

WIOA PY2022 ANNUAL NARRATIVE OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION:

In accordance with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), each state who 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.

In the Program Year (PY) 2022 (period covering July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023), the VDOL continued to offer flexible, relevant services across its statewide network of American Job Centers in coordination with core partners and others in the workforce development ecosystem in Vermont. In this post-pandemic era, faced with the need to provide services to four generations of job seekers, the work was focused on access and flexibility. An added focus on growing capacity and services to support Vermont businesses was also critical as the labor market is very tight and there is much competition for highly motivated, well-trained individuals.

During this program year, the VDOL continued to face many challenges and changes that have impacted the pace of our work and our ability to implement our strategies. The main issue impacting us was a factor that is affecting the state: people to fill open positions. The Workforce Development Division, which oversees implementation of the VDOL's workforce programs saw a vacancy rate of approximately 20% along with turnover, especially in key leadership roles. In February 2023, the senior leadership team was completely changed, and new appointees navigated through interim positions while learning the many facets of the workforce development division and its operations. A communications and outreach position was allocated to the division to help us inform the public and drive interest in our programs and services, but after three months, the position was vacated. Permanent leader appointments were finalized in April 2023, with staff who have extensive experience in the state's workforce ecosystem, the VDOL's Workforce Development Division, and operations of the comprehensive American Job Center, affiliates, and satellite locations. The team has been steadily re-building the extended leadership team, filling numerous vacancies in the job centers, and coming up to speed on the complexity of WIOA as well as other federal and state programs and resources.

Despite these notable challenges, the VDOL staff have remained positive and focused on accomplishing the goals outlined in the four-year WIOA state plan. This narrative will outline the achievements and successes gained in PY2022, while recognizing the need for continued leadership, staff development, and sustained efforts to deliver integrated workforce services to Vermont job seekers and businesses.

VERMONT'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM:

Vermont has one federally designated comprehensive One-Stop American Jobs Center (AJC), located in Burlington, and a network of affiliate centers and satellite service locations throughout the state. The VDOL staff provide services for WIOA Titles 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 the network. The 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. The 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'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. 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. Services are available at www.VermontJobLink.com or in one of our seven comprehensive or affiliate centers and five satellite service locations around the state.

Virtually, and in-person, we help individuals use current labor market information and provide access to assessments of skill level and interests which lead to comprehensive career guidance, we 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 priority to 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.

VJL users can view current labor market information, research training and education opportunities and resources, explore career pathways, access employment preparation tools, workshops information, and post or explore current job opportunities. VJL also serves as the VDOL's case management system, performance tracker, and reporting tool. The VDOL is in the process of procuring a replacement for this system.

For the last several years, we have seen a decline in foot-traffic into our offices. In response, the department is actively pursuing a service delivery strategy that brings services to our customers virtually, and in-person, where they prefer to meet. This year, we made an investment in tablets, to help us better serve people and businesses where they are, and to add flex capacity to the available computers in the AJC, affiliate centers, and satellite service locations.

Vermont's Workforce Mission

Governor Phil Scott is focused on expanding and strengthening Vermont's labor force as a top priority for his administration. Governor Scott has tasked the VDOL with leading a cross-

agency labor force expansion effort to meet this challenge. 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, Governor Scott 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 2022, 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.

Resources in Support of the Vision & Goals

The SWDB issued an RFP for a “one-stop operator.” This contract will be funded by the Governor’s WIOA set-aside. (Goal 4)

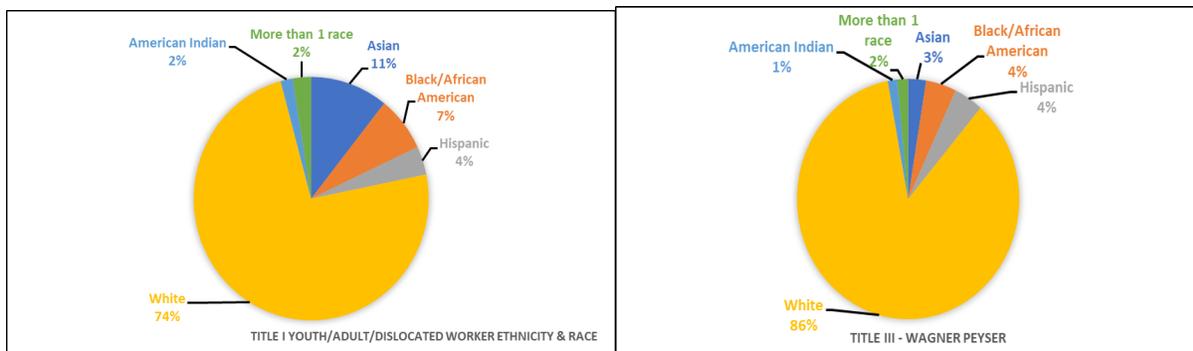
The Legislature allocated \$250,000 to the SWDB for a contract to catalog and map the resource networks that support Immigrants, Asylees, and New Americans. (Goal 2, Goal 5, Goal 6)

The Legislature allocated a total of \$2.5 million to support work-based learning and training. This fund supports work-based, and on-the-job training, experiences for participants by providing wages and stipends, reducing the burden on employers. (Goal 1 & Goal 4)

The Legislature rewrote and modernized Vermont’s Registered Apprenticeship system, creating new on-ramp opportunities through pre- and youth-apprenticeship and with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within those programs. This was important for us to address because unemployment is historically low, skilled workers are scarce resources, and businesses are realizing the need to differentiate from their competitors and sponsoring apprenticeship programs helps to alleviate some of that pressure.

Vermont Title I & Title III Racial Composition

According to the Census Bureau, a majority of the population of Vermont reports their race as white. The VDOL primarily serves participants who identify as white. We continue to expand outreach activities to ensure that all Vermonters, regardless of demographics, have access to services and opportunities. A recently released TEGL (03-23) clarifies the use of WIOA funds to conduct outreach to more diverse communities and will help Vermont as we strive to broaden the impact of our programs and services to those who have not historically been engaged by the public workforce system.



