



Vermont Department of Labor

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

Program Year 2019

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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) 2019 WIOA Annual Report provides a summary of Vermont's Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Programs from July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020.

Vermont's Workforce Development System

Vermont has one federally designated One-Stop American Jobs Center (AJC), located in Burlington, and eleven affiliates sites located 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), Registered Apprenticeship (RA), and other state and federal programs to jobseekers and employers through a network of local One-Stop Job Centers. VDOL's 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 each community. Strong interagency partnerships are essential in developing and maintaining a successful workforce development delivery system. VDOL works diligently at strengthening collaborations to ensure that partners in the workforce development system make progress toward 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 jobseekers and employers virtual access to many of the services available through the One-Stop network. Users are able to 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 at the start of comprehensive system analysis in preparation for an upcoming system procurement process in 2021.

Vermont's One-stop service delivery system provides self and staff-assisted services so that workers, jobseekers, and businesses can locate and access resources to fulfill their employment needs in easy-to-find locations. Services are available virtually at

www.VermontJobLink.com or in one of our twelve offices located around the state. In March, staff began assisting customers virtually – rather than in-person – with discovering and using current labor market information, accessing assessments of skill level and interests, providing career guidance, hosting job search workshops, and referral to training opportunities which may be available. Veterans receive priority referral to jobs and training as well as special employment services and assistance. In addition, the system provides specialized attention and service to individuals with specific barriers and disabilities, migrant and seasonal farmworkers, ex-offenders, youth, minorities, and older workers.

The pandemic caused VDOL's Workforce Development Division staff to perform their work remotely beginning in early spring of 2020. Within a few weeks, staff stood up initial methods of delivering basic and individualized career services virtually. Over the summer, virtual service delivery has been refined, expanded, and promoted as our new way of providing services.

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 2018, 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 2019, the State's workforce goals were:

- (1) Maximize equitable access to workforce development services through a seamless, coordinated delivery system that provides a quality, consistent experience for any jobseeker or Vermont employer.
- (2) Connect individuals to the training and supports they need to enter an occupation and progress on career pathways resulting in a livable wage.
- (3) Strengthen the Vermont economy by working with state and private partners to make data-driven changes that increase the number of women and other under-represented populations employed in the skilled trades, STEM fields, advanced manufacturing and other Vermont priority sectors.
- (4) Ensure all students who graduate from high school are able to pursue and complete post-secondary education, training, apprenticeships or career opportunities, with the education and skills necessary to keep Vermonters competitive in the economic sectors critical to the Vermont economy.

- (5) Align the workforce development system to the needs of employers, as well as job seekers, through systematic and ongoing engagement and partnership.
- (6) Expand Vermont's labor force by helping more Vermonters enter the labor market and relocating out-of- state workers to meet employer's needs.

Core Program Updates

Title I Adult Program

Title I Adult Program delivers employment and training services to individuals ages 18 and older who are unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency, in need of training services, and have the skills and qualifications to participate successfully in training services available. Basic, individualized, and follow-up career services and supportive services are available to eligible participants. Because of funding limitations, VDOL prioritizes serving veterans, low-income individuals, and individuals with barriers to gaining and sustaining unsubsidized employment.

In addition to providing basic career services like job search, labor market information counseling, interview preparation, resume updating, and work readiness trainings, Adult Program participants may engage in a paid or unpaid on-the-job training, work experience, or internship. During the experiences, individuals may learn how to perform specific occupational task, navigate the workplace, troubleshoot challenging workplace experiences and relationships, recognize and seize professional growth opportunities, and build a resume and references to market themselves for future unsubsidized employment.

The on-the-job training program continues to be a key method of delivering hands on training and has proven to be beneficial to both jobseekers and employers in the private and public sectors. The program affords employers an opportunity to train jobseekers at a wage reimbursement rate of up to 50% for a determined amount of contract hours. On-the-job training is designed to provide knowledge or skills essential to the satisfactory performance of the job.

Occupational skills training is among the most utilized service that VDOL has to offer its adult population. Participants who have successfully completed these trainings have entered the labor force in a variety of occupations including but not limited to; tractor trailer truck drivers, home health assistants, LNAs, bookkeepers, childcare assistances, medical records and health information technicians, chefs, machine tool operators, veterinary technologists, janitors, automotive service techs and computer programmers. In PY 2019, over 120 adults participated in occupational skills training totaling \$250,572.24 with local providers to gain the necessary skills training to perform specific jobs.

Although, not used in the Adult program as much as the youth, there are individuals that are in need of an internship or work experience that provides a planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited period of time. Work experiences

may be combined with an occupational skills training, so the participant is given the opportunity to apply what is learned in the classroom. In Program Year 2019, over 67 adults were served in a work experience totaling \$90,525.89.

