



Vermont Department of Labor

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Annual Statewide Performance Report Narrative

Program Year 2021

Submitted by:

Sarah Buxton, State Director
Workforce Development Division
Vermont Department of Labor

December 1, 2022

Vermont Department of Labor

Workforce Development Division Leadership

Michael Harrington, Commissioner,
Vermont Department of Labor
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Michael.Harrington@Vermont.gov,

Sarah Buxton, State Director
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Sarah.Buxton@Vermont.gov

Jane Fortin, Assistant Director,
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Jane.Fortin@Vermont.gov

Kristen Rengo, State Monitor Advocate
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Kristen.Rengo@vermont.gov

Theresa Hunt
Performance and Reporting Manager
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Theresa.Hunt@Vermont.gov,

Tracy Verge
WIOA Program Administrator
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Tracy.Verge@Vermont.gov

Cindy Robillard, Business Services Manager
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive
Montpelier, VT 05601
Cindy.Robillard@Vermont.gov

Gerard Miller, Business Process Analyst
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive
Montpelier, VT 05601
Gerard.Miller@Vermont.gov

Jay Ramsey, Assistant Director &
State Director of Registered Apprenticeship,
Workforce Development Division
5 Green Mountain Drive,
Montpelier, VT 05601
Jay.Ramsey@Vermont.gov

Table of Contents

Introduction	.....	4
Vermont’s Workforce Development System	.....	4
Core Program Updates	.....	6
Waivers	.....	11
Effectiveness Serving Employers	.....	12
Customer Satisfaction	.....	13
Progress Update: Achieving the State’s Strategic Vision and Goals		13
Sector Strategies	.....	16
Performance Accountability System	.....	17
State Activities		
• State Reserve Funds	.....	18
• Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion	.....	18
Promising Practices	.....	19
Success Stories	.....	20
Challenges	.....	22
Technical Assistance	.....	23

Introduction

In accordance with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), each state that receives funding under WIOA Title I (Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker Programs) and Title III (Wagner-Peyser Employment Service Programs) must prepare and submit an annual report of performance progress to the U.S. Secretary of Labor. This narrative provides an opportunity for the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) to describe progress toward its strategic vision and goals for the state's workforce system under WIOA.

WIOA became effective in 2016 and is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services so they can succeed in the labor force and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. It also established a structure and relationship between national, state, and local workforce investment activities to increase occupational skill attainment, employment, retention, and earnings while improving the quality, productivity and competitiveness of the workforce and reducing welfare dependency. This Program Year (PY) 2021 WIOA Annual Report provides a summary of Vermont's WIOA Title I and III Programs from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022.

Vermont's Workforce Development System

Vermont has one federally designated One-Stop American Jobs Center (AJC), located in Burlington, and a network of affiliate centers and satellite service locations throughout the state. VDOL staff provide services for WIOA Title I & III, Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG), Foreign Labor Certification (FLC), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Re-employment Services and Eligibility Assessment Program (RESEA), Registered Apprenticeship (RA), and other state and federal programs to jobseekers and employers through Vermont's One-Stop service network. VDOL staff coordinate with state agency partners, education and training providers, and community organizations to deliver a variety of employment and training services to meet the needs of jobseekers and employers wherever they are located.

Strong interagency partnerships exist and are essential in developing and maintaining a successful workforce development delivery system. VDOL works diligently at building, improving, and maintaining collaborations so that the workforce development system stays focused on the same goal: to increase the number and skill level of available workers in Vermont.

Vermont JobLink (VJL) is Vermont's online career, employment, and resource center. It gives job seekers and employers virtual access to many of the services available through the One-Stop network. Users can view current labor market information, research training and education opportunities and resources, explore career pathways, access employment preparation tools, workshops, or information, and post or explore current job postings. VJL also serves as VDOL's case management system and performance tracking and reporting tool. VDOL is in the process of procuring an updated information management system, including our case management and job board applications.

Vermont's One-Stop service delivery system provides self and staff-assisted services so that workers, job seekers, and businesses can locate and access resources to fulfill their employment needs in easy-to-access ways. Services are available virtually at www.VermontJobLink.com or in one of our seven comprehensive or affiliate centers and five satellite service locations around the state. The Department is actively transitioning to a service delivery model that is shaped to assisting customers virtually and in-person where our customers prefer to meet.

Virtually, and in-person, we help individuals use current labor market information and complete assessments of skill level and interests which lead to comprehensive career guidance, host job search workshops, refer individuals to available training and employment opportunities, and provide individualized Title I, TAA, and JVSG services. Veterans receive priority referral to jobs and training as well as special employment services and assistance. In addition, we work with Vermont's one-stop network of workforce service providers to deliver specialized services to individuals with specific barriers to employment – including those with disabilities, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, ex-offenders, youth, minorities, and older workers.

Vermont's Workforce Mission

Governor Phil Scott has made it a top priority of his administration to expand and strengthen Vermont's labor force. He tasked VDOL with leading a cross-agency labor force expansion effort to meet this aim. The three goals the State has set include:

- (1) Increasing the labor force participation rate of Vermonters,**
- (2) Recruit and relocate more workers to Vermont, and**
- (3) Assist employers in accessing and retaining skilled workers.**

In 2021, the Governor reaffirmed the State's vision to create a workforce development system that is a highly visible and accessible network of programs and strategies designed to increase employment, retention, and earnings for all Vermonters. For Program Year 2021, the State's workforce goals were:

Goal 1: Connect Vermonters to the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence

Goal 2: Increase the number of women, veterans, minorities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented people employed in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, advanced manufacturing, and other priority industry sectors in Vermont

Goal 3: Increase the number of Vermonters with barriers to employment who complete high school, earn a post-secondary credential - including an industry-recognized certificate, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary degree program - and become employed in occupations that align with the needs of Vermont's employers.

