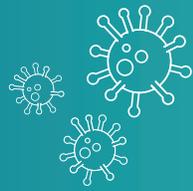


Mechanisms to Increase Local and Tribal Public Health Staffing Capacity for the COVID-19 Pandemic Response



Local and tribal public health agencies in Montana vary widely in terms of their staffing. Before the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic, it was estimated that more than half of the Montana local and tribal health departments (HDs) employed fewer than 5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) and only three employed more than 50 FTEs.¹ A recent study conducted by the Montana Public Health Institute (Institute) in collaboration with the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, indicated nearly every HD has had to increase their staff capacity in some way.² This has been done by reassigning existing staff, hiring additional permanent staff, hiring temporary employees and contractors, and using volunteers.

This brief is intended to provide information about potential options for local and tribal public health agencies to continue to develop and maintain staffing capacity for the pandemic response.

Hiring Temporary Employees through Local Governments

Many units of government have a mechanism in place to hire temporary employees directly. These employees are expected to retain their positions only for a limited time period, typically not to exceed 12 months. It is made clear in the hiring process that they are not eligible for permanent status and will be terminated at the end of the established employment period.

Health departments wishing to explore this possibility should contact their Human Resource Department if they have one, and if not, whomever handles human resource issues for their jurisdiction.

After consultation with its local human resource authority, if a HD receives permission to hire a temporary employee(s), but needs assistance writing a job description or advertising the position, the Institute has a Technical Assistance Team that may be able to assist. If you would like to discuss this possibility, please contact the Institute at hillary.hanson@mtphi.org or 406-249-6357.

Use of Temporary Employment Agencies

Temporary employees can also be hired through third party employment agencies. The employer of these individuals is the employment agency, not the organization for which they are performing the services. Typically, the time period during which they are employed is flexible and can be ended at any time their services are no longer desired. These agencies add a fee to the hourly wage of the temporary staff to cover their services.

There are a number of third party employment agencies in Montana. A few provide services statewide, while most operate more locally or regionally. In order to explore this option, a health department would need to contact one or more employment agencies with information about the specific job duties they need fulfilled, as well as the qualifications of the individuals they are hoping to engage. See the next page for a list of temporary employment agencies. Please note this list may not be comprehensive, but includes those that were easily identifiable on-line.

The Institute is also willing to assist HDs in working with temporary employment agencies. If you would like to discuss this possibility, please contact the Institute at hillary.hanson@mtphi.org or 406-249-6357.

Use of Independent Contractors

Independent contractors are hired to perform a specific job or task. Contractors are not employees, rather, they are in business for themselves. Government entities hiring contractors should assure the contractors are certified as independent contractors by the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, have a business entity registered with the Office of the Montana Secretary of State, and that they have commercial liability insurance. These are typically required to protect a government entity from having a contractor file a wage and benefit claim. Health departments should consult their jurisdiction's procurement procedures before hiring an independent contractor.

AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers

AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers (VISTAs) can be used to build capacity in public agencies. VISTAs are often younger adults interested in gaining experience in the workplace and are assigned to serve full time for one year. Many VISTAs have served in local and tribal public health agencies in Montana, and currently there are a number who are assisting with the pandemic response.

If you would like to discuss the possibility of having a VISTA placed with your health department, please contact the Institute at hillary.hanson@mtphi.org or 406-249-6357.

Assistance through Montana Disaster and Emergency Services (DES)

The Montana Disaster and Emergency Services Division has provided some staff support to local HDs. To learn more about what is available and to request support, contact your local primary DES coordinator. <http://readyandsafe.mt.gov/Emergency/DES-Coordinators-Map>

Temporary Employment Agencies

A2Z Staffing Solutions

Helena, MT
(406) 443-7664
[Serve primarily Helena area, but may assist elsewhere]

Adecco Staffing

Billings, MT - (406) 652-7644
[Serve primarily larger cities]

Advanced Employment

Billings, MT - (406) 652-8808
[Serve Billings area]

Big Sky Staffing

Bozeman, MT
(406) 551-0008
[Serve Bozeman area]

Express Employment Professionals

Helena, MT - (406) 442-7501
Missoula, MT - (406) 542-0323
Great Falls, MT - (406) 761-3027
Butte, MT - (406) 723-6531
Bozeman, MT - (406) 587-0388
Billings, MT - (406) 252-5050
[May serve areas outside of these cities, call the nearest to you]

LC Staffing

Bozeman, MT - (406) 582-8795
Missoula, MT - (406) 542-3377
Kalispell, MT - (406) 752-0191
[Serve primarily these cities and surrounding areas, but may assist elsewhere]

Career Concepts

Bozeman, MT - (406) 586-0235
[Serve Bozeman area]

Spherion

Butte, MT - (406) 782-1130
Billings - (406) 655-9200
Kalispell - (406) 407-7300
[Serve primarily these cities and surrounding areas, but may assist elsewhere]

Westaff

Helena, MT - (406) 443-7169
[Place temporary employees statewide]



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Endnotes

¹ 2020 Survey of Montana Lead Local Public Health Officials, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Public Health and Safety Division.

² A Plan to Address Local and Tribal Public Health System Needs Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Montana Public Health Institute et al, November 2020