VDOL staff served over 235 Adult participants during Program Year 2019. Whether it's working with employers to develop paid work experiences for individuals, customized on-the-job training, customized skill trainings, or supporting traditional certificate or credentialed programs, VDOL is developing stronger partnerships with employers in helping to create successful, long-term employment outcomes.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY 18 Actual	PY 19 Goal	PY 19 Actual
Title I Adult			
Participants Served	275		235
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	72.7%	71%	75.9%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	63.5%	66%	72%
Median Earnings	\$6,154	\$4,620	\$7,071
Credential Attainment	64.5%	62%	81.3%
Measurable Skill Gains	71%	Baseline	62.4%

Title I Dislocated Worker Program

The Title I Dislocated Worker Program delivers employment and training services to dislocated workers ages 18 and older. A dislocated worker is one who has been terminated or laid off, or has been notified of a termination or layoff; is sufficiently attached to the workforce, demonstrated either through eligibility for or exhaustion of unemployment compensation; and is unlikely to return to the previous industry or occupation. Individualized services may include career exploration, comprehensive assessment, labor market information, referrals and coordination of activities with community partners and supportive services. In PY 2019, 69 dislocated workers were served. Services totaling \$88,163.50 included: Occupational Skills Training, On-the-Job Training opportunities, Pre-vocational courses, and support services.

With many paths to reemployment, VDOL staff work one-on-one with Dislocated Worker Program participants, mapping out the best way to become reemployed in a permanent, full-time position. While the participant may have an extensive work-history reflected in their resume, they may require up-skilling to match the current needs of the labor market which allows them to earn a competitive wage. Using the WIOA eligible training provider list, Dislocated Worker Program participants can navigate and select occupational skills training that may be paid for with Title I funds. In PY 2019, after completing training programs and accessing other career services, Dislocated Worker Program participants landed full-time positions with labor market growth, including: bookkeepers, tractor trailer truck drivers, medical assistants, childcare workers, registered nurses, social/human services, automotive services, phlebotomists and more.

Career and training services are offered to Dislocated Workers to assist them in becoming employed in a high-demand occupation offering a competitive wage. For the last third of Program Year 2019, dislocated workers had a much more difficult time becoming re-employed as the Governor’s Executive Orders placed limitations on business and education program operations, limiting participant’s access to training programs and contacts with operating businesses able to hire.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY 18 Actual	PY 19 Goal	PY 19 Actual
Title I Dislocated Worker Program			
Participants Served	95		69
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	88.9%	79%	81.8%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	78.1%	74.5%	75.9%
Median Earnings	\$10,493	\$8,212	\$9,152
Credential Attainment	73.2%	62%	75.7%
Measurable Skill Gains	73.9%	Baseline	79.1%

Title I Youth Program

VDOL is committed to providing high quality services for youth and young adults beginning with career exploration and guidance; continuing support for educational attainment, opportunities for skills training in in-demand industries and occupations; and culminating with a good job along a career pathway or enrollment in postsecondary education while providing intensive case management to ensure success.

The Youth program encompasses fourteen program elements, ranging from skills training, to paid work experiences, to mentoring, that must be made available to youth participants. Partner’s resources may be leveraged through appropriate referral processes to assist in offering the program elements to youth.

Twenty percent (20%) of Youth Program funding must be spent on helping to connect and fund participant work experiences. Vermont meets and exceeds this requirement, as it aligns directly with VDOL’s philosophical approach to program implementation. In the experience of VDOL case managers and program staff, participants are most successful if their individual service plan includes on-the-job training or a work experience (e.g. internship, paid short-term employment, apprenticeship, etc.) – preferably a paid one.

During the pandemic, VDOL continued to focus its efforts on vulnerable, out of school youth. The shift to virtual case management and delivery of services to youth proved to be challenging for staff, but in some cases easier for the youth participants. As staff adjusted to the new way of service delivery, more targeted outreach to re-engage with participants began. The VDOL team took every opportunity to hold virtual meetings with the stakeholders and offer services in a virtual setting. Probably the most important actions case managers took was to reach out to existing participants, listening to their struggles, and offering support during this uncertain time.

In Program Year 2019, 256 Youth enrolled in a work experience totaling \$296,885.62. In total, VDOL staff served over 268 Youth participants during the program year.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY 18 Actual	PY 19 Goal	PY 19 Actual
Title I Youth Program			
Participants Served	327		268
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	72.4%	55%	69.2%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	59.2%	55%	65.1%
Median Earnings	\$4,209	Baseline	\$3,088
Credential Attainment	56.4%	38%	50%
Measurable Skill Gains	52.3%	Baseline	45.0%

Title III Employment Services Program

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. Individualized services are available for some, including re-employment support for specific unemployment insurance claimants. Screenings and assessments are also available to determine appropriate service referrals and help individuals enroll in available employment, training, education, and social assistance programs.

In Program Year 2019, VDOL served 5,895 individuals in staff-assisted labor exchange services.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY 18 Actual	PY 19 Goal	PY 19 Actual
Title III Wagner Peyser Program			
Participants Served	5857		5895
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	65.1%	66%	66.6%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	58%	59%	58.4%
Median Earnings	\$5,326	\$5,200	\$5,635

Waivers

Vermont had no waivers in place during Program Year 2019.