Goal 4: Improve Vermont's workforce development system by continuously aligning,

adapting, and integrating workforce education and training programs and career and supportive services to meet the needs of all customers

Goal 5: Expand Vermont’s labor force by helping more Vermonters enter the labor market and assisting out-of-state workers in securing employment with Vermont employers and relocating to Vermont.

Goal 6: Connect employers with technical assistance, hiring best practices, and workplace enhancements.

Goal 7: Adapt the current Workforce Development system to pandemic-era realities, by supporting and enhancing remote options for employers and workers and updating physical locations to address safety and accessibility concerns.

Goal 8: Acknowledge additional elements that impact Vermont's workforce system, including housing, childcare, broadband, education and affordability, by taking a more holistic approach and better aligning our workforce goals.

In early 2022, the Department also updated its purpose and principles as follows:

Purpose

The Department of Labor exists to improve the lives of working Vermonters. Together we serve the people and businesses of our great state so all of us can live well, be safe, and experience meaningful employment.

Principles

- Working with an **OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE** mindset
- Providing **COMPASSIONATE SERVICE** to everyone
- Acting with **PROFESSIONALISM** and **INTEGRITY** in all that we do
- Ensuring **EQUITY, ACCESS, and BELONGING** for our staff and our customers

Core Program Updates

Strengthening relationships with community partners to encourage referrals and co-enrollments has been a key priority of PY 2021. Outreach to one-stop and other community partners expanded to help inform those who work with individuals with barriers to employment and other marginalized populations of the service, value, and expertise VDOL core program staff can bring to an individual or their service team for employment support. Services include career awareness and planning, employment readiness skills, education and training opportunities, job placement, support services, and follow-up services. As our partners develop a better understanding of WIOA Title I, III, and the other federal and state programs we administer, we are slowly seeing more consistent referrals. This year, we updated our “rack card” and other promotional material so that partners and prospective customers have refreshed information available in a more easy-to-read and access format.

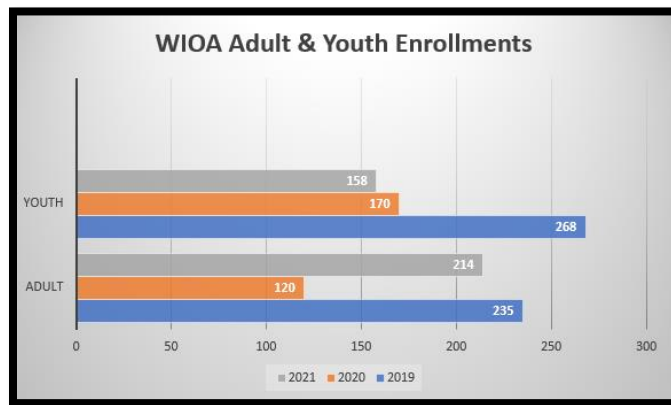
VDOL case managers work one-on-one with participants to provide individualized assessments and determine the appropriate range of goals, services, and support to meet

the participant’s needs. This entails providing comprehensive assessments, reviewing labor market information with the participant, career counseling, creating individual employment plans and if needed, making referrals to other resources outside the department. Case managers focus on transitioning participants into high-wage, high-growth, and demand-driven jobs and ensuring that participants who exit our programs will be successful. We continue to focus on work experiences and on-the-job learning and training models as the most successful way to help individuals meet their employment goals.

Snapshot of Enrollment Trends

In PY 2021, there was a discouraging decrease in WIOA youth enrollments. Case Managers reported that because of the tight labor market and recent wage growth, youth were able to find minimum wage, entry level jobs on their own. Although enrollments were down, case managers provided more intensive case management for youth – including non-WIOA eligible youth who were served with state funds.

Conversely Vermont experienced a significant increase in WIOA adult enrollments during PY 2021. This is likely attributed to the increased outreach, services, and enrollments of New Americans during the program year. Vermont focused heavily on serving new Afghan and Ukrainian refugees. In general, adults were seeking career changes that allowed more flexibility, remote work, and higher paying positions. Overall, 113 adults were provided with occupational skills support, compared to 91 in PY 2020.



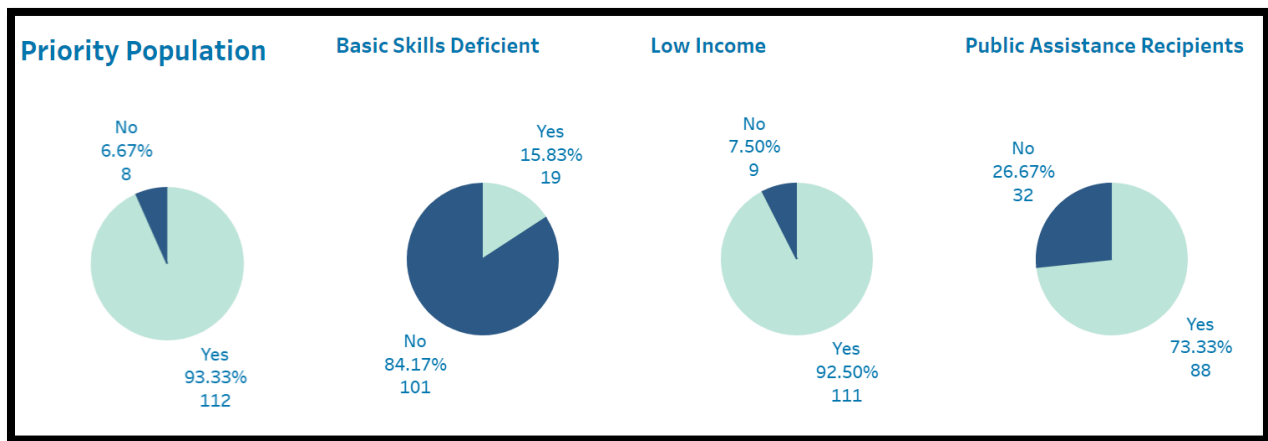
WIOA TITLE 1 - ADULT PROGRAM OUTCOMES

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2021 Goal	PY2021 Actual
Participants Served		214
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	73%	69%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	63.5%	61.3%
Median Earnings	\$6100	\$5884
Credential Attainment	67%	48.2%
Measurable Skill Gains	51.5%	58.1%

The WIOA adult program increases the number and skill level of adults in the workforce, reduces welfare dependency, increases individual economic mobility, and enhances the overall productivity and competitiveness of Vermont’s workforce. The program provides adults with workforce preparation, career preparation & training services, and job placement assistance. These services lead to occupational skill attainment, obtaining industry-recognized credentials, and securing a job with earnings that lead to self-sufficiency.