WIOA Title I: Youth, Adult, Dislocated Worker Program Overview

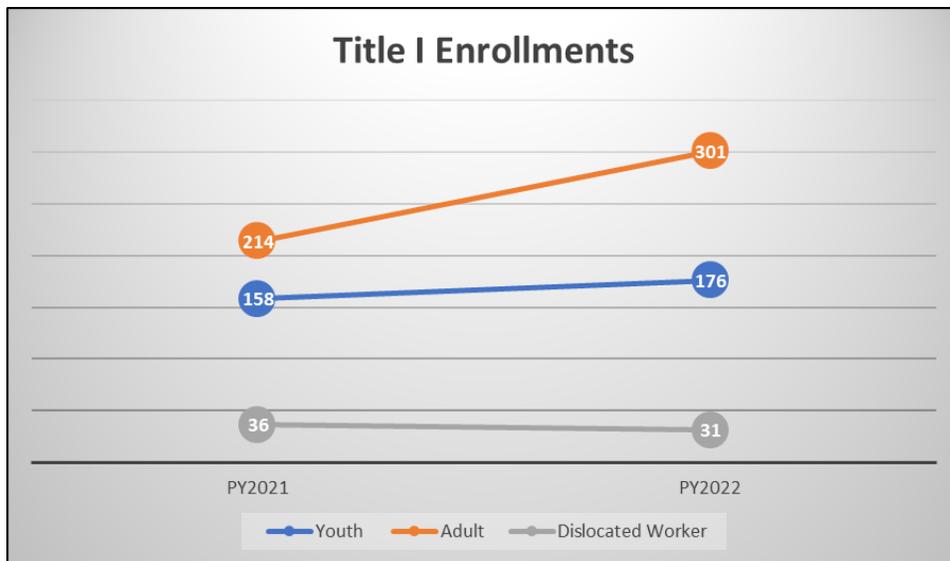
The VDOL WIOA Title I Programs continued to improve service delivery and accessibility, to engage and serve disadvantaged Vermonters statewide. Outreach efforts continued to grow as staff positioned themselves in community spaces to meet Vermonters where they were, including recovery centers, homeless shelters, adult basic education centers, schools, and libraries. Staff delivered presentations to community partner teams to highlight a “no wrong door” approach and steer them away from focusing on eligibility but focus on the value the VDOL services can bring to the table, along with the coordination of services with other partners.

With the low caseloads in PY2022, Job Specialists embraced the opportunity to provide more intensive, meaningful case management support to their participants on an individual basis and as part of a community team. This more intensive case management includes establishing short-

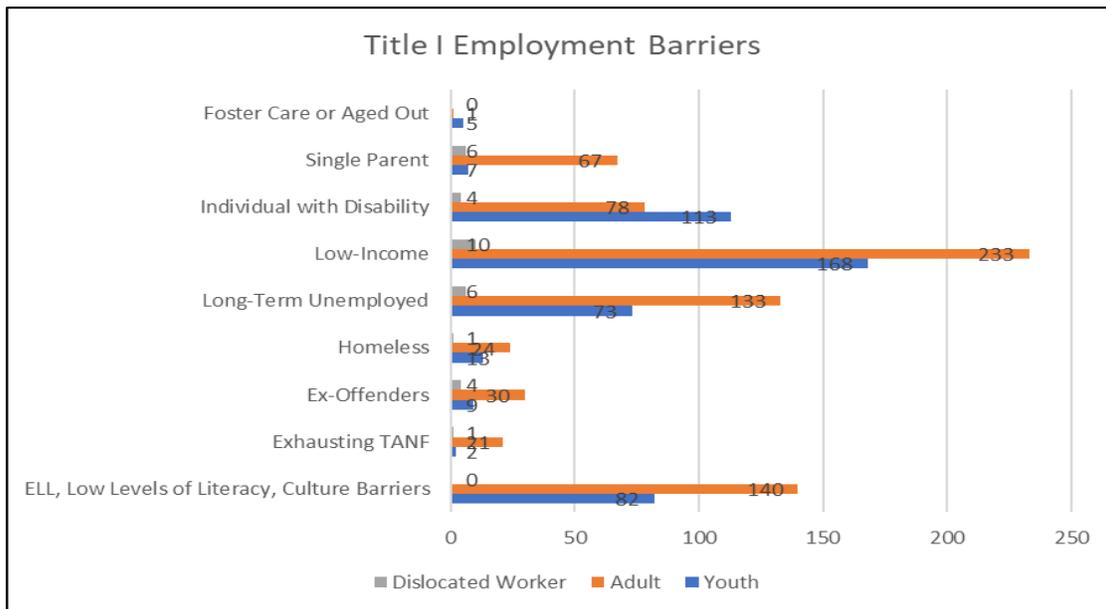
term and long-term goals, providing guidance and support as they navigate successful entry into their chosen career pathway. Vermont has found that quality, paid work experiences with case management support for the employer, as well as the participant, help to maintain engagement in the program and better employment outcomes. It also helps participants improve self-esteem, increase quality of life, diversify social networks, increase income, and promotes healthier lifestyle choices.

Title I: WIOA Youth, Adult, & Dislocated Worker Enrollment Trends

In PY2022, there was an encouraging increase in WIOA youth and adult enrollments. Vermont attributes the increased enrollments to its successful efforts in strengthening relationships with community partners and implementing an innovative approach to meeting Vermonters where they are. With Vermont’s unemployment rate being at 2.6% in PY2022 and workers simply obtaining employment on their own, enrollments in the dislocated worker program were very low. Discussion began in PY2022 to expand the dislocated worker eligibility criteria so that enrollments can be increased, and training activities maximized. The new dislocated worker policy will reflect long-term unemployed individuals as being eligible to be enrolled. Based on the Wagner-Peyser data alone, 458 jobseekers disclosed they were long-term unemployed.



