



OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS

**U.S. Department
of the Interior**

www.doi.gov/oia
News Release

Date: April 28, 2015

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas

Interior Provides \$310,000 Grant for *Connecting Youth to Jobs*
Public-Private Initiative in Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Trains Youth and Expands Citizen Workforce in Growing Tourism Economy

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 28, 2015) – Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia’aina has awarded \$310,000 from the Office of Insular Affairs’ Technical Assistance Program to a public-private project that connects high school aged students to private-sector careers in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The joint project co-sponsored by the Public School System and the Chambers of Commerce of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota will help expand the citizen workforce through co-operative education and on-the-job training that will lead to employment in CNMI’s growing tourism economy.

“I applaud Commissioner of Education Rita Sablan and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Public School System for working with the Chamber of Commerce and public high schools to provide job training opportunities for CNMI youth,” said Assistant Secretary Esther Kia’aina. “As the CNMI considers long-term workforce needs through increased immigration to meet the demand of its growing tourism industry, it is important to ensure that they do everything possible to develop and implement a local workforce development strategy.”

The *Connecting Youth to Jobs* program begins with a rigorous college and career-focused curriculum along with co-operative education, job shadowing, and on-the-job training where students earn as they learn and graduate from high school career-ready. Recent data from the CNMI show that more than fifty percent of jobs in the private sector are held by non-resident workers. The goal of this program is to increase the U.S. citizen workforce through linking youth to jobs in the CNMI as part of preparing them to be college and career ready. Projections show that across a ten-year period of youth training, 3,000 youth will be employed in the private sector which would be more than ten percent of the current labor force.

The Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas carries out the Secretary's responsibilities for the U.S. territories, including American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Additional responsibilities include administration and oversight of federal assistance provided to the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, and Palau under the Compacts of Free Association.

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