Case managers can work with any jobseeker over 18, but primarily assist individuals who are low income, in need of employment services, training, or retraining to secure unsubsidized employment. Priority is given to veterans, individuals with disabilities (84.17%), low-income individuals (92.50%), and recipients of public assistance (73.33%).

Snapshot of PY 2021 Recipients of Title I Adult Program Services



WIOA TITLE 1 - DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAM OUTCOMES

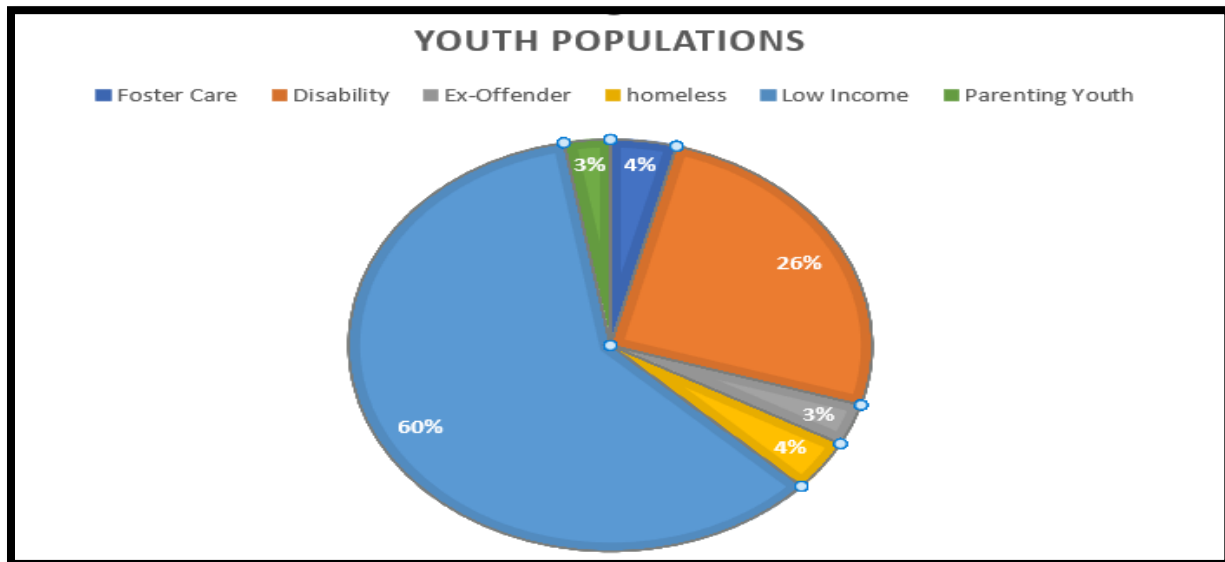
WIOA Performance Measures	PY2021 Goal	PY2021 Actual
Participants Served		36
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	83%	71.1%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	75%	78.4%
Median Earnings	\$10150	\$7952
Credential Attainment	71%	88.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	61%	61.9%

The WIOA dislocated worker program provides employment and training services to workers who have been impacted by business closures, workforce reductions, and natural disasters that lead to job loss. This includes individuals who have lost their jobs, displaced homemakers, and employed workers who have received a notice that they will lose their jobs unless additional training or credentials are secured. The program enhances the skill level, engagement, and competitiveness of Vermont’s workforce while meeting the needs of Vermont employers.

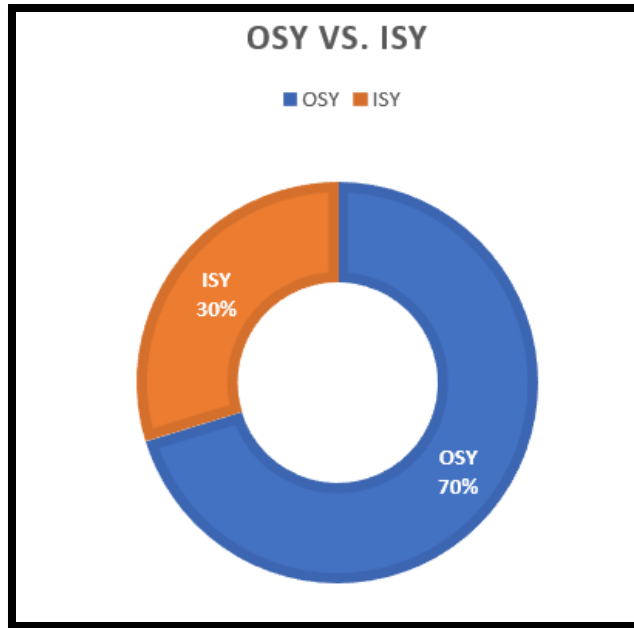
WIOA TITLE 1 – YOUTH PROGRAM OUTCOMES

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2021 Goal	PY2021 Actual
Participants Served		158
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	71.5%	69.7%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	59%	68.1%
Median Earnings	\$4058	\$5187
Credential Attainment	47.9%	31.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	37.5%	49.1%

Vermont continues to prioritize delivery of services to engage disadvantaged youth statewide. Like most of the country, youth labor force participation dropped during the pandemic and is struggling to meet pre-pandemic levels. VDOL has provided case managers with laptops, cell phones, and hot spots to allow for more flexibility in meeting youth where they are at to offer and deliver program services.



