

State of Connecticut

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Annual Report



GOVERNOR'S
WORKFORCE
COUNCIL
CONNECTICUT

Program Year 2020

July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021

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*A Message from
the Connecticut Department of Labor
and
the Governor's Workforce Council*

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is designed to strengthen and improve our nation's public workforce system by helping job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market, and by helping employers hire and retain skilled workers. Successfully administering WIOA while operating under ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic challenged all systemwide partners.

The Governor's Workforce Council (GWC), Connecticut's designated state workforce board, updated its strategic plan to account for the multitude of pandemic-triggered system impacts. The GWC communicated these updates and forged partnerships through quarterly meetings of the Council to meet and overcome the challenges the system faced. In addition, many of the Connecticut Department of Labor's (CTDOL) protocols and systems were overhauled, new technology was developed, and operations were modified for transition to remote and virtual service delivery to meet health and safety mandates. The agency collaborated with the state's five Regional Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and other WIOA partners to continually assess developments, craft solutions, and keep plans moving forward.

Connecticut's WIOA Annual Report offers an overview of the program year from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. It speaks to specific achievements across programs, highlights of activities and services provided by the WDBs, updates regarding ongoing services, and information on the state's outcomes and costs for PY20. The successful outcomes, both statewide and at the local level, clearly resulted from the cooperation and connectivity between workforce partners. The narratives illustrate how difficulties caused by the pandemic were addressed or solved. Most importantly, despite extraordinary circumstances that continued to exist, WIOA operations were consistently and steadily administered, ensuring readily-available services across the state.

While remarkable gains were made in PY20, the far-reaching challenges of the pandemic remained as the program year closed. Many of the steps taken to conduct business in new and better ways will remain in place for the coming year, with further improvements surely to be added. The GWC, CTDOL and our partners continue to focus on workforce advancement, furthering education and training opportunities, exploring new services and business options for employers, and strengthening the economy. With ongoing measures in place to remove or alleviate pandemic-related hindrances and the continued support of our US Department of Labor and state partners, we anticipate full recovery in the future.



Danté Bartolomeo
Interim Commissioner
Department of Labor



Mark Argosh
Chair
Governor's Workforce Council



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On the cover: *To represent the cooperative partnership between the Connecticut Department of Labor and Governor's Workforce Council, the logo of each is displayed on the cover of the report.*

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Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) - Program Year 2020

Connecticut's determination to fulfill its responsibilities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act resulted in many successes for Program Year 2020 (PY20), despite the continuing challenges presented by the COVID-19. The Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) and the state's five Workforce Development Boards (WDB) offered a host of programs and services, both long-standing and new, innovative ones, to the benefit of job seekers and employers around the state. Through dedicated efforts at the local level, administrative oversight and specific monitoring activities conducted by CTDOL, and effective communication, Connecticut's WIOA outcomes for PY20 were achieved through strong partnerships, as the Act directs. This report reflects not only progress during the current program year, various summaries describe plans and activities already in place for moving forward.

One of Governor Ned Lamont's top priorities since entering office in January 2019 has been the development of "a nation-leading, accessible, and equitable workforce in Connecticut that is responsive to the needs of the 21st century economy." To achieve this, the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) was established within the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). In the July 20, 2020 press release that emphasized the above-referenced goal, the governor announced the creation of the new office as well as its responsibilities to develop workforce policy, utilize data to set a vision for the workforce pipeline, and coordinate the state's workforce ecosystem around a common strategy and set of goals. As detailed in the press release, the office "will be committed to crafting nation-leading policies and goals that catalyze educators, businesses, nonprofit, and state agencies to develop curricula and programs that are accessible, inclusive, and aligned with the needs of employers." Additionally, OWS collaborates with the commissioners of DECD and the Department of Labor "to directly advise the governor and other state entities on various workforce strategies and initiatives" and is responsible for staffing the Governor's Workforce Council, Connecticut's WIOA State Workforce Board.

