnerships. Since the launch of the project, three virtual meetings have been held to review program deliverables and upcoming activities. Partners will meet monthly to share program ideas and successes as well as to find areas of collaboration.



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Somerset Economic Development Corp. (SEDC):

Nothing to report yet as contract was signed 12/15/2023. First report due July 2024.

Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC):

Nothing to report yet as contract was signed 12/14/2023. First report due July 2024.

Please contact Ben Sturtevant, DECD's Large Business Development Manager if you have any questions regarding this report.

Sincerely,

Heather Johnson
Commissioner

cc: Ben Sturtevant, Large Business Development Manager, DECD