Vermont has implemented several strategies to provide services to disadvantaged youth at a high level. For example, to better serve youth with barriers to employment, case managers spend more time addressing the barriers with the participant. This strengthens their relationship and helps them be unified in effort and purpose as they then work toward the participants education and employment goals. This more intensive case management includes establishing short-term and long-term goals, providing guidance and support to the youth as they navigate successful entry into their chosen career pathway. Vermont has found that quality, paid work experiences with case management support for the employer as well as the participant, help to maintain engagement in the program and better employment outcomes. It also helps participants improve self-esteem, increase quality of life, diversify social networks, increase income, and promotes healthier lifestyle choices. Strong collaborations with partner agencies providing mental health, transportation, or economic service supports can help meet the challenges that the youth face during these experiences and is integral in ensuring that they are successful.



Vermont continues to concentrate efforts to increase support “out-of-school” youth as a target population in WIOA I. In PY 2021, Vermont’s WIOA I program served 70% of out-of-school youth (OSY) compared to 30% in-school-youth (ISY). Strategies to increase outreach and participation of OSY include increasing the number of referrals from local youth non-profit organizations, Adult Basic Education (Title II of WIOA), Department of Children & Families, and other youth-related partners.

To ensure that all youth participants consistently have a variety of high-quality services to choose from in deciding which of the 14 program elements they would like to pursue, an online resource library has been created to assist case managers in offering opportunities. This allows effective connections and access to all the program element services to every youth participant that is served across the state. Staff played an integral role in creating this library as they developed, improved, and standardized curriculum resources and welcomed new local service providers to be added to the library or resources and referrals.

TITLE III EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM OUTCOMES

WIOA Performance Measures	PY 2020 Actual	PY 2021 Goal	PY 2021 Actual
Title III Wagner Peyser Program			
Participants Served	2230		2692
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	59.5%	63.5%	53.8%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	52.4%	58%	50%
Median Earnings	\$6,623	\$5,180	\$6875

The employment services that all individuals can access under the Title III Employment Services Program (Wagner-Peyser) include access to local labor market information, career pathway exploration, job search assistance, job referrals, placement assistance, resume and

cover letter writing assistance, mock interviews and interview preparation, work readiness training, and employment retention support. Screenings and assessments are also available to determine appropriate service referrals and help individuals enroll in available employment, training, education, and social assistance programs.

Throughout the PY 2021, services provided through Title III were on the rise since the PY 2020 decline due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Staff returned to working in regional offices and offering “#LaborOnLocation” – or satellite service delivery – at a variety of spaces in each region’s communities. Staff became more adept at using technology to offer virtual workshops, job fairs, hiring events, and virtual one-on-one meetings with job seekers, while also providing in person training and support. New technology also gave staff the opportunity to participate in professional development and training opportunities to enhance their skills as service providers and case managers. The expansion and diversity in training offerings gave staff the ability to connect with colleagues – both virtually and in person. This approach helped staff be more prepared to meet participants where they needed to be met to achieve their goals.

To ensure a greater coordination of service delivery among partners, during PY 2021 staff met on an ongoing basis with our economic services partners representing the Reach-Up Program (TANF) and 3Squares – ICAN (SNAP). These meetings were designed to share information and trouble-shoot communication and referral gaps to ensure that coordinated service delivery between organizations was efficient, effective, and comprehensive.

In addition, business services staff from each organization met regularly to respond to the needs of the business community, which included recruitment and retention assistance and planning virtual hiring events. This virtual relationship building provided the groundwork to increase the ability to have more standardized, local intake and referral process, shared assessments, and braiding of resources.

In PY 2021, VDOL served 2,692 individuals in staff-assisted labor exchange services. This is an increase from the previous year’s number of 2,230 individuals supported in staff-assisted labor exchange services. Although employment after the 2nd and 4th quarter after exit has also declined for the PY 2021, median earnings have increased. Median earnings in PY 2020 were \$6,623 and that increased to \$6,875 in PY 2021.

Waivers

Vermont had no waivers in place during Program Year 2021.

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2020 Actual	PY2020 Goal	PY2021 Actual
Effectiveness in Serving Employers			
Employer Services Provided	1623		3837
Retention with the Same Employer in the 2 nd and 4 th Quarters After Exit Rate	60.4%	Baseline	59.8%
Repeat Business Customer Rate	31.6%	Baseline	56%

In PY 2021, VDOL continued to place a heavy focus on the employer customer. Vermont continues to experience an unprecedented labor shortage, as do many other states, but is addressing this situation head on with consistent employer contact with some new and innovative ways to support their recruitment, training and retention needs.

The implementation of the simple Employer Inquiry web form in the pandemic era continues to be a favored tool with businesses. In PY 2021, we received 877 new inquiries. Many were from businesses that had not previously engaged with VDOL. This easy-to-complete form is routed directly to one of five regions of the state for direct follow up from a staff member. Although not the only option for employers to contact the Business Services staff, it stands out for its simplicity and the ability for quick response.

In addition to the standard slate of Services provided to business customers that include the basics of taking and posting job orders, reviewing, and editing job descriptions, referring or “matching” job seekers to available job openings, and offering job fairs and hiring events, the VDOL Business Services team planned and implemented some innovative new ways to promote employers and their openings.