Title I: WIOA Youth, Adult, & Dislocated Worker Employment Barriers



Among the top employment barriers disclosed across the Title I programs were individuals with disabilities, low-income individuals, English Language Learners, low levels of literacy, and cultural barriers. Staff reported that mental health issues have been on the rise since COVID and have posed a significant barrier to employment. Because of these employment barriers, Job Specialists are responsible not only for providing intensive case management but are also responsible for managing a strong and effective support team that provides services and support to their participants including connecting them with appropriate core partners.

Title I: WIOA Youth Program

In PY2022, the age group 16-18 increased by 25, but the age group 19-24 decreased by 9. This may be attributed to serving more in school youth and the older youth being served under the adult program. The “English language learner” category indicated an 18 person increase. This may be attributed to the growing number of New American families enrolling their children in school.

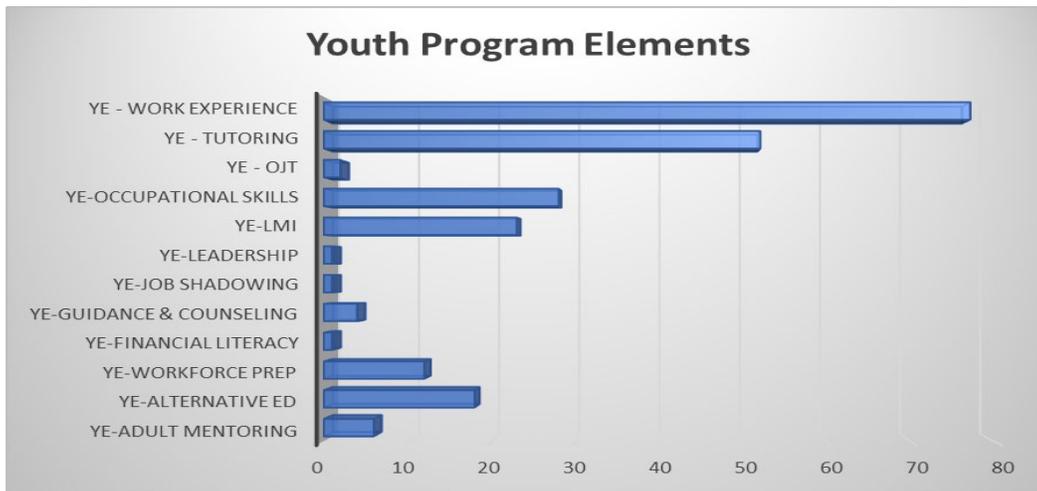
An Administrative Memo was issued in PY2022 to ensure that case managers understand how to clearly describe the fourteen WIOA Title I Youth Program Elements to participants and have the resources and information they need to make appropriate referrals to local partners who are qualified and knowledgeable in providing them more effectively to youth across the state (e.g., education, leadership, financial literacy, etc.). Job Specialists are required to make all program elements available to all Youth Program participants. Youth participants are not required to receive all services, but elements deemed appropriate and desirable must be provided to assist in removing employment and training barriers and obtaining short- and long-term goals.

During the initial assessment period, Job Specialists ensure that all youth participants have a consistent variety of high-quality services to choose from in deciding which program elements

they would like to pursue, which in turn provides the framework for the Individualized Service Strategy.

In PY2022, we started the process of creating a regional and statewide Youth Element Resource Library. The purpose of the library is to ensure that if a program element isn't available in one area of the state but can be accessed virtually in another area of the state, the Job Specialist can make that virtual connection. The hope is to improve and implement this library in PY2023.

PY2022 youth elements most accessed were work experience, occupational skills, and labor market information. Job Specialists spend a great deal of time with youth discussing labor market information and exploring career pathways. Connecting youth to a meaningful work experience is important for several reasons. Firstly, work experiences help youth learn about themselves and help them gain skills that are essential for advancing in a career pathway. Secondly, work experience can help youth develop transferable skills, understand how organizations work, build confidence, and confirm or decide on a career path. Finally, work experiences can gently introduce individuals to the world of work, teach them workplace etiquette, and give them an idea of the skills they might need to thrive in the workplace.



Although the focus for the VDOL remains on serving out of school youth, Vermont has experienced a substantial increase in the amount of in school referrals. We believe this increase is due to a post-pandemic shift in focus of school counselors to the social-emotional needs of students. Schools invited the VDOL to meet with students and inform them of services that are available to them now and potential training opportunities after graduation. With limited funding for in school youth expenditures, the VDOL serves many in school youth under the Wagner-Peyser program or the state funded program. Schools sent a clear, consistent message that the goal is to keep youth engaged in school and on track to successfully graduate.

Youth In School Testimonials

“Having the Job Center Specialist from the Department of Labor come and meet with students at the schools greatly benefits the student by creating another positive community connection that helps students develop and pursue their career interests. Once the relationship is formed, the students feel comfortable reaching out again for assistance in pursuing their next career interest. It's another reliable relationship they have after high school.

“The Job Center Specialist has been the only lifeline for most youth under 18. Public schools can't fund a high school student's interest in learning how to weld or becoming a licensed nurse assistant. Yes, HireAbility can support if a student is on their caseload, but that's a much smaller percentage of students. The DOL is currently the primary funding support for our future workforce.”

- Guidance Counselor

“We have had Casey come to CHCC to work with our students to support them in a variety of ways, including career exploration and post high school career support. He has worked with many of our students to aid in funding for further certifications and learning that will help them in their futures. Such as welding classes, an Artificial Insemination class, and CDL classes to name a few. Casey gets to know students and creates a respectful relationship with them that builds trust so that they know that they can work with them while they are in high school as well as after high school. I feel very fortunate that he is able to work with our students, as I know that after they leave us, they will have continued support with training and career exploration when they need it.”

- Assistant Director

Youth Success Story – Strength of Collaboration

“For the last 12 months, I have been working with a youth client who was referred by HCRS. The client disclosed she suffered from severe anxiety and multiple barriers and did not successfully complete her high school diploma. She participated in 2 separate work experiences where she was able to improve her soft skills and self-confidence. During the work experiences, she determined a career pathway of Salesforce for Administration purposes. This occupation would allow her to work independently and potentially at home. Through direct supports of WIOA, HCRS and HireAbility, she developed the courage to attend Vermont Adult Learning where she eventually earned her GED.”

