



## **MEDA Remote/Telework Working Group**

### **April 11, 2019**

### **10:30am**

**On the Zoom call: Anne Boothe, Mary Craigle, Lisa Haas, Paul Tuss, Sarah Calhoun, Tori Matejovsky, Rhonda Huseby, Tom Kaiserski, Christina Henderson, Ann Marie Robinson, Liz Ching, Dan Brunell, Liz Moore, Kev Campbell, Sean Becker, Brent Donnelly, Liz Marchi, Barbara Stiffarm, Julie Emmons, Diane Smith, and Gloria O'Rourke.**

#### **1. Welcome and roll call**

Gloria read a list of attendees; Anne Boothe welcomed everyone to the call.

#### **2. Brief overview of how we got to this point**

Anne Boothe gave background information on how today's meeting came about. Following the spring MEDA meeting in Dillon, a group formed an ad hoc committee to focus on Remote Work issues for Montana. The group compiled a statement paper that Anne shared. As interest in remote work opportunity grows and the impact on communities is realized, the MEDA Remote Work Working Group was formed.

#### **3. Chair and MEDA's Role**

- a. Anne agreed to Chair this group but would appreciate a Co-Chair.
- b. Role of MEDA

Gloria provided an overview of MEDA's role:

- Note taker, meeting organizer, webpage updated
- MEDA Board in communication loop
- MEDA Board is to be informed and involved in any official action involving the committee.
- No need to be a member of MEDA to be a part of our working groups

#### **4. Updates and Sharing:**

- **Russ Fletcher**, MATR - Russ could not make the meeting but was asked to contribute and provided the following: *I think the most valuable project would be to provide a way for those in the gig and remote economy, those interested in it and businesses involved to better communicate with each other to share info and insights. An open forum to build a community to provide a crucial element that many would be unable to enjoy as remote employees. Ideas on how to increase and improve this workforce will flow from these discussions.*
- **Dan Brunell**, Montana Chamber of Commerce/Foundation – Make Montana Home. Part of the Chamber's Strategic Plan is to focus on several initiatives, one of which is the remote worker and reviving a private statewide recruitment website titled Make Montana Home. Another purpose is to identify the holes that are out there: rural communities fall through the gap, so a templated website that basically gives a digital presence to a community is provided. The pilot project is the City of Glendive. These websites are not meant to compete with existing websites but to fill a gap. The Chamber is also trying to identify skills certificates in each area by partnering with ACT testing which identifies careers and life skills. Dan shared an overview of a study as to how students learn differently in cities vs rural. Liz Marchi encouraged everyone to visit the [Make Montana Home](https://glendive.makemontanahome.org/) website. She receives questions daily regarding finding remote work. Still a work in progress; <https://glendive.makemontanahome.org/>

- **Paul Tuss**, Bear Paw Development Corporation – Hi-Line “model” prospect  
Paul met with Opportunity Link, Bear Paw, and Triangle Communications to compile an unsuccessful grant application to a foundation to address the rural worker shortage. Between 2000 and 2015 the number of jobs in MT grew by 20% but the growth happened in 5 counties, none of which are in rural areas. The three parts to the application included: holding a stakeholder workshop to drill down to the problems and solutions, hiring a consultant to work on a tool kit, assist with branding the remote work in rural Montana, and compile a video for future use, including a web-based platform for targeted markets. While the grant was not successful, the group continues to move forward with community meetings and information sharing. The first meeting will be held next month.
- **Rhonda Huseby**, Bureau Chief Department of Labor  
Rhonda offered Montana Job Service offices to lend assistance or information. She said the job coaching site is changing. Montana Works database system used by the state currently does not indicate if a position could be offered to a remote worker. It is hoped the new site will provide this option. Rhonda also asked everyone to include Job Service in their local meetings.
- **Christina Henderson**, Montana High Tech Jobs Alliance  
Christina reported remote work has been a focus of the High-Tech Alliance for some time. Three trends the group is seeing: A. Opportunities for individual workers that allow them to move to Montana. For example, a board member had a career in Silicon Valley but when youngest child left home, they moved to Columbia Falls, MT and brought her job with her. The board member is now working for Oracle. This impacts rural communities. B. Montana companies are able to leverage remote work to grow and maintain their workforce. For example, if there is a good worker, companies are letting the individual remain in Montana. Montana companies are also hiring workers out of state to work remotely for Montana companies. C. Distributed offices. Companies are opening offices in various communities due to a remote worker presence. Companies have found talent and let them live where they want, and also expand their company.

