



January 8, 2024

Honorable Tara Nethercott
Honorable Bob Nicholas
Joint Appropriations Committee
200 West 24th Street, Capitol Building, E201
Cheyenne, WY 82002

Re: Wyoming Innovation Partnership (Letter # 3)

Dear Chairwoman Nethercott, Chairman Nicholas and members of the Joint Appropriations Committee,

For the last two years, the Wyoming Legislature has supported the Wyoming Innovation Partnership (WIP) to better support communities throughout the state to address workforce needs. WIP is a collaboration to align education and workforce development and support innovation, entrepreneurship, and research to help drive Wyoming's economy. The initiative supports economic growth and diversification and builds a highly skilled, ambitious, and qualified workforce by linking community goals with the state's economic strategy. This partnership is data-driven to ensure a return on investment for the people of Wyoming. The novel partnership will create a better understanding of how effectively our educational programs are aligning with the needs of industry, workforce, and our overall educational system.

A total of \$55,000,000 has gone to WIP over the past two years. This enabled real progress in preparing for tomorrow's workforce needs across the state. The first two phases of WIP addressed data-identified workforce gaps that included energy; tourism and hospitality; healthcare; manufacturing; digital infrastructure and technology; and agriculture. Specifically, Phase I focused on laying the foundation and launching collaborative programs. Phase II - currently underway - is a larger effort focusing on significant workforce development programming, research and innovation.

The successes of WIP should not be undersold. For the first time ever the University of Wyoming and the state's eight community colleges, as well as the Wyoming Business Council, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services and the Wyoming Department of Education are working to align education, workforce development and industry to support Wyoming's economic development needs. Further, we are seeing an increase in the return on investment as students graduate, enter the workforce and earn high wages. WIP is also supporting business start-up and expansion in Wyoming.

A few notable specific successes from the investment in WIP include:

- Wyoming's first applied software development degree through a partnership with Sheridan College and the University of Wyoming. Phase II is expanding this program to Western Wyoming Community College and Northwest College.

- Students graduating into the Wyoming workforce from the WIP-enabled Powerline Technology program at Western Wyoming Community College.
- A robust slate of healthcare training including an echocardiology program at Laramie County Community College and EMS training at Casper College, Northwestern Wyoming College, and Laramie County Community College and expansion of nursing training at Gillette College, Western Wyoming Community College, and Laramie County Community College.
- Four new innovative programs for entrepreneurs to access and navigate support to ensure their businesses can launch and thrive in Wyoming, including a career and technical education (CTE) program, a certificate program, an associate's degree program, and a bachelor's degree program. Phase II adds programming to support the creative economy along with an innovation hub pilot.
- Programs aimed to invigorate and support Wyoming's agricultural industry, such as precision agriculture, controlled environment agriculture, and ranchland management and agricultural leadership programming.

As WIP moves into Phase III, the focus will be on evaluating sustainability to the developed programing and further coordinating efforts for long-term culture change. Data and metrics will continue to guide decisions and collaboration will support solidifying strategies to help Wyoming and our communities thrive long-term. It is the vision we invested in during the last budget session, and seeing that through is important for Wyoming's workforce and future.

I am requesting \$30,000,000 in one-time general funds to ensure the transition to long-term sustainability of WIP; \$20,000,000 in FY 25 and \$10,000,000 in FY 26. Up to \$400,000 of this request may support one or more at-will employee contract positions split within the 100 series and the 900 series as necessary to administer, monitor and report on WIP. I do not plan to request additional money for WIP after this biennium, but plan to have state entities embed their WIP programs in their existing budgets or seek private and federal funding for these programs.

This biennium request is essential to ensure WIP's sustainability and solidification within the higher education structure that is being embedded across our systems. This will lead to the on-going development of opportunities for people to stay and succeed in our great state – and a strong relationship between industry and higher education that will continue to work together to meet tomorrow's demands.

Thank you for your consideration of this important and timely request.

Sincerely,



Mark Gordon
Governor

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