PY 2022 WIOA Youth Program Outcomes

In the Youth program, Vermont met or exceeded the negotiated goal for all five performance measures. The largest increases between PY 21 and PY 22 were the Credential Attainment and Measurable Skill Gains metrics at 12.7% and 12.8% respectively.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2022 Goal	PY2022 Actual
Participants Served		175
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	63%	74.7%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	59.5%	71.2%
Median Earnings	\$3700	\$6155
Credential Attainment	44%	44.2%
Measurable Skill Gains	40.5%	61.9%

Title I WIOA Adult & Dislocated Worker Program

In PY2022, there was an increase of 88 enrollments in the WIOA Adult program, 55 of those enrollments were between the ages of 25-44 and 15 between the ages of 19-24. The increase in numbers between female and male were relatively equal, increase of 43 and 46 respectively. Asians represented an increase of 26 in PY2022 which the VDOL attributes to how New Americans are self-identifying. An increase of 57 ELL individuals was attributed to the New Americans seeking our services. Long-term unemployed (27+ weeks) had an increase of 50.

PY2022 adult & dislocated worker services most accessed were occupational skills and short-term prevocational courses.

While Vermont continues to make progress in bringing the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) approval and reporting processes into compliance, the approval process and reporting requirements have discouraged many small training providers in our state from applying to be included on the ETPL. Vermont is a small state with limited resources and a small number of training providers. The ETPL process creates administrative burdens internally such as duplicative efforts, and reporting barriers for training providers. Vermont's Legislature continues to allocate funds to pay tuition for programs that were unapproved programs on the ETPL. Over 70 Vermonters were granted \$158,560.00 to cover tuition for programs that WIOA was unable to fund because the programs were not on the ETPL.

Vermont believes the On-the-Job Training Program (OJT) is one of the most beneficial services it has. Despite outreach efforts for the OJT program, enrollments continued to be low. The VDOL recognizes that with staff turnover, there was a need for OJT training and simplifying the OJT process for staff and employers while offering the same benefits and achieving the same goals will be a focus in PY2023.

Adult Success Story – Career Pathways & Collaboration

Jessica is a 33-year-old single mom who was referred to the WIOA program by her reach up case manager. Jessica was a recipient of 3 Squares (TANF) and disclosed that because of her anxiety, it was difficult for her to sustain employment. Jessica’s work experience consisted of cashiering. This client’s goal was to gain work experience and eventual employment in the administrative field with a local nonprofit. Jessica started out with a work experience with Adult Basic Education working 20 hours a week where she began her career pathway exploration as an administrative assistant.

Jessica also expressed interest in some self-directed online learning through [a regional CTE center] and enrolled in the “Admin Assistant Bundle” with the local career center. A natural progression from a work experience to an OJT occurred.

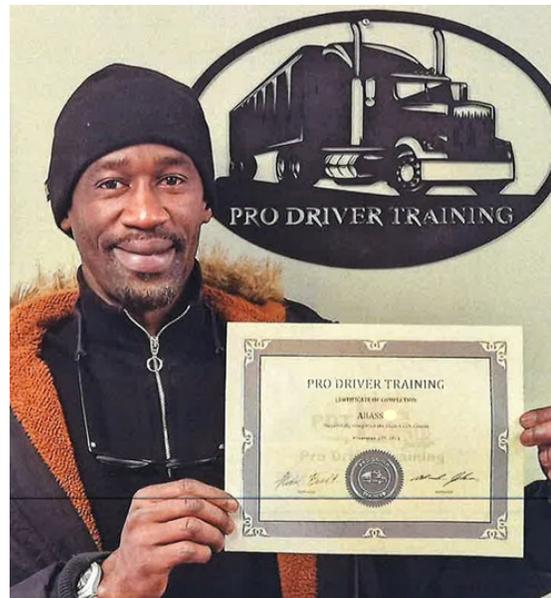
The client achieved the certificates associated with the Admin Assistant Bundle, Microsoft Office Suite and enrolled in the QuickBooks course to advance her skills more.

Jessica was co-enrolled with WIOA, HireAbility, and ICAN where she leveraged funding from all three and case management support.

Jessica successfully completed her OJT and now receives follow up services from WIOA.

Adult Success Story – Retail to CDL

Abass is a 46-year-old man who approached the Vermont Department of Labor in November of 2022 after receiving a scholarship from Department of Transportation to be used toward his Commercial Driver's training classes. He and his wife made a modest income both working in retail jobs, but he was motivated as a new American and aspired to do more to support his family. He reports that he has always enjoyed driving and has been passionate about commercial driving for years. Abass still needed just over \$3,000 to be able to afford tuition at Pro Driver Training. He diligently studied the commercial driving manual and earned his CDL permit and passed his DOT physical independently as he prepared for training. He took on odd jobs to build up his savings so along with his wife's income, he could afford to not work during training and focus all his energy on learning.



He enrolled in the WIOA program in March of 2023, began behind-the-wheel CDL driver training in April of 2023 and successfully completed his CDL.

Abass' focus was always on becoming a safe driver no matter the situation. He mentioned that some days he would come home from training exhausted, but it was worth it to master safe backing skills and feeling comfortable and confident behind the wheel. He was excited to work with Pro Driver Training and Vermont Department of Labor as he began to look for work and intends to return to work quickly in his new industry.

Dislocated Worker Success Story - Karen

Karen lost her job in August 2022 as the result of a permanent plant closure. She had worked in the plant for over 10 years. Her employer, Entergy, was the owner and operator of Vermont Yankee located in Vernon, VT. In December of 2014 the power plant was shut down and Entergy began a process of decommissioning. Karen continued to work as a Senior Administrative Assistant for Entergy for the Nuclear Decommissioning Organization. After the last site was closed, Karen was notified that her job would be ending on the last day of August 2022.



A dislocated worker in need of skills training, Karen applied for WIOA in the fall of 2022. She was enrolled in October 2022. She entered Occupational Skills training (non-ETPL) -- a Paralegal Certificate Program with Boston University -- November 1, 2022. Karen successfully completed her skills training in February 2023 and received a Certificate in Paralegal Studies from B.U.'s Center for Professional Education.