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Services provided to business customers include: taking and posting job orders, reviewing and editing job descriptions, referring or “matching” job seekers to available job openings, recruitment services like targeted job fairs and customized hiring events, screening of qualified applicants, referrals in creating job accommodations and use of assistive technologies, providing regional industry and occupational wage information, developing trainings and customized skills development opportunities, creating or expanding internship and registered apprenticeship opportunities, assistance in managing reductions in force and coordinating rapid response activities, accessing relevant workforce tax credits and fidelity bonds, and more.

In January 2020, VDOL restructured its middle level workforce development leadership team and brought on a new role of Business Services Manager, with responsibility for leading a coordinated business engagement effort bridging the Rapid Response Program, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and WIOA’s employer services. This position is helping to integrate state and federal programs through policy changes, staff training enhancements, and participating in interagency and community efforts that support employers.

A primary focus of the Business Services Manager is to oversee VDOL’s new Business Services Team. This team is comprised of locally based staff who are working to increase the quality and quantity of jobs posted in the Vermont Job Link system. To achieve this goal, an emphasis on staff training and communication, including weekly Business Services Team meetings has occurred. Additionally, as a result of COVID, updates to the VDOL website, including an Employer Inquiry Web form has offered an easy first step and improved the ease of access for employers.

Intentional coordination and collaboration with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation’s (DVR) Business Account Manager Team and the VDOL Business Services Team has provided a streamlined, “no-wrong door” approach to serving employers in Vermont. Joint leadership and team meetings coupled with a process-mapping effort have begun to identify key points of intersection in the work that VDOL performs. One key goal for this Program Year is to provide joint training to move from a transactional or reactive approach to business engagement to a transformational, proactive model.

States choose to report on two of three federally selected indicators of effectiveness in serving employers:

- (1) Retention with the same employer in the 2nd and 4th quarter after exit (the percentage of participants who exit a service and are employed with the same employer in the second and fourth quarters after exit),
- (2) Employer penetration rate (percentage of employers who use core program services out of all the businesses represented in the state), or
- (3) Repeat business customer rate (the percentage of businesses who receive services that use core program services more than once).

In Program Year 2019, Vermont selected “retention with the same employer” and “repeat

business customer rate” as the indicators we would report. In PY 2019, VDOL established data sharing agreements with the Agency of Education and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to capture and report on their employer service outcomes through WIOA Title I and III programs in the next year. The core partners are still working to overcome technical challenges in sharing and matching data to produce the more accurate reports.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY 18 Actual	PY 19 Goal	PY 19 Actual
Effectiveness in Serving Employers			
Employer Services Provided	1889		1173
Retention with the Same Employer in the 2 nd and 4 th Quarters After Exit Rate	58.4%	Baseline	62.8%
Repeat Business Customer Rate	24.8%	Baseline	25.5%

Customer Satisfaction

The need to offer services virtually, as a result of COVID-19, has provided new opportunities for communication and interaction with both jobseeker and employer customers. Following each new 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 improve the quality and quantity of the data collected.

Virtual Job Fairs are also being recorded and the final video content is uploaded to the Vermont Department of Labor's YouTube channel. Through this process, we are able to monitor the number of views and likes and are able to provide that information to employers on the scope of their exposure from the one, relatively low investment time spent on presenting details about their company, culture, open positions and recruitment process.

In the transition to working remotely for some of the local program staff, there is an opportunity to conduct phone surveys with WIOA program completers. This survey is under development and will be implemented in the 3rd quarter of Program Year 2020. With the upcoming AJLA (Vermont Job Link) system upgrade, there is an improved survey delivery function that will allow for targeted surveying of both job seekers and employers.

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

Goal 1. Maximize equitable access to workforce development services through a seamless, coordinated delivery system that provides a quality, consistent experience for any jobseeker or Vermont employer.

Vermont has made progress in each of the state’s six goals described in the WIOA state

plan. VDOL maintains an inventory of all workforce and education training opportunities across state government and community partners. As the designated workforce leader of the state and One-Stop Operator, VDOL has been able to identify areas of duplication and potential inefficiencies across all partners to focus efforts. Stronger partnerships and alignment with Vocational Rehabilitation have helped meet employers' needs faster and maximize the successful participation of all Vermonters in available education and training programs leading to employment or advancement in employment. VDOL and VR have continued to physically co-locate in district offices in order to provide more seamless service delivery.

VDOL has expanded partnerships with state agencies and community programs serving those with the highest economic need and those individuals with barriers to employment, including people with disabilities, new Americans, women in poverty, people who are homeless, offenders, lower-skilled adult learners, and Vermonters in recovery.

Goal 2: Connect individuals to the training and supports they need to enter an occupation and progress on career pathways resulting in a livable wage.

VDOL has continued to expand the availability of sector-based training programs in manufacturing, construction, and health care through apprenticeships, internships, classroom-based training, and other on-the-job opportunities. These are sectors with occupations in high-demand that pay relatively high wages compared to other in-demand occupations in the state. In partnership with the Agency of Education, Adult Education and Literacy Programs, the Vermont State College System, and Adult Career and Technical Education providers, VDOL has helped ensure that career pathways have entrance points for lower-skilled adults and are connected to adult education programs with outreach specific to this population.

Presently, VDOL and VR staff from across the state, are working on adopting LEAN principles for the implementation of cross-partner services to increase efficiency, accessibility, and coordination of client services. Currently VDOL and VR are in the process mapping phase.