The return of in-person job fairs and hiring events allowed for some new and creative opportunities during PY 2021:

- Partnered with VT Associated General Contractors to bring 155 Vermont employers to the Champlain Valley Exposition with the targeted audience being secondary career and technical education students as well as the general public. Over 1000 students and job seekers attended.
- Created a summer job fair campaign around baseball by partnering with collegiate summer teams in three locations in Vermont. Brought in employers from the local areas and collaborated with the teams on promotion and marketing. The main idea was to bring employers to public events where their people are, and it worked. We hosted over 60 employers between 4 events. Feedback from employers was

positive with a general sentiment of appreciation for the willingness to try something new to support their recruitment challenges.

To monitor and validate the employers using Vermont JobLink, VDOL's job search database, more closely, we implemented a more consistent and thorough employer vetting process. This required business services team members to conduct an additional level of outreach to employers when they created a new account or requested that a dormant account be reactivated. The additional level of outreach has helped to build trusting relationships with our employer community. While the goal was to minimize fraud or misuse in the database, it also increased the overall engagement with employers and has helped to keep our performance in the Effectiveness in Serving Employer strong.

Customer Satisfaction

The need to offer services virtually has provided new opportunities for communication and interaction with both jobseeker and employer customers. Following each weekly Virtual Job Fair, every registered attendee receives an email with helpful and important follow up information and a request for them to provide feedback on the event. They are directed to an online form and local program staff conduct follow-up outreach on areas of concern. This tool is being adapted and improved regularly to increase the quality and quantity of the data collected. Staff follow up with individual concerns and consider what worked well to consistently improve the job fairs and service experience. One outcome this year was offering an "in office" assisted experience so that jobseekers uncomfortable with technology could use a job center computer and have support staff available to them as they engaged in the online platform.

Additionally, a feedback form has been created for our employer customer to complete after they participate in one of the Virtual Job Fairs' we host. This tool is newly developed but has shown general approval and appreciation for the platform being provided and the opportunity to present information about their opening, company culture, benefits, and application process. Employer feedback about the volume and quality of the interactions has prompted VDOL to begin exploring more professional and tailored platforms that would help meet their needs.

Progress Update: Achieving the State's Strategic Vision and Goals

Goal 1: Connect Vermonters to the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence.

In PY2021, VDOL invited leaders from MyFutureVt.org to join us in an all-staff training on the resources and tools available at MyFutureVT.org related to career exploration and locating education and training. Case managers can use this state-specific resource to connect individuals with the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence. In addition, VDOL organized additional learning sessions between workforce development division staff and labor market information division staff to

support continued, up-to-date knowledge of career opportunities in the state.

During FY2021, VDOL workforce development staff were asked to adopt a “yes, how?” framework when assisting jobseekers. In other words, when an opportunity to advance in their career plan presented itself and was further blocked by a “moveable” barrier such as a tuition or support payment, staff were asked to consult with their managers and, if necessary, division leadership about ways to remove the barrier that might not be readily apparent. This resulted in a handful of instances where new resources were discovered from other agencies or clarity in understanding the limitations of our own funding resources was provided. In this way, we are shifting from “no, because...” to “yes, how?” to promote the connections with resources that our customers need.

Goal 2: Increase the number of women, veterans, minorities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented people employed in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, advanced manufacturing, and other priority industry sectors in Vermont.

Vermont exceeded the number of people in every demographic category – with two exceptions - receiving basic career services in 2021 over 2020. Vermont’s number of youth in foster care increased by eight and number of single parents dropped by nine. The median income for all individuals served increased in 2021 over 2020.

Goal 3: Increase the number of Vermonters with barriers to employment who complete high school, earn a post-secondary credential - including an industry-recognized certificate, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary degree program - and become employed in occupations that align with the needs of Vermont’s employers.

Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth program performance indicate that all three showed an increase in the percent of participants who had a measurable skill gain from 2020 to 2021. All three experienced dips in credential attainment rates, which could be attributable to the “shut down” in occupational skills programs for the cohorts and period being measured. All three showed an increase in 2021 over 2020 in the percent of individuals employed both two and four quarters after exit, except for dislocated workers who showed a small dip in second quarter employment in 2021.

Goal 4: Improve Vermont’s workforce development system by continuously aligning, adapting, and integrating workforce education and training programs and career and supportive services to meet the needs of all customers

During the PY2021 year, the State Workforce Development Board began crafting a strategic plan for how it would function more effectively to meet the state’s workforce goal. Further, the Vermont Legislature passed a bill directing a Special Operating Committee to create an action plan that “identifies the optimal organizational structure for the Vermont workforce development system, under which a single government entity, office, or executive position is charged with the authority and duty to coordinate

workforce development efforts across State government, in close partnership and coordination with nongovernmental partners, and achieve the goals of the State of Vermont Strategic Plan.” This work is ongoing and will be the subject of much legislative discussion in the coming session.

Goal 5: Expand Vermont’s labor force by helping more Vermonters enter the labor market and assisting out-of-state workers in securing employment with Vermont employers and relocating to Vermont.

One partnership that has addressed this goal is the work being done by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (VT Dept of Marketing and Tourism) and a small team of VDOL staff that respond to and provide job search support to out-of-state job seekers. Through the ThinkVT site, job seekers complete an intake form where they can indicate that one of their key needs in relocation is employment. When the form is received, our team generates a standard email offering labor market information, resume, and interview assistance and provide follow up as needed. In PY 2021, the team responded to 450 inquiries. While actual relocation requires resources and support from many partners, housing stands out as a key barrier to ability to complete a relocation plan. This program continues to be re-evaluated and offers promising practices to grow the Vermont workforce.

A partnership of state agency official, including workforce development, health care, and economic development leadership worked with five nursing programs located in VT to engage with graduating nurses, connect them with Vermont hospitals, long term care facilities and nursing homes and other health care employers and offer resources and support with a goal of filling the critical nursing shortage.

Goal 6: Connect employers with technical assistance, hiring best practices, and workplace enhancements.