Karen is currently employed with The Green Mountain Higher Education Consortium, a collaborative endeavor of three Vermont Colleges: Champlain College, Middlebury College, and Saint Michael's College. Karen is on salary in the Payroll Department at GMHEC. She started her position in June 2023. Karen has expressed her thanks to the Vermont Department of Labor for the support she received through the WIOA Program.

PY 2022 WIOA Adult Program Outcomes

In the WIOA Adult program, we exceeded all negotiated goals for PY 22. In comparing PY 21 outcomes to PY 22, there were some significant increases in the Credential Attainment measure (+19.7%), and in the Median Earnings in the 2nd quarter after exit measure (+\$2,459).

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2022 Goal	PY2022 Actual
Participants Served		302
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	68%	77.4%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	59%	68.6%
Median Earnings	\$5500	\$8343
Credential Attainment	67%	67.9%
Measurable Skill Gains	55%	67.3%

PY 2022 WIOA Dislocated Worker Program Outcomes

In the Dislocated Worker program, four of the five measures met or exceeded the negotiated goal for PY2022. Also, there were some noteworthy increases in performance between PY 21 and PY 22. Employment in the 2nd quarter after exit had the largest increase of 28.9% from PY 21 to PY2022. The Median Earnings measure had an increase of \$1,616 between the two years. The decreasing number of DLW participants over the last few years has a tangible impact on outcomes. Whether one person attains or does not attain a goal can directly affect the overall performance for the entire program.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2022 Goal	PY2022 Actual
Participants Served		31
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	73%	100%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	67.5%	87.1%
Median Earnings	\$9000	\$9568
Credential Attainment	80%	79.2%
Measurable Skill Gains	60.5%	71.4%

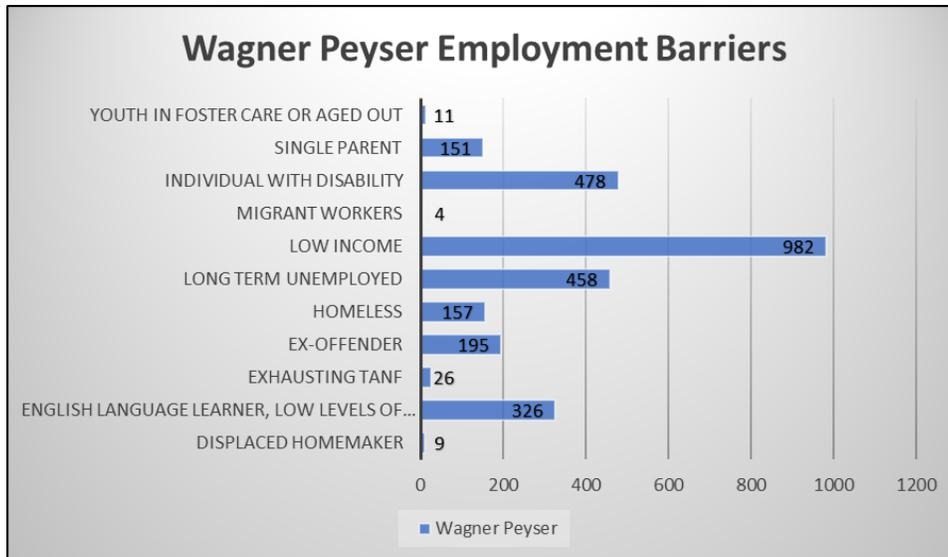
Title III Wagner-Peyser

The primary function of the Wagner-Peyser Act is to provide universal access of labor exchange services to job seekers. Labor exchange services are considered a type of career service under WIOA and are available to all individuals legally entitled to work in the United States. There are no eligibility criteria. The most notable change in Wagner-Peyser was an increase of over 90 individuals from PY2021 to PY2022. Vermont attributes this increase to the extended outreach efforts and sees it increasing even more in PY2023.

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. To ensure that all services are equitable and accessible to all, Labor on location events continued to grow across the state in PY2022.

The top 5 most accessed services are: Job search planning, resume assistance, career guidance, UI claimant activity, and labor market information.

The VDOL recognizes there is potential in converting jobseekers who access Wagner-Peyser services and disclose specific barriers to employment to a WIOA enrollment. Through assessments, goal setting, and career exploration, staff were able to make appropriate referrals internally and to core partners.



Title III Employment Services Program Outcomes

All three outcomes for the Wagner-Peyser program in PY2022 exceeded the negotiated goal. While the number of overall participants served decreased slightly between PY2021 and PY2022, the outcomes for PY2022 increased as shown above.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2021 Actual	PY2022 Goal	PY2022 Actual
Title III Wagner Peyser Program			
Participants Served	2692		2519
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	53.8%	59%	61.8%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	50%	52%	59.7%
Median Earnings	\$6,875	\$6500	\$8250

Wagner-Peyser Testimonial

"It's been a very busy few months since we spoke last, but so exciting! My job at Cabot Creamery is supporting an Environmental Health and Safety role referred to as an EHS Specialist.

This is a career change for me transitioning from a production leadership role to a role providing safety support for production teams. This is due in part to a revised and updated resume that focused on transferable skills.

From a salary perspective I was able to increase my annual salary. The benefits package has added a pension to my retirement goals and Cabot provides tuition re-imbusement. I just completed my first course finishing with a 95. I have also been sent to multiple OSHA certification courses and was just recently invited to serve on the Vermont Safety Council which I gladly accepted.

All of these things have allowed me and my family to avoid relocation and to remain in Vermont.

My experience working with the St J. team and specifically with Liz was always positive, progressive, and encouraging. I am so thankful for the work and support Liz provided and the chance that Cabot took on me.

My advice for people who find themselves middle aged and laid off: leverage your experience, focus on transferable skills, listen intently, network, be assertive, dare to go big!"
Wagner-Peyser Jobseeker

WAIVERS

Vermont had no waivers in place during Program Year 2022.