Goal 3: Strengthen the Vermont economy by working with state and private partners to make data-driven changes that increase the number of women and other under-represented populations employed in the skilled trades, STEM fields, advanced manufacturing and other Vermont priority sectors.

VDOL works with other state agencies, departments and community partners to identify and support education, training, or economic development initiatives to reduce occupational segregation in priority sectors. One more recent partnership has been with the Office of Professional Regulation at the Secretary of State's Office. VDOL is working to create better alignment with select registered apprenticeship programs in order to provide more seamless transitions from training to licensure in occupations often pursued by military spouses.

The Agency of Education has been working extensively with schools on expanding career

exposure and work-based-learning opportunities for students in grades 7-12. This includes outreach and alignment with Career Technical Education (CTE) providers, postsecondary education providers, and employers to ensure that student personalized learning plans are informed by broad exposure to a full range of careers, including STEM fields and non-traditional careers for women.

Goal 4: Ensure all students who graduate from high school are able to pursue and complete post-secondary education, training, apprenticeships or career opportunities, with the education and skills necessary to keep Vermonters competitive in the economic sectors critical to the Vermont economy.

VDOL and the Agency of Education (AOE) have worked together to establish and promote career pathways, focusing on priority pathways and in-demand industries and occupations. A great deal of progress has been made in connecting skills learned in school with their application in the workplaces of the future.

VDOL has increased outreach to youth who are leaving school to engage them in workforce development opportunities, specifically WIOA youth and adult activities. As the designated Apprenticeship Agency for the state, VDOL has worked hard to expand apprenticeship programs and opportunities over the last year and is working to build a predictable pathway from secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses as pre-apprenticeships into registered apprenticeship programs.

Goal 5: Align the workforce development system to the needs of employers, as well as job seekers, through systematic and ongoing engagement and partnership.

VDOL created a new statewide leadership position to oversee the coordination, promotion, and delivery of services to businesses. The Business Services Manager came on in January 2020 and stood up a Business Services Team located across the state. The Manager and team have continued to share information at the local and state level with VR partners to support successful placements; expanded partnerships with the local workforce development leaders to identify skill gaps and develop training programs to meet the staffing needs of local businesses; stand-up weekly virtual job fairs after the start of the pandemic, and improve the quality and quantity of job postings on Vermont Joblink by working directly with employers to gather and verify information.

Goal 6: Expand Vermont's labor force by helping more Vermonters enter the labor market and relocating out-of-state workers to meet employer's needs.

VDOL has increased focus on at-risk youth, ex-offenders, individuals in recovery, and other individuals with barriers to employment to support their initial, continuing, and extended participation in the labor market. VDOL has also prioritized activities that retrain and retain older workers in the labor force after traditional retirement or temporary exit from the workforce. VDOL continues to work with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to create and promote strategies to convert visitors, tourists, out-of-state

college students and Vermonters living outside of the state to full-time residents and workers. Vermont’s national reputation for its handling of the pandemic has caused thousands of individuals to relocate to Vermont. Because of the vast number of layoffs in the state, VDOL hasn’t been able to provide many employment services to these individuals. Many continue to work remotely.

Sector Strategies

Information Technology

There has been a need for technology focused jobs and career pathways in the Springfield area. The Black River Innovation Campus (BRIC) in Springfield has not only taken on that role to encourage tech businesses to relocate to the area, but it has also become a highly collaborative partner. VDOL’s relationship with BRIC has been mutually beneficial as VDOL supports those who want to relocate to the area and the offering of accessible programs to support tech industry in the community. VDOL staff have taken the role of Resume and Interview Workshop facilitator for their monthly Remote Work Certification Program designed to not only give participants the tools to be successful in a virtual workplace but also to connect them to nationwide employers looking for remote employees.

Health Care

Vermont is the second oldest state in the nation as measured by median age. This means as a state we are currently a high consumer of health care services and that is only expected to rise as our population ages.

As noted in the table below, there has been tremendous growth in industries related to health care. This growth is projected to continue. Notice projected growth of 0.9%, 0.4% and 0.8%; they may not seem like large numbers but relative to the projected growth for total private industry (0.2%), these are relatively large increases.

**VERMONT LONG TERM INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS
2018 - 2028**

NAICS Industry	2000 Employment	2018 Employment	2028 Employment	Annual Growth %	
				2000 - 2018 Actual	2016 - 2028 Projected
621 Ambulatory Health Care Services	13,602	17,513	19,222	1.4%	0.9%
622 Hospitals (incl. State Hospital)	9,859	14,638	15,209	2.2%	0.4%
623 Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	6,187	7,381	7,978	1.0%	0.8%
624 Social Assistance	5,463	12,978	15,140	4.9%	1.6%
Total Private Industry Employment *	274,913	288,558	294,313	0.3%	0.2%

In addition to more job openings due to industry growth, Vermonter’s currently employed in the health care industry are older than average, which indicates that due to retirements, there will be a lot of openings in health care related occupations. The COVID-19 pandemic

has had a significant effect on all aspects of life from individual well-being, public health, and the economy. Healthcare facilities are seeing a rise in employee burn out due to the pandemic and the stress it has placed on the industry.