Governor Lamont appointed Mark Argosh as Chair of the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC) and Dr. Kelli-Marie Vallieres as Vice-Chair. Mark has decades of experience as a boardroom consultant and financial-sector operating executive, and is Executive Director of Social Venture Partners CT. As noted in the governor's July 20, 2020 press release, Dr. Vallieres, Chief Workforce Officer of OWS, has "over 20 years of experience as the CEO of two manufacturing companies in Connecticut, has a PhD in adult experiential learning, serves on the boards of several workforce-focused organizations across the state, and has served as the vice chair of the Governor's Workforce Council since its inception."

Under OWS's leadership, Connecticut has already achieved many successes, including:

- Implementation of the CT Back to Work Initiative, one of the Governor's immediate responses for tackling high unemployment in Connecticut caused by the COVID-19

pandemic. The initiative introduced new options for online learning for thousands of unemployed or underemployed residents.

- Distribution of nearly \$13 million of CARES Act funding to the five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities for the provision of innovative workforce training programs to address workforce shortages. A total of 800 individuals received training in high-demand fields such as manufacturing, healthcare, and information technology (IT). Approximately 350 individuals were trained as pharmacy technicians, CNAs, sterilization processing technicians, and medical assistant. Supportive services, including childcare vouchers and weekly stipends for trainees were also provided.
- Collaborative efforts between OWS, WDBs, employers, state agencies, education, and training providers resulted in the securing of a \$10 million USDOL H-1B grant to support manufacturing and IT training in Connecticut. Employer engagement was a critical element of the proposal; 76 companies and stakeholder partners provided letters of support. It is projected that over the next two years, job training will be made available to 2,000 individuals through this grant, with a focus on training for entry-level and incumbent workers.

The GWC and OWS are making every effort to coordinate workforce development funding statewide and encourage project design to lessen knowledge gaps and align training program completion with the next level of credentials within career pathways. This year, each workforce region dedicated staff resources to establishing or reinvigorating at least one Regional Sector Partnership (RSP), and efforts are underway to establish additional RSPs to address the needs of the manufacturing, healthcare and IT sectors across the state.

In continuing to fulfill its oversight role, the GWC hosted quarterly virtual meetings that gave members the opportunity to attend both the formal meeting and committee breakout sessions that fostered more personal communications and opportunities for timely discussions on workforce issues. Five committees were established: Business Leadership; Career and Education; Barriers to Employment; Data and Accountability; and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In addition, the GWC and OWS created several subcommittees to delve deeper into critical workforce areas such as healthcare worker shortages and work-based learning partnerships.

As for its commitment to strengthen the availability of data, GWC worked closely with the Department of Administrative Services to establish goals that will drive data initiatives forward. Also, as required by Executive Order 4, GWC delivered a Strategic Plan to Governor Lamont in fall 2020; the plan will be updated frequently to address additional partnerships and deliverables. Lastly, a tremendous response was received to Governor Lamont's request that Connecticut business leaders, educators, legislators, labor unions, nonprofits, local workforce boards, residents, and state and local leaders participate in workforce development discussions and solutions, evidenced, in part, by GWC's virtual meetings regularly attracting over 250 attendees. Connecticut plans to capitalize on this collective energy and participation to continue the implementation of Governor Lamont's Strategic Plan.

Once again, the endeavors of CTDOL's Employment Services (ES) Operations Unit resulted in advancements that significantly benefited both employers and jobseekers in Connecticut and, at the same time, assisted the agency in meeting its WIOA goals for the program year. Details of

the accomplishments are described in the “Employment and Training” section of this report, but highlights of successes by ES staff are as follows:

- Developed and implemented new, statewide Virtual Employment Workshops, with attendance-tracking capabilities, for all interested jobseekers.
- Worked with internal stakeholders to create a new, online form for requesting virtual and in-person services, including UI meaningful assistance, through the American Job Centers (AJCs).
- Developed new services in the five comprehensive AJCs to assist jobseekers lacking access to technology by:
 - Utilizing a public workstation with videoconferencing technology located in the AJCs so jobseekers could communicate with on-site AJC staff or staff at other locations, and
 - Providing the ability for desktop remote assistance in the Career Centers, which are self-service, so customers could pick up a phone to connect with an AJC staff person who could then remotely take over the desktop to provide assistance.

These new options also allowed for social distancing to be maintained during the pandemic.