While the VDOL business services team has provided 3837 unique services to Vermont businesses in PY 2021 that support their recruitment, training and retention needs, the team has worked in collaboration with many other state and community partners as well.

Some of these key partners include the Department of Economic Development, Department of Marketing and Tourism, Hireability, Vermont State University, Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center, and regional economic development organizations. The Business Services Manager and members of the Business Services team regularly meet with these partners to maintain communication around current best practices, identify areas of need and develop strategic plans to best serve Vermont employers.

One example includes participation in a recent National Manufacturing month forum that offered advice and guidance to statewide manufacturing employers on innovative recruiting practices, training resources for new and incumbent workers and allowed for sharing within the participants of their best practices.

Goal 7: Adapt the current Workforce Development system to pandemic-era realities, by supporting and enhancing remote options for employers and workers and updating physical locations to address safety and accessibility concerns.

All One-Stop Network partners continue to adapt to the safety and accessibility needs of customers by enhancing surface and air quality cleanliness and offering services at times and locations that they feel customers are most likely to engage.

Goal 8: Acknowledge additional elements that impact Vermont's workforce system, including housing, childcare, broadband, education and affordability, by taking a more holistic approach and better aligning our workforce goals.

This work is being done at the Executive and Legislative levels though separate and joint commitments to address housing, childcare, internet accessibility, education quality, and access, and affordability in policy and legislation.

Sector Strategies

Telecommunications:

In PY 2021, the Commissioner of Labor was directed by the State Legislature to conduct an occupational needs survey to determine workforce needs in the communications sector specific to broadband buildout and maintenance. In conducting this survey, the Department worked with the Department of Public Service and the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB) to solicit input from employers and subcontractors throughout the State. The Department of Public Service and communications union districts shall assist the Department of Labor in identifying employers with workforce needs connected to this act. The survey identified current and future employment opportunities and the prerequisite skills needed for widespread worker recruitment and building a talent pipeline to support the State's substantial investment in telecommunications and the buildout of broadband infrastructure in the state. Respondents to the survey indicated that it is difficult for them to project their future workforce need with any specificity. While no one cited a current "crisis" level need for workers, general fiber splicers, service technicians, line workers, and general construction experience seem to be in demand. Subsequent conversations with employers and training providers revealed three needs:

- Provide incumbent worker trainings to advance skill development and promote retention
- Develop a new pipeline of skilled workers through a new Registered Apprenticeship Program
- Support and provide technical assistance to Registered Apprenticeship programs to enable an accelerated path for CTE/high school students by recognizing skills learned from CTE programs.

The VDOL has now approved and funded a registered broadband installer apprenticeship

program and incumbent worker training opportunities, in response to these needed. In the next year or two, varying levels of coordination will support better connections secondary career and technical education programs and work-based learning experiences in the telecommunications field.

Construction

During PY 2021, VDOL's business services team, youth program leaders, and registered apprenticeship program director met repeatedly with construction industry leaders and employers to identify and implement ways to strengthen and support pathways into construction careers, skill trainings for career growth, and recruitment efforts for employers. Positive outcomes of this collaboration include:

- Conducting the state's largest in-person job fair in at least four years – focused largely on highlighting career opportunities in construction and related trades
- Launching a pilot (state) grant to support incumbent trainings for construction workers that provide skills trainings that help career growth into supervisory and management roles
- Investing in a pilot that the Associated General Contractors of Vermont (AGC) led to host weekly career information and job recruitment efforts targeting youth – especially those in secondary career and technical education programs
- The development and registration of a new apprenticeship for Commercial Craft Professional.

The Department looks forward to continued support for the construction industry in the years to come.

Performance Accountability System

The VDOL continued to strengthen its monitoring policy by conducting annual on-site visits and quarterly case reviews. The results identified areas of concern, best practices, and training needs. The VDOL library continues to grow with resources for its staff to reference. The resources include videos, desk guides, FAQ's, valuable links, Workforce GPS, etc.

The Vermont Department of Labor continues to use Administrative Memo's to introduce and document changes to policies. In April of 2022, an administrative memo was provided to all staff outlining the policies and procedures for Data Validation of the WIOA III and JVSG programs. All staff were trained on this process to collect participant source documents pursuant to guidance in TEGl 23-19. A data validation sample was pulled in July 2022 and validation of files took place in August 2022.

In addition to the data validation itself, the team looked at two additional indicators - the success rate of staff in collecting the source documents for new WIOA III enrollments and to evaluate documented attempts to attain the source documentation where none was received. Since the time frame between training and data validation itself, the sample size was relatively small. The team reviewed 102 new enrollments. Useful information came from this exercise and will be instrumental in developing future modifications to the Data

Validation Administrative Memo for PY 2022.

In PY 2020, the Vermont Department of Labor signed a data sharing agreement with Vocational Rehab for co-enrollment activities. Our goal is to establish a process to automatically capture this data in the case management system, reducing time spent on manually verifying and entering data. While automation has not yet been implemented, VDOL and Hireability Vermont (previously known as Vocational Rehabilitation) continue to share data – representing in our reporting for the first time in PY 2021.

State Activities

State Reserve Fund Activities

Vermont completed a request for information (RFI) and request for proposal (RFP) process during PY 2021 to solicit proposals from vendors who could improve VDOL's information management system, including its case and customer management system, job board, and financial tracking system, and information display platform. The state's reserve funds aided in the identification of system requirements and the articulation of an improved future state for VDOLs information management systems. This system will disseminate information about eligible and non-eligible training providers, work-based learning and training experiences. These includes registered apprenticeship opportunities, best practices in employer recruitment, hiring, and retention. Additionally, it includes toolkits for employers and training providers to ensure accessibility, both physical and programmatic, for individuals with disabilities. The selection, contracting, and implementation of the new system is expected to occur during PY 2022 and PY 2023.