In this time of great uncertainty, young adults are shifting their career aspirations to jobs that are important to them and offer a sense of worth to our society, such as careers in health care, which will be critical in responding to the long term effects of the pandemic. This leads to many future job openings – some due to growth, some due to high levels of retirements and regular job churn. VDOL, as a key partner in all workforce development activity in the Northeast region, has partnered with the Community College of Vermont to offer two free classes, Intro to Healthcare and Medical Terminology, in an effort to provide targeted training toward careers in the healthcare sector and aid participants in transitioning from the classroom directly to the workplace, allowing Vermonters within Caledonia County access to healthcare career pathways.

Manufacturing

Prior to the implementation of the weekly Virtual Job Fairs at the start of the pandemic, Morrisville VDOL staff collaborated with Manufacturing Solutions Inc. (MSI), ETS (MSI's staffing partner) and Community College of Vermont (CCV) in a virtual Open House hiring event highlighting CCV's Certified Production Technician courses to engage people from the highly-impacted local hospitality and tourism sectors to considering manufacturing careers. Promotional materials, preparations for the virtual platform and marketing the event taught great lessons in navigating the remote and virtual processes with the goal of increasing employment applications for MSI.

In coordination with the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center (VMEC) that supports training and retention services for Vermont manufacturing companies, VDOL tapped Rapid Response-Layoff Aversion funding to address the need for manufacturers to build capacity and to quickly train new employees that may have little or no manufacturing experience and/or retain employees in existing and new positions. It is particularly critical at this time, as manufacturers are facing wide-spread challenges related to the global pandemic. This addresses a need for manufacturers to adapt quickly to changing business conditions and workforce needs. Building capacity to provide effective on-the-job training allows manufactures to best position themselves to avoid layoffs, shorten layoffs, and/or expedite new hires (shortening unemployment periods for laid off workers). The two specific courses funded were *Training Within Industry (TWI) Job Instruction (JI)* and *Training Within Industry (TWI) Job Relations (JR)*.

Performance Accountability System

In Program Year 2018, Vermont released a WIOA Program Monitoring Policy and Procedure memo. Program monitoring allows for regional managers and program managers to identify areas of concern or non-compliance, establish corrective action plans for resolution of identified problems, and identify issues requiring technical assistance. In-person monitoring was completed at the State level in November and December 2019 and in January 2020,

however the team was not able to reach all offices due to schedule conflicts. It became evident for the necessity to move toward storing documents electronically as a priority, so that monitoring could be performed remotely when needed.

In response to the identified need stated above, in Program Year 2019 Vermont released and conducted training on the WIOA and TAA Document Upload Requirement Admin memo. In this memo, case managers are required to electronically store all required programmatic eligibility documentation (for example: low-income documentation; veteran status; verification of layoff; etc.) to the participant's record in the state's MIS, Vermont JobLink. The memo also requires case managers to electronically record all required programmatic activity and outcome information (for example: copies of credentials attained; supplemental wage records; attainment of Measurable Skills Gains; training documentation).

Per DOL, states were instructed to create and implement their own Data Validation policies in TEGL 7-18, WIOA Core Programs Joint Data Elements. In Program Year 2019, Vermont created and released our data validation policy state-wide. VDOL conducted training but, due to COVID and other staff constraints, were not able to start data validation. VDOL put together a team of data validation testers and will start this process in mid-December 2020.

In January 2021, VDOL will conduct training on TEGL 23-19 for DOL-specific data elements. The existing data validation Admin Memo has been updated to incorporate the additional DOL specific data elements. Vermont has plans to complete Program Year 2019 data validation before May 2021.

Going forward, these monitoring and data validation processes will ensure integrity of the data prior to the annual report due date. These processes will also ensure the programmatic outcomes are as accurate as possible.

Recent deficiencies in the primary indicators of performance appear to center around Vermont's declining enrollment numbers. Vermont enjoyed a long period of low unemployment rates throughout the later years of the previous decade. As a result, we served fewer participants in general. Each person has a bigger impact on performance outcomes when the pool of individuals is relatively small. VDOL had been conscientiously working towards increasing enrollment numbers in serving Vermont's unemployed and underemployed population. COVID-19 has had an impact on that effort, although VDOL is working towards increasing services available to individuals virtually and by any other in-person means that meets the state's and department's safety requirements during this time of limitations due to COVID-19.

The Vermont Department of Labor has had a Common Exit policy in place for many years. The programs included are Title I and III, and the Reemployment Services (RES) and Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) grants. All programs are case managed in Vermont's MIS, Vermont JobLink. Vermont JobLink is set up to record one common exit date when all services have been completed in all applicable co-enrollments. Titles II and IV are not included in this common exit policy as the agencies use different MIS platforms and data sharing efforts are still being developed.

State Activities

Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion

As noted earlier, VDOL's workforce development division restructured its middle level leadership team during PY 2019 and brought on a new staff member in the role of Business Services Manager, with responsibility for business engagement including: Rapid Response, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and employer outreach. The development of shared marketing materials, joint employer visits and possibly a shared information system are currently in the early stages of formation.

