

MORE APPRENTICES

DOL to expand program through grant

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Thanks to an \$800,000 State Expansion grant, the Guam Department of Labor is now working to expand the registered apprenticeship program by 20 percent over the next year, according to director Sam Mabini.

This latest federal grant specifically targets the expansion of pre-apprenticeships by focusing on youth and low-income people. According to Mabini, the labor department wants to add 100 new apprentices in the first year, and then continue funding the program to add 200 the second year, and 200 again during the third year, "resulting in a 100 percent expansion."

Of the grant funds, \$700,000 is allotted for the apprenticeship training budget and is divided per industry, based on the number of anticipated new apprentices, Mabini said. That budget covers costs, work gear, transportation vouchers, ID cards and health certificates, among other support services, for apprentices who enroll.

The remaining \$100,000 is automatically designated by the federal government for administration of the grant, Mabini said.

The grant, offered under the new federal ApprenticeshipUSA initiative, marks the first time the federal government has offered direct funding to expand and strengthen state apprenticeship programs. Out of the 37 recipients of the grant, Guam is the only U.S. territory.

According to Mabini, the award is the next rung in a ladder of grant funding the labor department has been working to construct. In September, the labor department was awarded \$2,166,119 for the Reemployment and System Integration National Dislocated Worker Grant.



These two awards alone, not counting the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) grant funds that support the Guam American Job Center, total nearly \$3 million awarded to the labor department this year.

"We are proud to be recognized as a territory that is deserving of these funds to carry out local and regional workforce initiatives," Mabini said. "This is an educational and training opportunity like no other. Participants will have the opportunity to earn a salary while learning the skills necessary to succeed in high-demand careers in Guam."

Mabini said pre-apprenticeship models do currently exist on Guam, but they will be improved through focused partnerships. Partnering with the Guam Department of Education, the labor department will specifically focus on attracting students currently enrolled in a credit recovery program.

"Based on their assessment tests, these students, who are seniors and have yet to attain the credits needed to graduate from high school, will be placed into training programs with Allied Health, construction, hospitality and telecommunications Industries," Mabini said. "Students will receive vocational training

and acquire practical knowledge through on-the-job training."

Mabini added that pre-apprenticeship programs will also expand to include "participants in the public assistance programs, individuals with disabilities and other under-represented populations on the island."

There are currently 540 active apprentices with 73 employer sponsors in 86 apprentice trades, according to a June 2016 Apprenticeship Training Program Report from Guam Community College.

Given long-term occupation projections, Mabini said, Guam will need to increase the number of enrolled apprentices over the next three years.

That need, coupled with recent obstructions in the flow of H-2B visas granted to skilled foreign laborers, is why the labor department is looking for ways to continue funding growth of the apprenticeship program beyond the 18 months of initial funding covered by the grant.

According to Mabini, the labor department forecasts spending \$1,400,000 per year for years two and three of the projected expansion.

She believes that the main way this expansion can be funded, apart from federal funds, is through local involvement.

PDN FILE PHOTO

Kindo Electric, Inc. President Kenneth Leon Guerrero works with journeyman apprentice Mary Jo Quenga at a job site in Hagåtña on August 2010. The Guam Department of Labor is working to expand the apprenticeship program by 20 percent over the next year.

"It is important that we as a community embrace and recognize that education and training is a necessary investment," Mabini said. "Our island leaders, private and public, should partner in providing the necessary resources to continue and sustain apprenticeship and other work-based models. Why? Because they work."

Mabini said if the labor department can use local funding, public-private partnerships or possibly the Manpower Development Fund, "then federal funds would just augment what our community is committed to supporting."

Currently, the Guam Contractors Association, GCA Trades Academy, Guam Hotel and Restaurant Association, Guam Community College, Guam Department of Education and Guam Medical Association partner with the labor department to sponsor registered apprenticeships.

GCA Trades Academy director Herbert Johnston hopes to see expansion in both the number of apprentices and the number of employers sponsoring them.

"The challenge is getting people interested. That's where this pre-apprenticeship program comes in - it allows young students to experience it so that they can try it out before their full apprenticeship," Johnston said. "We need to get more and more people into trades, especially with the situation with labor. It takes a while to get skilled, so we have to start somewhere."



Mabini