During PY 2021, VDOL used the state's reserve funds to support the required activities, including monitoring and oversight of Title I activities, operation of a fiscal accountability system, and supporting industry and sector partnerships. VDOL also used reserve funds for allowable employment and training activities such as the administration of Title I programs, development of strategies to meet employer needs and strategies to meet needs of individuals with barriers to employment, coordination of programs and services among one-stop partners serving youth and mature workers and supporting the delivery of career services in the one-stop delivery system – particularly for unemployed individuals.

Rapid Response and Lay Off Aversion

Due to the strong economy and the widespread labor shortage in Vermont, PY 2021 saw a relatively low level of Rapid Response activity. We recorded five significant layoffs in this period, two were covered under WARN. These events involved approximately 500 workers.

In all five cases, the Business Services team responded immediately upon notification with outreach to the business, assessment of the conditions of the layoff and planning and delivery of Rapid Response services to the impacted workers. The Vermont Rapid Response Coordinator works closely with staff from the Unemployment Compensation division, Hireability and Vermont Health Connect to quickly deliver Rapid Response information sessions to the workers. While most sessions continued to be virtual, we did resume in-

person sessions when requested. In all cases, an overview of TAA was provided, however based on the program definitions for TAA no petitions were filed.

With the high demand for workers, we experienced strong outreach from other Vermont companies when a layoff was announced. The Business Service Team was able to plan and hold hiring events in the local communities specifically targeted for the recently laid off individuals and many of the dislocated workers were hired immediately into new positions with comparable or higher wages and skill levels.

Promising Practices

New American Support: In PY 2021, Vermont began receiving Afghan refugees – most classified as Humanitarian Parolees. State officials, employers, and economic development partners celebrated this event and continue to ask for the federal agencies to relocate more refugees and New Americans in our state. Just before the announcement was made and individuals and families began arriving, the state was preparing to support a new nonprofit to administer federal refugee supports. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) has had a strong presence in Vermont for many years and has been an invaluable partner. Now, the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC) is also present to help with assisting New Americans in the southern part of the state. With the new influx of New Americans from Afghanistan and, later, Ukraine, VDOL took the following steps to better support and coordinate services to help individuals, employers, and partner service providers to access workforce services:

- VDOL provided (state) economic support to a regional partner of ECDC during early relocation efforts to assist New Americans with employment readiness skills. This leveraged VDOL's WIOA program by also creating new ways of coordinating and communicating about individual and employer needs through regular meetings and expanded awareness about WIOA services so that funds and case management could be more effectively utilized and braided.
- VDOL created a refugee specific support page on its website: <https://labor.vermont.gov/refugee> which describes services and funding opportunities available.
- A new position was created to, in part, assist with increasing coordination and support services and provide training and professional development opportunities to staff in how to best serve New Americans, individuals with limited English proficiency, and deepened awareness of cultural differences.
- VDOL worked with the state agency in charge of refugee support to better align funding supports, clarify roles and responsibilities of involved service providers, and prioritize problem solving for specific issues (e.g. obtaining driver's licenses) facing New Americans.
 - Through collaboration among VDOL, a local driving school, ECDC, and other partner organizations, 3 female WIOA participants who recently were evacuated from Afghanistan and previously had no driving experience, have been trained in safe driving (using WIOA funds) and have obtained their Vermont Driver's Licenses, which will be helpful for obtaining employment in

- rural Southern Vermont where public transportation is limited.

This work has created a new practice for coordination of services for populations with specific employment needs and barriers to success in the workforce.

Success Stories

Joseph A. - Adult Work Experience

Joseph is an 18-year-old male who self-identified as having a disability and difficulty obtaining competitive employment. Through their work together, the case manager secured him a short-term work experience in the reconditioning department at local care dealership. Joseph excelled in this position, which gave him the confidence to apply for, interview, and receive a job offer from Saint Johnsbury school as a custodian. He has been there for over two months and reports that he is doing well.

The success, in this case, belongs entirely to Joseph. He worked hard, figured out transportation, and overcame obstacles all on his own. The case manager's role in this was minor encouragement and advice.

Daryl M. – Basic Career Services and Virtual Job Fair

This summer, Daryl, was referred to the Vermont Department of Labor by a community partner (Northeast Kingdom Community Action) for help with job search.

When Daryl came into the St. Johnsbury resource center to meet with a case manager, he had mostly been unemployed for the last year. The last job he worked at was for about four weeks from March to April. He was needing to gain employment ASAP and needed assistance with his truck payment and repairs.

During their first meeting, Daryl and the case manager worked on resume creation and brainstormed job ideas that he may be interested in. They discussed his work experience and discovered that he may be interested in custodial openings. In the meantime, he was applying for jobs on Indeed and Vermont JobLink. The case manager also connected Daryl with the Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN) for the additional support services for his truck.

At their next meeting they had a virtual job fair that hosted a Regional Hospital as the employer. The case manager was able to get Daryl to come and join the job fair to inquire about custodial positions through the hospital. Before the virtual job fair, they did look on the hospital's website and Vermont JobLink but didn't see any openings. However, the case manager encouraged him to still join, and inquire directly through the Human Resources department.

At the job fair, the case manager was able to connect Daryl with the head of the hospital's Human Resources. They got to speak directly after the presentation where she informed him

there was a position that just opened in their environmental services. She was very eager for Daryl to apply and told him directly through that initial meeting she would be calling him in for an interview. Daryl applied and within a week called to tell the case manager he had accepted the position at a starting rate of \$18/hour.

Daryl was very appreciative for the connection to the hospital and the assistance with the job search. The head of Human Resources was just as thankful as well. Daryl is still working at the hospital and is enjoying the new position.