In Program Year 2019, VDOL served approximately 95 unique companies and over 6,200 individuals with Rapid Response Services. Vermont has historically delivered Rapid Response services to individuals through in-person information sessions in coordination with regional workforce teams including human services, educational and economic development partners. With the Stay Home Stay Safe Order in affect in response to COVID-19 in March of 2020, these informational sessions converted to a virtually delivered model and increased significantly in occurrence. As the demand for Rapid Response services increase, VDOL also created a Rapid Response video library to provide links to information sessions and resources in a way that balanced the demand for services and the capacity to meet that demand.

Through Rapid Response, companies are identified by state or regional staff for referral to the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition filing process. Staff support the company, union or workers to submit a petition to the United States Department of Labor if an initial assessment indicates that the jobs being lost are a result of a trade impact issue. If a petition is certified, the individual workers that have been served under Rapid Response are sent a Notice of Potential Eligibility for TAA by USPS and provided a TAA Information session. Individual intakes are schedule in the appropriate regional AJC and all TAA participants are dually enrolled in WIOA. The requirement for dual enrollment is met by the use of cross-trained case management staff and a common MIS system, Vermont Job Link.

As a result of the broad economic devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses in many key industries were drastically impacted by widespread temporary and permanent layoffs. Layoff aversion funding was deployed to associations in two key Vermont industries, Construction and Manufacturing, to quickly and systematically offer Health and Safety training to companies to keep employees safe in the COVID-19 era and reduce the length and volume of layoffs.

In partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development and the Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance division, several Virtual Town Hall sessions have been offered to employers to assist them with the many new challenges they face as the result of COVID-19. The topics have ranged from specific re-opening/operating requirements, paid family and sick leave, support around Cares Act funding opportunities, unemployment charge issues and federal and state WARN requirements.

Wagner-Peyser Employment Services – Special Population Focus

Separating Service Members

Starting in 2019, VDOL staff have attended Fort Drum “Career Fairs” at Fort Drum NY. Up to 5,000 service members participate in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) during the last 12-18 months of their service prior to separation. The quarterly Career Fairs draw between 150-250 service members, who can meet with various employers, service organizations and state entities. Recent Vermont attendees at these Career Fairs included the Vermont State Police, the Vermont Air and Army Guard, recruiters from the Vermont Department of Corrections, and a group of businesses from the Saint Johnsbury area who were invited through a partnership with the Northern Community Investment Corporation (NCIC), based in Saint Johnsbury.

The core message from the Vermont contingent to these service members was the value of moving to and working in Vermont, our diverse geography, rural and urban communities, a shared love of the outdoors and nature, and other aspects considered desirable to service members. While each of the participating entities was certainly recruiting for their own needs, they were also highlighting the many reasons to consider relocating to Vermont. In order to reinforce that message, a large “Think Vermont” banner and rack cards were strategically placed in the Vermont area. Service members were encouraged to visit online resources to learn more about relocating to Vermont, including programs like “Stay to Stay Weekends,” and other relocation incentives. COVID-19 has presented some significant challenges to in-person visits, so VDOL is currently working on a virtual “Vermont Day” to highlight employers from across the state who are seeking talent. A pilot of that model is planned in partnership with NCIC for late winter/early spring.

Victims of Domestic Violence

VDOL and Umbrella, a community-based social service organization in the Northeast Kingdom, have worked closely over the past year through the Umbrella Youth in Power Program and the VDOL’s WIOA Programs. VDOL holds a seat on Umbrella’s newly formed Coordinated Community Response team and has entered into an MOU with Umbrella to collaborate on preventing and responding to domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking against youth. Umbrella plans to create a needs assessment, develop outreach materials to announce trainings and workshops, as well as adapt curricula. VDOL’s primary role is to assist domestic violence victims as they explore and transition to employment and training to achieve financial stability. Umbrella is also an established worksite for WIOA participants and is currently offering a remote work experience.

Promising Practices and Success Stories

Promising Practices

A promising practice developed this year in the Southeast region of the state is finding a way to create communities within our own community, to support clients as a whole person, instead of only focusing on job skills. During this unprecedented time, giving youth a space to learn, connect, and grow has been highly successful. In collaboration with HCRS (Health Care & Rehabilitation Services), VDOL staff developed Zoom games in early April 2020 targeted toward the youth population. What was first a place to play employment related games has now become a safe place for youth to connect with their peers, celebrate success, and gain information on a variety of topics from mental health support to employment skills, to leadership development. Participants in the group have successfully moved into transitional housing, obtained their driver's license, and found employment. Other benefits have been social connection in an isolating time and peer relationship development for those with social anxiety.