- Updated and maintained the interagency “Employer Resource Guide” and “Employer Reference Card” which offer road maps to the many programs, services and incentives for businesses. Available in electronic format, these annually-updated resources provide important marketing and training tools for business services professionals.

With the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic escalating as Program Year 2020 began, CTDOL continued to experience a dramatic increase in unemployment claims. To best handle the surge in claims filed and provide assistance to the thousands of unemployed individuals relying on UI benefits for extended periods of time, an Unemployment Insurance (UI) Consumer Contact Center was established on July 8, 2020. As the cornerstone of CTDOL’s customer service delivery system, the Consumer Contact Center provides a convenient, efficient, online system for filing an unemployment claim. CTDOL also increased UI staffing levels with both intermittent and permanent agency employees assigned to the Center to offer direct customer service for matters such as filing new or continued unemployment claims; providing return to work notifications; responding to held claim inquiries and status letter requests; processing referee and board appeals; reopening unemployment claims; determining eligibility issues; and helping customers navigate UI online systems. Claimants also were informed about Employment Services options and referred to reemployment and partner staff for additional services offered both virtually and in person. The Consumer Contact Center has handled more than 1.5 million claimant calls and cases since the Center’s establishment.

As reported in PY19, CTDOL joined a consortium of states (Mississippi, Maine and Rhode Island) to implement a modernized Unemployment Insurance system that will provide integrated functionality for the Unemployment Insurance Division. The May 2021 implementation target date had to be pushed out when the pandemic struck and the resulting volume of UI claims necessitated that CTDOL remove resources from the project to assist with the workload. During PY20, CTDOL continued to work with the ReEmployUSA consortium on the design,

development and testing of Connecticut-specific changes for the Tax, Benefits and Appeals system that will allow CTDOL to go live with ReEmployCT in July 2022.

CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit successfully carried out its many responsibilities during Program Year 2020 while operating remotely due to health guidelines that were established under the COVID-19 pandemic. Fiscal and programmatic monitoring, all facets of contracting, ETPL approvals and oversight, case management system guidance and improvements, WIOA Annual Report preparation, grant expenditure reviews and invoice processing, and many other functions were completed adeptly and timely by staff. Throughout the year, staff maintained constant communication with the WDBs and other agencies, via videoconferencing and other methods, to ensure plans, projects and deliverables were clear and action steps were well-coordinated. Periodic, virtual meetings were also held between the WIOA Administration Unit, the WDBs, and other partners to stay up-to-date on various workforce topics, and staff regularly attended local board meetings. WIOA Administration Unit staff also continued to assist with the tremendous workload that UI and Shared Work experienced as a result of the pandemic.

CTDOL endeavored to fulfill its obligations under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and provide high-quality programs and services for its customers throughout another challenging program year. Goals were reached, partnerships were further strengthened and strides were made in many areas of workforce development. The focus of CTDOL, the WDBs, and the state's other WIOA partners will continue to be on pursuing new opportunities, offering successful employment and training options, and furthering the accomplishments reflected in this report.

State Evaluations, Oversight Activities, and Guidance

Compliance Monitoring

Compliance monitoring, as set forth in 2 CFR 200, "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards," was conducted at all five regional Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) in 2020-2021, in accordance with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regulations at 20 CFR §683.410. Compliance reviews for Program Year 2020 were conducted remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting health guidelines and restrictions (including office closures). The Jobs First Employment Services (JFES), which is the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, was reviewed by monitors, and, in accordance with contract requirements, several grants administered by CTDOL were also monitored during PY20.

The annual WIOA compliance monitoring included a review of financial management, consisting of financial reporting, cost allocation methodology, cash management, allowable costs, payroll controls, audit requirements, procurement, and property controls. In addition, WIOA active participant files were sampled and reviewed for eligibility verification for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth in all five areas.

As of the close of the Program Year, the WDBs were working toward resolution of their compliance review findings. Overall, though, monitoring results for PY20 demonstrated that the five WDBs were generally in compliance with federal and state administrative requirements. All boards made continuous improvements during the year by updating or adding policies and procedures.

