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# Radford organization gets \$6 million to train SWVa workers

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The U.S. Department of Labor has set aside \$6 million to fund a Radford-based organization promising to help disadvantaged workers across Southwest Virginia get the training and jobs they need.

The New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board will spread the money across more than 30 counties and cities, from Bristol to Botetourt, over the next four years in a new program called "Pathways to the American Dream."

Some of the funds will go toward traditional workforce training projects, such as hiring career coaches that will work hands-on with unemployed and underemployed workers, as well as those who have a job but lack the training required for promotion.

Pathways hopes to keep those funds flexible, so it can help individuals with whatever they require, whether that's tuition for a training course, tools they need on the job site or fees for certification exams, according to Workforce Development Board Director Marty Holliday.

Other programs will take a more systematic approach, such as partnering with the region's employers to figure out where there are gaps in the local workforce that can be plugged with worker retraining. The program will focus on the information technology, health care and advanced manufacturing industries.

One of the goals Holliday said she's most excited about is a new system that she hopes will make it possible for

workers going back to school to get college credit for training they've already received, whether that's on-the-job learning or certifications they picked up along the way.

"Don't make them start at zero. They came with something," Holliday said. "People kind of weave in and out of work and training, work and training. How do we ensure they can continue to move up? The only way to do that is to give credit for prior learning, wherever that took place."

The Southwest Virginia award was one of 23 America's Promise grants announced by the U.S. Department of Labor this month, totaling more than \$111 million.

Holliday said the next step is for the Workforce Development Board to meet with DOL officials to negotiate the finer points of Pathways' budget and to set benchmarks in order to judge the program's effectiveness.

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