Success Stories

Sabrina was referred to VDOL by Northeast Kingdom Learning Services (NEKLS) in March 2019, where she was working to complete high school after dropping out in the 10th grade. Sabrina was receiving 3squares benefits to meet her basic needs and wanted help finding a job that would lead to a fulfilling career. Very quickly, Sabrina identified her goal to become an LNA. She enrolled in a WIOA funded Work Experience at the St. Johnsbury Welcome Center where she built confidence, data entry and customer service skills while also working on her education plan with NEKLS. Due to the close proximity between the two sites, Sabrina was able to walk between her worksite and NEKLS. The Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN) provided mileage reimbursement to a family member for her daily travel to work and educational opportunities. In July 2019 Sabrina applied for a Unit Aide/LNA Training Program at ST Johnsbury Health and Rehabilitation Center. She was accepted and obtained her LNA license in January 2020. Sabrina continues to work full time as an LNA at St. Johnsbury Health and Rehabilitation Center. Due to COVID-19 complications, continues to work on her educational plan to obtain her HS Diploma. Sabrina plans to continue her education and further her career in the medical field.

Erik (18) graduated from high school and was living with his parents while taking a gap year before college. He had a 504 Plan while enrolled in school and identifies as being neurodiverse. He came to VDOL with hopes of filling his gap year with activities that would prepare him for college. His goal was to improve his communication skills, confidence, and independence. A WIOA Case Manager met with Erik and his parents to discuss goals, strengths, weaknesses, past experiences, and fears. His network of support was then expanded, to include representatives from the Vermont Learning Support Initiative (VLSI – helping neurodiverse learners recognize and achieve their college aspirations) and Vocational Rehabilitation. The team engaged in supportive dialogue around self-advocacy, triggers, coping strategies and accommodations to help Erik ready for a WIOA funded Work Experience placement. Erik enrolled in a part-time Work Experience at The Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium, where he assisted staff in the STEM Lab. As Erik's confidence grew, his training plan expanded to include providing customer service at the front desk and assisting with weekend planetarium shows. Erik is now a resident student at Northern Vermont University, College Steps Program.

Michelle began services with VDOL through the Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN), a program she chose to access for support transitioning to the workforce, after years of being a student and stay at home mom. She was referred to the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) and determined eligible. A VDOL Case Manager helped Michelle identify her skills and abilities which led to the development of a resume that reflected all she had to offer the workforce. As part of her employability plan, Michelle established short- and long-term goals, searched and applied for work and rehearsed her interviewing skills. After a few weeks of intensive work search, she enrolled in a WIOA funded Work Experience at a local housing authority where she would receive experience and feedback in an administrative/office assistant role, while continuing her search for employment. Her plan included co-enrollment into a Community College of Vermont class (Effective Workplace Communication); the 7-week hybrid was a great aid to her transition to work. When her Work Experience with the housing authority was placed on hold (due to COVID-19), Michelle continued her college classes with CCV (working towards her LPN) and her work search. Her efforts resulted in an entry level job (full time with benefits) with the local hospital. She also applied for and was granted temporary reinstatement of her LNA license, which had lapsed 5 years prior. The HR team at NVRH assisted Michelle in documenting practice hours, required for permanent LNA Licensure. She was recently promoted to a new position at NVRH, as an LNA, working in the Med-Surg Unit and ED.

Angie attended the *Building A Greater You* Series at the Kingdom Recovery Center in January 2020. At the seminar she met the VDOL ICAN / WIOA case manager who provided an overview of the ICAN and WIOA programs. During this time, she was also working with Vocational Rehabilitation in an unpaid work experience at the Kingdom Recovery Center. As a result of assessments and career planning Angie was enrolled in a WIOA Work Experience opportunity what provided her the ability to earn income in addition to enrolling in classes in the recovery field. Angie developed a close connection with the work site supervisor, who was able to mentor her, challenge her and give her tasks to help her learn and grow. Angie's enrollment was impacted by COVID-19, however, the Recovery Center was able to continue to provide work assignments so that she was able to work remotely from home. She provided outreach calls, attended trainings online and prepared social media posts for the recovery centers Facebook page. One of Angie's main goals was regaining custody of her children. During her enrollment in the program, she was able to move into a house and her children joined her. She met with the EAP counselor, to work through the changes and stresses that go along with reconnecting with her children in a parental role. Angie now holds a job at the Recovery Center as a Recovery Support Worker and ARIS as a Caregiver. Angie received her Recovery Coach Certification which will allow her to expand in her Recovery work.

Susan, a mature worker, participated in labor exchange activities in addition to the RESEA Program. She did not have internet access at home and could not afford the cost as she had nearly exhausted UI benefits. She utilized the American Job Center (AJC) resources nearly on a daily basis, taking advantage of resume/interviewing/networking workshops to improve her resume and job search skills and relied on the VDOL staff for support in these areas. Sue was selected for many interviews but faced multiple rejections from many hiring managers. She was concerned that her age may be a determining factor in her inability to

find new employment. With continued encouragement and support, she continued to apply for various positions, while seeking guidance and assistance with editing and updating her resumes/cover letters. Her persistence paid off when she was hired at the University of Vermont in the Physics and Chemistry Department as an Office Program Support Specialist. This position was a perfect match, it was in her area of expertise, she would be able to support herself, and would have healthcare benefits she so desperately needed.

