

Government Results and Opportunity Hearing Brief



During the 2024 session, the Legislature appropriated funding for two Government Results and Opportunity (GRO) fund pilot projects at the Workforce Solutions Department (WSD). As approved by the Legislature, both projects—trades career exploration and youth pre-apprenticeship—were intended to target disengaged and disconnected young adults. New Mexico has about 32 thousand youth ages 16 to 24 who are not in school, working, or in training and the state's youth disconnection rate exceeds the national average. However, the Governor vetoed language requiring the programs target this population, and a recent LFC action plan found that WSD does not target either program to disconnected youth.

Trades Career Exploration (Be Pro Be Proud)

Amount: \$6 million

Purpose: For the implementation of a trades career exploration pilot program ~~targeted toward disconnected and disengaged young adults~~ and evaluation of employment outcomes of participants.

The trades career exploration pilot program, known as Be Pro Be Proud, is a semi-truck outfitted with virtual reality career stations that travels across the state to promote various careers in the skilled trades. The truck and accompanying website identify labor market information for these careers, as well as information about training programs. The GRO funding supplements a \$5 million American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) appropriation that established the program, providing ongoing operational support.

The pilot program seeks to inspire participants to pursue a career path in one of the skilled trades. However, the agency does not track higher education or career outcomes for individuals who experience career exposure through the travelling exhibit, making evaluation of the pilot program's success challenging. WSD collects output information, including the number of participants (about 13.6 thousand in FY25 and FY26), number of individuals who provide emails to receive follow-up information (roughly 3.5 thousand in FY25), and the number of tour stops the truck makes (91 in FY25). Such outputs do not demonstrate whether participants ultimately pursue a career path in the skilled trades. Although WSD was able to identify 71 participants who later went into a pre-apprenticeship or registered apprenticeship program, the agency does not systematically collect information that allows for rigorous evaluation of program effectiveness. As the recent LFC action plan found, WSD also does not collect education or employment information necessary to determine whether the program is serving disengaged or disconnected youth.

Questions for Consideration:

- What is WSD's plan for rigorous evaluation demonstrating a causal relationship between the program and education and employment

AGENCY: Workforce Solutions Department

DATE: July 21, 2026

PURPOSE OF HEARING: Review of 2024 GRO pilot projects

WITNESS: Sarita Nair, Secretary, WSD

PREPARED BY: Carlie Malone

EXPECTED OUTCOME: Informational

Appropriation Progress At-A-Glance	
Evaluation Plan Submitted	Yes
Percent Expended	
Year 1	100%
Year 2	90.6%
Outcomes Tracked and Reported	No

outcomes? To evaluate program effectiveness, could WSD collect additional information from participants to facilitate data matching across higher education and employment records?

- Can WSD report the percent of students who request follow-up which the agency connects to programs of interest?
- How many participants enroll in a trades program, receive a trade certification, or ultimately work in a trades sector?

Youth Pre-Apprenticeship

Amount: \$1.8 million **Purpose: To implement and evaluate youth ~~re-employment, apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs targeted towards disengaged and disconnected young adults who are currently unemployed or at risk of being unemployed and are not currently enrolled in high school.~~**

Appropriation Progress At-A-Glance	
Evaluation Plan Submitted	Yes
Percent Expended	
Year 1	100%
Year 2	83%
Outcomes Tracked and Reported	Some

The Pre-Apprenticeship Opportunity Program (POP) is intended to create career pathways for youth and young adults 16-24 years old by providing on-the-job training in marketable occupations. WSD partners with over 200 employers, acting as the employer of record for participants and paying the state minimum wage, to provide youth with up to 400 hours of work-based experience that may result in full time employment, apprenticeships, or an improved skill set for future employment. Participating employers span thirteen sectors and include the welding, carpentry, and electrician trades. The GRO funding supplements a \$5 million ARPA appropriation that established the program, and funding totals about \$1.2 million per year across funding sources.

The program seeks to improve employment and labor force participation rates in New Mexico by creating a talent pipeline for youth and connecting them with employers. As with Be Pro Be Proud, the recent LFC action plan found that WSD does not collect education or employment information necessary to determine whether the program is serving disengaged or disconnected youth. However, WSD has collected information about subsequent employment for participants and identified participants who also engaged with Be Pro Be Proud. Of the 689 pre-apprenticeship participants partially or completely funded by GRO in FY25 and FY26:

- 20 (2.9 percent) entered a registered apprenticeship program after completing the pre-apprenticeship program;
- 347 (50.4 percent) had wage records in the first quarter of 2026 and, of those, 159 (23 percent) worked in same industry as their pre-apprenticeship; and
- 76 (11 percent) toured the Be Pro Be Proud truck either before, during, or after their pre-apprenticeship.

WSD does not currently track information related to higher education outcomes but reports that the agency is working on possible approaches for matching pre-apprenticeship records with higher education data. Notably, although WSD has reported some educational and training outcomes for participants, the agency's current approach cannot identify whether those outcomes are attributable to the pre-apprenticeship program. WSD could consider constructing a comparison group of youth with similar characteristics (e.g. age, school enrollment, prior

employment, etc.) to engage in a quasi-experimental analysis of the effectiveness of the program.

Questions for Consideration:

- Can the agency collect and report information from participants to determine whether they are disengaged or disconnected before participation?
- Can the agency identify an evaluation approach to determine a causal link between the program and education and employment outcomes?