

\$4.5M grant program to expand apprenticeships in New Jersey

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TRENTON — Hoping to build a qualified workforce to take on the jobs of the 21st Century, the state administration announced \$4.5 million in grant funding to expand apprenticeship opportunities.

“In my mind, there is almost no industry sector that wouldn’t benefit from a robust apprenticeship program,” said New Jersey Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo in a news release Wednesday.

According to the state, the grant program called the Growing Apprenticeships in Nontraditional Sectors, or GAINS, is focused on creating apprenticeship opportunities in high-growth fields like advanced manufacturing, renewable energy, IT, health care, and life sciences.

Rhonda Lowery, executive director of the Atlantic County Workforce Development Board, said she sees many opportunities in the region where the grant money would be useful, especially at the Federal Aviation Administration Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township, a major employer in the region, but also at schools and smaller businesses.

For Atlantic County, which has among the highest unemployment rates in the United States according to federal labor data, Lowery sees a chance to both mold and grow the workforce.

“Some of the employers here talk about us not having the workforce that’s needed for the future, so this may be a way for us to customize it,” she said, through either building new curricula to train employees or modifying existing ones.

Lowery said her organization is very interested in applying for the grant.

The grant is open not only to potential employers and employment services, but also to educational institutions including county vocational schools and two and four-year colleges.

“Obtaining this grant will allow us to work with business partners in possible apprenticeship programs in Healthcare, Hospitality, and STEM,” said Atlantic Cape Community College spokeswoman Laura Batchelor.

She said the college is excited about the opportunity and is currently reviewing the grant along with potential partners.

Gov. Phil Murphy has been promoting apprenticeship for many months. In June, he advanced plans to create the New Jersey Apprenticeship Network to promote paid apprenticeships and create a deeper connection between educational institutions and the business sector.

According to the state, the grant will offset costs for businesses who invest in their workers through quality on-the-job training and classroom instruction. The grant is administered through the U.S. Department of Labor and

the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development's new Office of Apprenticeship. The office will assist businesses with the logistics of expanding and training.

Applications are being accepted starting Oct. 26. A technical workshop for interested applicants will be held Nov. 5. More information is available at nj.gov/labor.