Greg N. – Wagner-Peyser

On September 7th, Greg came into the resource center to open a UI claim and look for work as he had been let go by his employer. Greg presented himself as a veteran and indicated that he had a stroke, which presented him with significant barriers to using technology as well as his mobility and ability to perform many job functions that a typical employer in his field might require. Greg had worked as a bagger and cleaning tech. An employment plan was developed working with him and his case manager at Hireability (Vocational Rehabilitation).

Greg needed a new job and was certainly going to need significant assistance in finding suitable employment as well as weekly assistance with filing his UI claim until he got back to work. Using Title III and JVSG services, a joint team provided Greg with the assistance he needed.

Greg received help in creating a resume and the team met with him intensively every week to help with applying for jobs and filing his weekly UI claim. With individualized services, the team helped Greg secure suitable employment at a local supermarket on October 17th making \$14.00 an hour, an increase from his former employment which was \$12.55 an hour.

Hannah F – Labor Exchange

In early January, Hannah met with a case manager at the Barton Public Library during a #LaborOnLocation session and was referred to the local satellite Job Center for help with VJL and a résumé.

A case manager met with her and assisted her to create a VJL account. Hannah worked with her case manager to update her resume and polish it for her job search. She was happy with the results. The case manager made several suggestions for pursuing job leads, based on her work history. Two really caught her attention and the case manager explained how she should apply to both.

Hannah contacted her case manager about a week later and said that she had applied at a local craft brewery, and they had requested an interview via zoom. Her case manager set up a quick zoom call to make sure she was familiar with the platform and give her some tips and best practices for preparing for a virtual interview.

Hannah contacted her case manager later that day and said that the interview went well and that they had requested references. Hannah attended a second interview and eventually was hired by the employer. Her case manager checked in on her after her first day, and she was delighted with her new employment; in her words, she had “found her tribe.”

Mercedes C. – Employer Testimonial for Employer Services

In January 2022, a VDOL case manager connected a local training provider to a jobseeker he had just met who had a welding background. The case manager knew that the employer was interested in expanding the welding courses offered at our local Career and Technical Education’s Adult Program, so he thought this might be an appropriate referral. Within five months, that jobseeker was employed and had completed facilitation of the Introduction to Welding class. He led a class of six students, five of whom completed and provided excellent reviews of the course and the instructor. The training provider is now planning a welding certification class for the fall. In today's tight job market, the employer might never have met this instructor without the help of the case manager and VDOL. Thanks to this connection, adult students in the area have a local option for welding training!

Coriene S. – Testimonial from WIOA Client

“When I decided to change my life and focus on my career I told my case manager through Reach Up (TANF) what I wanted to do and she referred me to WIOA. At first, I wanted to go to school for business but then shortly after I decided that I wanted to become a Real Estate Agent. WIOA and my case manager worked together to find a Real Estate Agency for me to work at to start learning the ropes and what I needed to do to be on my way to becoming a realtor. My case manager through WIOA was very helpful the whole way even when I had issues with my checks, and it turned into a pretty stressful time. He was always in contact with me and checking in on me and my progress. I now have taken my 40-hour pre-licensing course and my first exam. I failed my first exam, but that's okay! It's super hard! I have now hired a tutor to help me pass and I don't plan on giving up! I currently manage two properties for my Real Estate Agency in between studying and doing other Admin work. I plan to have my license by January. I would absolutely recommend WIOA to others and my case manager specifically. The whole experience was super amazing and really helpful and made me feel more confident in myself and my worth ethic.”

Challenges

Staff Turnover

The workforce development division of the VDOL experienced a significant amount of turnover during PY 2021 with nearly 50% of currently occupied positions leaving their post. Common reasons for leaving included retirement, opportunities for more pay elsewhere, and the desire for remote work hindered by the requirement for in-person service delivery availability currently in place. Overall, the division carried a 35% vacancy rate for much of the program year. Regional managers and leadership staff, as well as frontline staff, took on more and different work to maintain continuity of services. As a result, intended progress in program improvement and professional development opportunities suffered. VDOL is rebounding, however, as of the writing of this report, and hopes this will not be a challenge in the second half of PY 2022.

Service Delivery Locations

Coming out of the pandemic, Vermont has prioritized providing employment services in places that jobseekers might be more likely to access them. Our “#LaborOnLocation” initiative to provide satellite services in community spaces with moderate success, but has also resulted in complicated staff coverage plans for local affiliate job centers. VDOL has invested in basic technology (e.g. laptops, internet plans, etc.) and some outreach materials (fliers, banners, rack cards, etc.) but is still determining best practices for finding and serving potential customers. VDOL also struggles with how to pilot this work in ways that comply with TEGL 16-16 and Title III requirements and funding limitations.

Workforce Shortage

For years before the pandemic, Vermont has struggled with the lowest numbers of available, unemployed workers in the nation. During the pandemic, our unemployment rate spiked, but was brief and not sustained. In the last two years, Vermont has lost an additional 5-10% of available workers. With our small and older population, the number of people who are eligible for or require WIOA I or III services continues to be low and impacts VDOL’s ability to scale service delivery models and increase the number of enrollments.

Technical Assistance Needs

As Vermont continues to reorganize staffing and responsibilities – including hiring and onboarding of staff – we will be working with our federal program officer for guidance in improving:

- Outreach, service delivery, and monitoring of services to migrant seasonal farmworkers,
- Updating required policies for WIOA Title I and III,
- Providing layoff aversion assistance under Rapid Response activities,
- Establishing evaluation processes for WIOA core programs,
- Improving methods of collecting customer satisfaction and feedback information,
- Using WIOA funds to improve outreach to service delivery to potential Title I and III clients,
- Increasing the use of paid and unpaid work-based learning and training opportunities for jobseekers, and,
- The use and alignment of registered apprenticeship opportunities in WIOA, TAA, and JVSG programs.