Status of State Evaluation Activities

The Connecticut Department of Labor's Office of Research produces the "Higher Education/Workforce Legislative Report Card" (LRC) which includes an online tool at <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/LRC/LRC2.aspx>. The LRC reports employment by industry and average wages of recent graduates of Connecticut's public colleges and universities. Also included are demographic information and results by program of study. Users can compare outcomes of colleges and universities online or download tables for further analysis.

Administrative Review and Technical Assistance

Monitoring, evaluation, and technical assistance are integral oversight responsibilities of the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) and are mandated by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and other applicable laws and regulations. CTDOL's WIOA Administration staff conducts annual program, data, and fiscal monitoring of the Workforce Development Boards and, throughout the year, offers technical assistance and performs administrative reviews to continually evaluate program components.

Additionally, the WIOA Administration Unit staff provides guidance to WDB staff, conducts Data Validation as required by USDOL, evaluates program activities for compliance with USDOL and CTDOL policies, and is available for consultation on program-related matters. Administrative reviews are also conducted and include, but are not limited to:

- Adherence to and compliance with USDOL ETA and CTDOL policies
- Eligibility for the WIOA program, including barriers and priority of service
- Performance outcomes for Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth participants
- WIOA outcome measures, including achievement of negotiated program goals

During PY20, staff resources were stretched with many staff shifted to assist with the historic Unemployment Insurance claims load triggered by the pandemic as well as with the Shared Work program which experienced increased activity as well. Nonetheless, WIOA staff managed to provide the administrative review functions and guidance described above, and offered specific oversight to WDBs regarding:

- Opioid National Dislocated Worker Grant and COVID-19 Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant implementation, support and training;
- Data and program analysis; and
- CTHires (case management system) support and training.

Throughout PY20, COVID-19 continued to impact Connecticut's ability to provide workforce services to participants system-wide given the closure of the state's American Job Centers (AJCs) to the public. In May 2021, AJCs reopened on a limited basis for scheduled, in-person services. Throughout PY20, CTDOL, WDBs, and other system partners and partner programs continued to provide virtual services, including for WIOA Title I. Regionally, WDBs were able to expand remote services to provide a variety of training opportunities. Youth received work opportunities remotely and, on a limited basis, in person. Outreach, community response, and employer support

were successful in providing summer youth experiences to participants during the height of the pandemic.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, WIOA program monitoring in PY20 included desk audits of each of the five WDB regions in Connecticut. The WIOA Administration Unit staff made updates to a monitoring tool for program participants and conducted comprehensive reviews of a selection of participant files from each WDB region. An outcome report describing the successes and challenges participants faced in reaching economic self-sufficiency was prepared by CTDOL for each WDB. The monitoring process involved:

- Remote interviews of WDB staff, other workforce partners, providers, and participants (conducted on a limited basis as resources allowed);
- Obtaining and reviewing written policies, forms, and guidance issued by the WDB for each program component; and
- Discussion of identified issues requiring correction by the respective WDB.

CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit continued to promote collaboration and communication within the workforce system through periodic WDB and partner meetings which were conducted remotely.

WIOA Participant and Employer Survey Results

During Program Year 2020, the Connecticut Department of Labor utilized SurveyMonkey to gather customer satisfaction information from participants. A total of 42 participants completed surveys. A majority of these respondents provided positive feedback to survey questions, with many specifically praising the professionalism, knowledge, and helpfulness of the American Job Centers' (AJC) staff. Many respondents indicated they were thankful that online and remote services were available during the time AJCs were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most concerns centered around unemployment issues, stemming from the unprecedented number of claims filed and processed during the program year.

The results of the participant* surveys were as follows:

- 81% were very satisfied with the services provided by the American Job Centers
- 74% believed the services exceeded their expectations
- 76% believed the services provided were very close to the ideal set of services

Satisfaction surveys were also made available to employers* during PY20 through a combination of sources. CTDOL's WIOA webpage hosts an employer survey powered by SurveyMonkey. In addition, Connecticut's virtual one-stop delivery system, CTHires, includes an option for employer feedback. During PY20, a total of 18 surveys were completed by employers through SurveyMonkey. Employer comments were positive, focusing on the value of partnership and continued remote services during the pandemic.

*Results are not intended to make any inferences beyond the survey's respondents.