EFFECTIVENESS IN SERVING EMPLOYERS:

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2021 Actual	PY2022 Goal	PY2022 Actual
Effectiveness in Serving Employers			
Employer Services Provided	3837		3778
Retention with the Same Employer in the 2 nd and 4 th Quarters After Exit Rate	59.8%	Baseline	70.3%
Repeat Business Customer Rate	56%	Baseline	46.3%

In PY2022, the VDOL continued to place a heavy focus on the employer customer. Vermont is still reeling from employment challenges brought on by Covid-19, but we are excited at the opportunities the situation is providing us by seizing on the employer's willingness to partner with us and take an increased interest in our services. The VDOL 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 PY2022, we received 477 new inquiries. Many were from businesses that had not previously engaged with the 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. While the overall number of inquiries is down from PY2021, upon further discovery it became clear this is the result of businesses having gained a direct contact with staff on the Business Services Team thereby reducing the use of the initial form. The Business Services Manager has continued to emphasize personal engagement and regular follow-up with businesses. Since overall business contacts are up, lower use of the web form is a testament to the Business Services Team's success in building strong, trusting relationships with employers.

In addition to the standard slate of services provided to business customers, which includes 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 continuation of job fairs and hiring events allowed for some new and creative opportunities during PY2022:

- The VDOL partnered with the Vermont Department of Health to offer dual purpose job fairs and vaccination clinics. It has been a success with the public taking advantage of the free vaccinations to keep their families safe while surveying opportunities for different career paths. Further collaboration between the Departments is expected.
- The VDOL staff were out on the street during the days following the flooding, supporting business in person, and offering assistance. Businesses affected by the flood were tremendously appreciative of staff efforts. By being out on the street and engaging with business owners in person, we further established trust while problem-solving the various issues expressed by businesses, many of which were outside the scope of our normal services. This led to collaboration with other state and community partners. The relationships that were forged continue after flood relief efforts are winding down and the VDOL is now a trusted partner to many new business customers, especially small businesses.
- Work has begun on a dedicated business services team that will not only be responsible for outreach, but also act as a knowledge source for various employer services and options available to employers throughout the state. Cross training of internal staff with partner agencies training has begun. We fully expect the business services team to be the go-to resource for Vermont business moving forward.
- In November of 2022, Vermont participated in a one of a kind, six-state NE Regional Virtual Career Fair. This event was an effort to offer broader a broader regional recruitment opportunity for employers. Over the two-day event, 1,042 total employers participated (169 from Vermont) with 2,881 registered job seekers. Post event, Vermont employers reported a high level of satisfaction with the amount of effort needed to participate in relation to the number of virtual contacts they made. This event was offered via Premier Virtual and Vermont hopes to explore a further partnership with Premier to continue to offer the virtual job fair experience to both job seekers and employers.

To monitor and validate the employers using Vermont JobLink, the VDOL’s job board, 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 on the job board, it also increased the overall engagement with employers and has helped to keep our performance in the Effectiveness in Serving Employer strong. We are also doing continual training of the vetting process and are creating a vetting process team to go over any challenges and questions.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION:

Vermont recognizes that customer satisfaction is crucial and that surveys help to measure and improve service quality. It is also a great way to understand how our customers see us and what their needs are. A high priority in PY2023, is for the VDOL to begin exploring customer satisfaction options in collaboration with the one-stop operator.

SECTOR STRATEGIES:

Telecommunications: The VDOL continued to support the work started in PY2021

To recap, in PY2021, 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:

- Incumbent worker training 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 career technical education (CTE)/high school students by recognizing skills learned from CTE programs.

In PY2021, the VDOL provided funding to create a registered broadband installer apprenticeship program and incumbent worker training opportunities. Due to a lack of responsiveness on the part of key industry employers and some severe staffing shortages with the grantee, this grant failed to make progress in PY2022. The work was re-evaluated, and the grantee agreed to allow the VDOL to shift the funding to the Vermont Community Broadband Board which was better

positioned to convene stakeholders and gain the buy-in of the employer community. This course change occurred late in the program year, but there have been active engagements, and some early deliverables will be rolling out by December 31, 2023. 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. We feel this better positions Vermont to best capitalize on the significant Investing in America funds that are now available.

Construction Industry

To address the continued need to shore up the Vermont construction workforce, the VDOL provided grant funds to New Hampshire/Vermont Chapter, Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc. to support the implementation, management, and promotion of a 3,000-hour Commercial Carpentry Registered Apprenticeship program. The anticipated success of this program is built around the clearly articulated needs of six Vermont contracting firms that have committed to providing entry level job opportunities for participants. The structure of the program will allow for the braiding of state apprenticeship funds with WIOA funding to provide OJT and support services to those that meet WIOA eligibility. The first cohort of 17 participants are actively participating and a full program evaluation is slated to identify any need for a change in program design and its effectiveness.

Teacher Shortage

Vermont, like many other states, is currently faced with a significant shortage of teachers, support staff and administrators in K-12 schools. Some key factors are low pay, scarce affordable housing and post-Covid burnout.

With funding from the State Apprenticeship Expansion fund through the Office of Apprenticeship, the VDOL is partnering with the Agency of Education (AOE) to create clear career pathways, expedited on-ramps and apprenticeship programs to mitigate this issue. In PY2022, the VDOL took first steps to explore ways to develop, pilot and scale Educator Apprenticeship Pathways and build sustainable, statewide capacity to support Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAP) for Educators as we work to grow and diversify the educator workforce in Vermont.

This complex challenge will require the braiding of state and federal funds (both WIOA and apprenticeship) to fully support the many entry points to the many career options in the field of education. WIOA funds will be used to support work experiences, On the Job training opportunities and support services for youth, New Americans, underemployed individuals, and career changers.

Due to the rural nature of Vermont, with many smaller school districts that find it hard to compete to recruit talent, the Grow Your Own model is being explored. “Grow Your Own” (GYO) is a partnership between school districts and educator preparation providers (EPPs) to select candidates (paraprofessionals, graduating high school seniors, career changers) from local communities to earn their degree and educator license to teach.

PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM:

Vermont introduced a new Monitoring Policy in June of 2023. Unlike audits, monitoring is current and preventative and focuses on review of activities and transactions occurring during the period of performance. One intent of monitoring is to identify issues and address them immediately. With effective and timely resolution, issues identified through monitoring can be addressed before they become audit findings.

Monitoring is ongoing with review activities occurring throughout the year quarterly and annually.

Quarterly program activities or systems focused reviews allow Program Administrators and Regional Managers to be proactive in ensuring that practices comply with federal and state regulations and policies. These focused reviews will also allow regional managers to ensure that all data entry expectations are being met so performance reporting will be reflected accurately. The focused, centered review will also afford managers more opportunities to address and reinforce good behaviors and identify areas of concern.

Onsite monitoring provides an oversight process used to measure progress, identify areas of compliance, offer opportunities for technical assistance to help resolve non-compliance issues, and ensure that Federal funds are used responsibly. The monitoring team makes determinations and recommendations based on the information collected during pre-monitoring activities and while on site and assess the statewide progress in meeting performance goals/measures, participant outcomes while ensuring fiscal integrity and transparency.

Four Monitoring Components



Monitoring is conducted to ensure that program activities and expenditures are allowable and meet, or do not exceed, spending thresholds and to ensure that practices comply with federal and state regulations and policies.

Monitoring involves an in-depth examination of program activities. It is intended to ensure that the delivery of the WIOA program is effective and meets the needs of a diverse group of customers. Monitoring allows an opportunity to learn about innovative approaches and best practices being used to achieve strategic priorities. Information gathered during monitoring informs continuous improvement of operations and quality of service, promotes effective service

delivery approaches, addresses system deficiencies and, ultimately, results in customer satisfaction and attainment of performance obligations.

Performance monitoring occurs throughout the year and allows reviewers to gauge whether minimum levels of performance are being met. Reviewers assess and identify issues that may affect attainment of negotiated levels of performance.

Monitoring is critical to ensuring that a continuous improvement cycle in which advanced strategies and worthy practices are promoted and technical assistance and staff training needs are being identified and addressed. Monitoring is continuous and may be delivered in a variety of methods at different levels by Regional Managers, Program Administrators, and a Monitoring Team.

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.

In PY2020, 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, the VDOL and HireAbility Vermont (previously known as Vocational Rehabilitation) continue to share data.

The VDOL data team runs weekly reports to track, monitor, and ensure that employer and job seeker activity in the MIS, Vermont JobLink, is as complete as possible. To verify employers and job seekers are receiving timely and appropriate job matching opportunities, we look at active and disabled employer accounts with job postings to ensure that all job postings are publicly viewable as intended. We also look at pending enrollments to ensure job seekers are enrolled in a timely manner as appropriate.

The state has had a common exit policy in place for several years. The DOL-administered programs we include in the common exit process are the Title I and III programs as well as the Trade Adjustment Assistance program.

STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES:

STATE RESERVE FUNDS

State Reserve funds were used to pay for a portion of the salary and benefits of a new position that supports equal opportunity and accessibility of our programs and offices. This position also maintains and administers the WIOA Non-Discrimination Plan.

PROCUREMENT FOR NEW CRM -ONGOING

Vermont completed a request for information (RFI) and request for proposal (RFP) process during PY 2021 to solicit proposals from vendors who could improve the VDOL's information management system, including its case and customer management system, job board, 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 the VDOL's management information system. This system will disseminate information about eligible and non-eligible training providers, work-based learning and training experiences. These include 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.

There have been many challenges related to the early work with the selected vendor, and the state-wide flooding ultimately put a hold on the project. During PY2022, the 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. The 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 LAYOFF AVERSION -

In PY2022, the VDOL provided Rapid Response services to nine significant layoff events that represented just under 400 impacted workers. Rapid Response information sessions were offered and targeted job fairs were held. Outreach was high from other Vermont businesses and these workers and in most cases, they were faced with excellent re-employment opportunities in their local communities.

With national and global inflation causing businesses to evaluate their operations and causing challenging economic times, layoffs began to increase toward the end of PY2022. The newly appointed Rapid Response Coordinator has adopted some new tools and strategies to offer a more targeted approach to Rapid Response.

By offering the affected employees monthly smaller-scale job fairs that target those impacted by layoffs or business closures it allows for direct connections to new employers. For now, our ability to support the impacted workers remains strong, as there are many Vermont businesses looking to add talent, but we will continue to work closely with our Unemployment Insurance and economic development partners to provide wrap around resources as they are needed.

PROMISING PRACTICES:

Workforce Instruction for Service Excellence (WISE)

Workforce Instruction for Service Excellence (WISE) is an onboarding training program that was launched in PY2022. The WISE training curriculum was developed to support the VDOL's purpose and principles. The VDOL recognized the cruciality of providing the tools and insights for new employees to possess in order perform their job better and more effectively. The WISE

training was five full days, in person sessions for all new employees. Staff were asked to complete pre-requisite work including an Introduction to the Vermont Workforces System, customer services videos, attend a resume and interview workshop, and complete Vermont JobLink training. The WISE training was very interactive and challenged new staff to step out of their comfort zone. Different methods were used to present material including guest speakers, individual and group activities, and lecture. Regional Managers brought their experience and expectations to the WISE training which proved to be impactful. Job Specialists were given case scenarios that they worked through together with a Regional Manager mentor. On day five, the Job Specialists presented their cases to a Regional Manager in front of the class. At the end of each day, a survey was sent to the attendees for feedback. In PY2022, two WISE trainings were completed - training more than 20 new staff members.

Five Day Curriculum



Staff Testimonials:

"I liked the hands-on approach from the supervisors. Having them there showing support and learning along with all the new hires was morale-boosting."

"I enjoyed the content; I like the pre-requisite work it started my wheels turning. The variety of activities and engagement was encouraged, supported, and I believe assisted with the group coming together."

