

Budget 2009-2010

Federal Funding

The OVAE has found that due to administrative error, Montana ABLE has been receiving overpayment since 2003. Since we were unintentionally overpaid, we are being held harmless. This means we will not have to pay the money back, but funds will be reduced by 10% annually until our allocation is correct.

The funding formula, which was designed by a task force of program directors, is being implemented this year. The allocation spreadsheet that was distributed at the directors' meeting in January was a projection for the FY 2010. It is important to understand the projection did not include the 17.5 percent state administration/leadership allocation (money required by law for state level activities) or the 10% decrease in federal dollars. With 27.5% less dollars to distribute to the field, it is impossible to fund local programs this year with a 10% maximum decrease and 17% maximum increase, which was proposed by the task force. The maximum decrease for this year will be 25% with the maximum increase of 3.69%.

Preparing Your Budget Based on Current Resources

Program allocations are currently being determined. I understand you are being asked to do more with less, and I applaud your innovation and ideas on ways to maintain service. With diminishing resources, this may not be the time to focus on expanding and building capacity. There are some major things to think about as you prepare your budget for the upcoming program year. I respectfully submit that program expansion is not encouraged. We do not want to lose sight of our mission. It is a conflict, but equity and sustainability of all programs is a state priority for our students and future funding. In times of financial stress, it is easy to lose sight of our mission, slip into survival mode, and stop considering the needs of others. But, if we can adhere to our philosophies and beliefs, we can build the case for future funding and necessary services.

Future Federal Allocation

Since Montana is in hold harmless, we can infer that without reauthorization there will be another cut in the federal allocation next year.

State Allocation

The state allocation has remained the same, and all state dollars will be distributed according to the formula.

Charging Student Fees

Talking about charging fees for service is extremely serious, and we need to have input from the entire field. We need to define our mission; ABLE has been a free service. The ramifications of charging fees need to be discussed, and consensus needs to be reached. We need to carefully analyze not only the students we serve, but the impact this would have on our partner agencies, our communities, our future, and on other ABLE

programs. Additionally, the guiding principle of the formula funding task force was to design a fair and equitable formula for distributing funds to promote consistency and equity across the programs.

Distance Learning

We need to also discuss distance learning at this time. Those of you that are currently distance learning providers must also determine the future role of distance delivery. In your distance learning application, you said you would implement distance learning with existing resources. Distance learning is in its infancy in Montana ABLE, and it is important to continue with fidelity to your initial application and focused vision. If this proves unrealistic, changes can be implemented in the 2010-2011 program year. Remember we are only three months into implementation. I strongly urge you to review the policy, your application, memos, and conference call summaries. This is to be the year for building the infrastructure for GED Online.

Distance Learning For 2010-2011

By our fall conference, the information from your mid-year distance learning evaluations will be compiled to guide our discussion regarding the future of GED Online. Following the conference, you will have the opportunity to apply to be a distance learning provider for the second year. Modifications to your GED Online delivery may be included in your renewal application. According to policy, you must reapply to be a distance learning provider each year. If you feel that you cannot sustain distance learning with your existing resources, you may need to "stop out" for a year. If you determine you want to continue distance delivery, the state model and state initiative remain the same for this year; distance delivery is for GED Online students with the ability to count supplemental curriculum Skills Tutor, Nova Net, or Plato for the GED Online students only. Distance delivery at this point, is not about capturing hours in supplemental curriculum for traditional students. Online curriculum is approved by the state, so it is important to remember that these supplemental curricula will be reviewed at our fall meeting, and may not be approved in the upcoming program year.

The contract with Missouri GED Online is currently for 100 students, they will allow us to go over slightly, with the understanding that students are dropped from GED Online after two weeks of inactivity. The limited number of seats reflects our very focused, small state initiative to build the distance learning infrastructure that we will build on in future years. GED Online, implemented with fidelity according to your applications, will provide data on how we worked with partner agencies and employers to help their clients and employees attain a GED.

Planning for the Future

Our future hinges on reauthorization. So I propose two scenarios.

Reauthorization: We will be preparing for the new RFP next year, and business as we are doing it now will no longer matter.

No reauthorization:

1. August-September: Directors' meeting in to review ABLE mission and how we will address increased demands with shrinking resources.
2. October: Expand funding formula committee to review funding allocations for 2010-2011.
3. October: Directors' meeting to review formula.

Uniting For the Future

Reauthorization or no reauthorization, we are going to work on increased funding; I am bringing in Art Ellison to help you develop a plan that will work. You need to bring a team to data quality ready to move into action. This is bigger than state advocacy, bigger than the MAACE board, bigger than your local program; it is going to take all of us and a plan. Reauthorization or not, we need to work on state funding.

I recommend you hold fast to what you have been doing for this year and prepare to work together in the next program year.