On the problem side, Montana companies are seeing employees lost because great workers are being recruited remotely. Someone hiring will allow someone to live in Montana and work in California, for example, which takes an employee out of the Montana talent pool.

- **Introduction and Remote Work interest/ideas from those on the call**
  - ★ Lisa is a Remote Worker in Choteau. Lisa works for Cognizant which is a growing company expecting to use remote workers. Lisa recommends leveraging LinkedIn more to attract workforce.
  - ★ Sarah Calhoun reported on White Sulphur Springs and remote workers involved in Red Ants Pants.
  - ★ Mary Craigle and Sean Becker commented on Opportunity Zones and bringing remote workers to the attention of Opportunity Zone projects.
  - ★ Liz Moore, Montana Nonprofit Association, said MNA has been developing the next generation of leaders and talent attraction is key. MNA is also launching a nonprofit innovation project which would increase capacity from a tech perspective.
  - ★ Julie Emmons has been a remote worker since 2007; she also manages a ranch with her husband. Her son-in-law is able to work remotely and come home. The challenges: high speed network and direct flights out.
  - ★ Liz Marchi suggested this group have a panel of four to five telecommuters during the Innovate Montana Symposium this October. Liz is willing to serve as facilitator with questions asked such as: what do you do, how did you get your job, where do you live, what is easy about remote work and what is hard. In addition, Liz thinks a panel is needed on broadband in Montana with Diane Smith, Geoff Feiss, and small telco CEOs to spur innovation.
  - ★ Gloria reported on hearing of the importance of Remote Work opportunities when conducting Community Reviews around the state. Choteau recently held a Listening Session just for Remote Workers. Those who attended were surprised at who (and how many) others were working remotely in Choteau.

- ★ Barbara Stiffarm, Opportunity Link. In conducting the regional meetings for the grant Paul mentioned, it was learned that people at home do not have the equipment that is needed. Community members are very interested in keeping talent at home through remote work. Education is needed to convince employers to hire remote workers and learn of their skills and talent. Education is also needed for individuals to get in to the remote role. Kev noted older workers are also wanting to engage remotely to have a retirement income.
- ★ Tori Matejovsky, Great Northern Development Corporation, asked the group to consider posting policy resources. Tori has used Associated Employers out of Billings to assist with policies.

**5. Action Items and Follow up:** Specific action, person responsible, deadline, consensus

- a. Create a document vault that includes policy resources for 1) employers who want to allow/encourage remote workers, 2) home offices, 3) job postings, 4) the documents that this group has circulated and wants to share. There were several entities that offered to host this, consensus was to start with MEDA.
- b. HB405 - Catch and keep bill. Anne encouraged everyone to review the bill as funding may be available to Remote Workers.
- c. Review and determine next steps for Advancing Remote Work in Montana (document/white paper). It was suggested to send out this document as a press release. The document was created for a telecommunications meeting but was not presented.
- d. Federal policy changes (which are nowhere near to being activated) are needed to improve broadband in underserved areas. The free market is not going to solve the problem. This group could draw attention to those areas who are underserved.
- e. Invite Jason Smith to be involved with this group.
- f. Consider the USDA Reconnect program. Sean noted Montana is 50<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states for rural “last mile” connections.
- g. Plan to have two panels at Innovate Montana this October, in Butte; see Liz Marchi’s comments above.
- h. Send Gloria information and resources to be posted on the MEDA Remote Work Working Group webpage.
- i. Everyone could join the [Montana Telecommuters Facebook page](#).

**6. Next meeting – to be determined.**