Growing Collaborations & Partnerships

WIOA/ICAN - co-enrollment

It's a goal under ICAN to increase co-enrollments with WIOA, particularly as the Federal exemptions have lifted and "Time Limits" have come back. Though co-enrollment with WIOA is promoted with all ICAN populations, we are primarily focused on "Time-Limited" (ABAWD) participants. Time limited populations co-enrolled with WIOA and actively engaged with their employment plan, will meet their work requirements.

Vermont is working towards increasing co-enrollments using 3 strategies:

1. Case managers regularly attend ICAN collaboration meetings in their respective regions. The meetings are facilitated by Invest EAP ICAN coordinators and attended by HireAbility counselors, VDOL case managers, and VABIR employment staff. Meetings focus around ICAN participant service coordination and inter-agency referrals. Meeting frequency and design vary slightly around the state based on the needs of the participant community. Some districts naturally have a higher number of individuals engaged in ICAN activities. In those regions, meetings occur more frequently than areas with fewer ICAN participants. At least 1 region reserves two full days per month to schedule one-hour client meetings focused on service coordination with partner agencies. A VDOL case manager will attend the client meetings where integration with WFD service delivery is needed.
2. In 2021 & 2022, the VDOL transitioned most of our field positions to the Job Center Specialist II (JCSII) level. In addition, we cross trained all case managers on service delivery under WIOA, WP, RESEA, & ICAN. More case managers trained across multiple programs provides an increased opportunity to co-enroll individuals in programming which includes ICAN, WIOA and WP. Each region identifies lead ICAN case managers that will primarily support service coordination within the multi-agency ICAN partnership. These VDOL case managers will support other co-workers in their office region by acting as a point of contact to the ICAN partnership and providing technical guidance as they work with their clients.
3. The VDOL now holds monthly statewide ICAN meetings that focus on continued professional development and program guidance. These meetings have also been attended by ESD ICAN leadership as well as Invest EAP leadership. Monthly coaching & guidance with consistent multi-agency leadership messaging helps to support co-enrollment with WIOA.

Workforce Development / Department of Corrections

There is a growing relationship between the Department of Corrections and Workforce Development. In PY2022, staff had more of a physical and virtual presence in facilities to establish a strong, trusting relationship and engage with incarcerated individuals before being released. This approach affords the VDOL staff more time to develop an IEP that is responsive to the individual's day-to-day realities. It also provides an introduction and a path to support the individual and the VDOL staff to enhance the chance of connection when they are released.

CHALLENGES:

The State of Vermont is not without challenges. Specifically, the state has faced lack of housing, transportation, an aging workforce, and a low unemployment rate.

- The housing market in Vermont has continued to be a challenge as we seek to encourage recruitment of students, exiting military members, and out of staters. Conversations with core partners have time and time again provided a response indicating lack of housing opportunities results in individuals seeking relocation elsewhere. According to VHFA the median length of time a home remains on the market in 2022 was 65 days. This is a decrease from 137 days in 2016. Lack of housing has also contributed to the cost of housing being considerable higher than in years past. In addition, the flood of July 2023 has further had an impact on home and rental availability in Washington, Windham, Windsor, Caledonia, and Orange counties.
- Although an obstacle identified by Governor Scott, local officials, colleges and universities, job corps, veteran organizations, ACCD, and Labor we all continue our efforts to promote the benefits of relocation and planting roots in Vermont. In 2022 our Jobs for Veterans State Grants staff partnered with Vermont Air National Guard, National Guard, Department of Corrections, and the Vermont State Police and went to Fort Drum and Fort Liberty on a recruitment mission.
- Transportation continues to be a challenge for the 61% rural Green Mountain State. Individuals who do not possess their own mode of transportation or have access to public transportation struggle to find ways not only back and forth to work but to appointments. Many of the hardest to serve individuals, with whom state and federal funding programs are designed for, fail to meet goals and expectations due to a broken transportation system. Thoughts of Uber, taxis, and ride share also prove to be difficult to arrange because of cost and liability. There was a growing demand for driver's education funding in PY2022 for adults, specifically New Americans and high school students not able to access the traditional school funding because they weren't able to take the course while in school. This poses a challenge in Vermont as funding is limited to support this.
- In PY 2022 programs such as Commute with Enterprise were researched and presented to employers as well as WIOA support services, Commuter Co-op, and other alternate modes of transportation such as bicycles.

- In 2022 Vermont's unemployment median rate was 2.6%. This is well below the national average of 8.1% for the first and second quarters of 2022. Vermont has also been impacted by baby boomer retirements, declining birth rates, and low relocation.
- Many conversations are happening at the legislative, academic, and workforce levels to create ways in which to increase pre-apprentice, apprenticeships, recruitment techniques, salaries, and hybrid work models. All are being explored to determine how we as a state entice individuals to work, live, and play in Vermont.
- With an unemployment rate this low we often find ourselves seeking to entice the hardest to serve to seek employment. To do this state agencies, employers, and educational institutions need to highlight the benefit of not seeking subsidized support.
- A goal started in PY2022 and continuing for the future is identifying and sharing with employers untapped labor pools such as individuals with criminal backgrounds, employer investment in incumbent training creating a labor pipeline, identifying short term nationally accredited pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities, and lastly supporting New American initiatives.
- Due to the performance reporting requirements that training providers must meet to remain on the Eligible Training Provider List, consumer choice for WIOA funding is limited. Training providers are finding it impossible to track and obtain wage information to satisfy performance reporting requirements and therefore are opting out of the ETPL. Due to limited capacity and lack of data sharing, Vermont can't make this easier for training providers.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

- Vermont realizes the importance of having policies in compliance with federal guidelines and maximizing those policies unique to Vermont. As Vermont reviews current Title, I & Title III policies and procedures, technical assistance may be needed.
- The Eligible Training Provider requirements continue to be a concern for the VDOL and its training providers. Vermont may seek technical assistance to improve the ETP process and performance reporting.
- Improving coordination of services and leveraging funding across state partners has continued to be a focus for Vermont in every program year. Vermont feels that there may be a benefit in technical assistance to help us capitalize on the significant funding opportunities.
- There may be a technical assistance need for the State Workforce Board in building a framework around roles and responsibilities.