Ben is a 32-year-old Vermonter with a stable work history and high school diploma with some college credits. He was laid off from his job due to restructuring and budget constraints and made the decision to learn a new trade in construction and carpentry, only to find himself laid off again in December 2019. Searching for work and filing for Unemployment Insurance Ben moved in with his father to split living expenses. Still unable to find work, Ben inquired into the WIOA Program following a referral from the Unemployment Insurance Division. Ben met with a VDOL Case Manager to discuss his interests, goals and training opportunities and was determined eligible as a Dislocated Worker. In March of 2020 Ben enrolled in the Advanced Welding Institute, due to COVID-19 learning had been pushed back several weeks/months and caused long breaks in training. Ultimately, Ben was able to work with the school to make up for lost time and graduated within the 9-month expected timeframe, he graduated in November 2020. This is essential for Ben, as his Unemployment Insurance compensation is running out and he needs to be able to support himself as well as contribute to the family household. Ben is continuing to seek employment with the support of the school as well as working with his VDOL case manager.

Taymi a 22-year-old head of household was a Boston University graduate with a Bachelor's Degree in Health Science and in January 2020 she moved back to Vermont. On a temporary basis, Taymi decided to move in with her parents until she was able to secure suitable housing and steady employment in Vermont. Taymi met with a VDOL Case Manager to determine eligibility and begin assessments for WIOA programs. She was determined eligible and an employability plan was developed for enrollment into the Vermont HiTec Phlebotomy Program hosted by the UVM Medical Center. Following a successful completion of the Vermont HiTec Phlebotomy Program on July 27, 2020, Taymi started her year-long apprenticeship and full-time paid employment with the UVM Medical Center.

John, a 19-year-old youth was born in Guatemala and adopted at age two and relocated to the US. He had limited work experience and had been working with Howard Center and Spectrum for substance abuse, depression, and self-medicating and was admitted to Day One. John graduated from Lake Champlain Waldorf School and noted he wanted to make positive changes in his life. He was connected with a VDOL Case Manager to determine eligibility, to establish an employability plan and determine goals for his participation in the WIOA Program. With the assistance of the VDOL Case Manager, a work experience site was developed at a local car detailing establishment whose focus is to provide at risk youth with soft skill training and support for individuals with barriers to employment. Following successful completion of his work experience program, John was able to apply for, interview, and secure employment with the University of Vermont Medical Center.

Bill, a disabled veteran, moved his family to Vermont in 2020 from North Carolina as a result

of his wife finding a teaching position in the Central Vermont area. He was a stay at home dad and enjoyed the role, but knew he needed to get back into the work force. He created a Vermont JobLink account and began his search for new employment. Veterans are provided a priority of service with VDOL, and when his name appeared on a VDOL daily report of new veteran enrollments, the VDOL Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist (DVOP) made contact to engage in employment services and resources. After the initial outreach and assessment were complete, it was determined that Bill would also benefit from a connection with the VDOL Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) and the local VDOL Labor Exchange staff. The collaborative efforts of the VDOL staff resulted in the veteran being offered a position at CAD CUT. This local employer was experiencing extreme labor force shortages during the pandemic and they struggled to fill government contracts for personal protective equipment (PPE). Bill was extremely happy with the outcome and was very impressed with how well as an organization we worked together while still working remotely.

Miro graduated from high school where he participated in technical education programs. After graduation he was unable to secure employment and struggled in looking for work in his chosen field of carpentry. He had very limited work experience when he decided to engage in VDOL WIOA Youth Programs. Miro worked with a VDOL Case Manager to develop an individualized employability plan which included enrollment into a work experience activity. During this enrollment he continued to struggle with adapting to training site expectations. Using the Work Experience as a living assessment of Miro's strengths and barriers, the WIOA Case Manager tailored his academic learning with labor market driven workshops centered on communication, identifying values, and adaptations to new information. Miro found success in manufacturing after understanding his classroom training in building trades during high school did not have to directly translate to a job as a carpenter. He learned through the process that more than construction, he valued small teams, clear instruction, repetition, and performance feedback. Because of these lessons learned, Miro was able to secure a job that offered each of these work values in manufacturing plastics at a local company. He continues to engage with his VDOL WIOA Case Manager during his 12-month follow-up period. He participates in financial literacy workshops to enhance his independence and understand saving for his future.

Challenges

With the onset of the pandemic, the "typical workday" for VDOL staff looked very different. The Governor directed Vermonters to work remotely when possible and deliver virtual services to Vermonters from home became part of workforce development staff's new "typical workday." The balance of home life vs. work life took on a whole new face. Staff were not only asked to make their homes their new offices. In some cases, schools asked them to make their homes a classroom too.

VDOL immediately took steps to settle its staff into their home offices providing them with the equipment and resources necessary to provide virtual services. Weekly Microsoft Teams meetings were established for each Region and Statewide to assure that communication was top priority. VDOL teams were formed to brainstorm with leadership the new way to

deliver virtual services. Field staff were called upon to assist with tasks that they may not have been in the “typical workday.” Since virtual services were expected, policies and procedures needed to be reviewed and tweaked to adhere to the new practices. Trainings were developed for staff, along with a consistent message that VDOL would continue to deliver services to Vermonters. With the pandemic continuing, this transition continues – refining practices, protocols, and policies to ensure high quality services.