The results of the employer* surveys were as follows:

- 84% were satisfied with the services provided by the American Job Centers
- 93% believed the services met their expectations
- 61% believed the services were very close to the ideal set of services

Performance and Accountability

The Connecticut Department of Labor's (CTDOL) Performance and Accountability Unit is primarily tasked with the collection, compilation, evaluation, reporting, and distribution of performance and demographic data for state funded and federally funded programs and services that are administered and delivered by CTDOL, in collaboration with its partners and subcontractors. The unit also provides technical support to those administering the various programs and services that include:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) - Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth
- Veterans
- Wagner-Peyser Act
- Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)
- Jobs First Employment Services (JFES)
- Unemployment Insurance (UI)
- Foreign Labor Certification
- Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers
- Connecticut Individual Development Account Initiative

To submit and generate required reports, the Performance and Accountability Unit utilizes the federal Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS). First, data extracts are generated for each report by Geographic Solutions, Inc., the developer of CTDOL's web-based case management system, then the extracts are provided to the Performance and Accountability Unit. Prior to report certification by CTDOL to USDOL, the unit collaborates with program administrators to ensure that program data is reviewed, and accuracy is confirmed. For its performance data, Connecticut utilizes in-state wage information as well as data from the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS).

As mandated by WIOA, CTDOL must collaborate with the Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services and the Connecticut State Department of Education for quarterly and annual reporting purposes. CTDOL previously established Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) for the exchange of data with these WIOA-required core partners and continues to share data as outlined in each respective memorandum. Each core partner transmits data to CTDOL via CTDOL's PilotFish, a server with a collection of software tools that allows for the secure connection, translation, and transformation of data between heterogeneous systems. The parties to the MOU share both participant data of those co-enrolled in the core programs of each entity as well as wage and employment data for all participants, not only those co-enrolled. A unique identification number is assigned, via CTDOL's MS SQL Server database, to represent each data entity (individual) instead of their Social Security Number. The unique identification number and co-

*Results are not intended to make any inferences beyond the survey's respondents.

enrollment and wage information are returned to the core partners for inclusion in each agency's respective federal report.

In addition, the Performance and Accountability Unit synthesizes raw UI data and generates monthly reports so CTDOL's administration may determine whether claimants receive their benefits within federally-mandated timeframes; gathers and provides data critical to both negotiating the establishment of the state's WIOA performance goals with the Workforce Development Boards and ensuring that Connecticut is meeting those goals; prepares CTDOL's section of the Governor's Budget Narrative; supports various programs with Data Element Validation tasks; and designs surveys and analyzes their results for numerous CTDOL units.

Continuing Workforce Activities

CTHires

In addition to its reporting responsibilities described in the summary above, the Performance and Accountability Unit also administers the Connecticut Department of Labor's web-based case management system: CTHires. The system offers an array of options, including a job skills assessment tool; a format to create and send résumés and cover letters to employers; a job bank; a list of training providers; a job search tracker; a virtual job recruiter/job candidate finder; labor market information; and system email for communications between jobseekers, employers, case managers, and training providers. CTHires also collects required data for reporting on self-services and staff-assisted services for WIOA (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth), Wagner-Peyser, Trade Adjustment Assistance, National Dislocated Worker Grants, and Registered Apprenticeship Expansion Grants.

Since CTHires was launched in Program Year (PY) 2015, various components have been added to the system to integrate additional programs, such as Foreign Labor Certification (PY16), JFES (PY17), the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program in PY19, and Registered Apprenticeship in PY20. The addition of the Registered Apprenticeship module will accommodate the new reporting requirements for the Registered Apprenticeship Expansion Grants offered by USDOL.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, enhancements were made to CTHires to accommodate the remote nature of services being provided. Individuals were offered the ability to complete a pre-application for WIOA programs. This pre-application process includes the uploading of electronic copies of documents for verification and determination of program eligibility. CTHires was also enhanced with a remote signature feature for electronic document signing. Many of the functions that were deployed in response to the pandemic will continue to be a mainstay of the system.

Rapid Response and National Dislocated Worker Grants

The state Rapid Response (RR) Unit, in conjunction with local Workforce Development Boards and other One-Stop partners, is responsible under WIOA Title I (20 CFR, Part 682, Subpart C) for carrying out rapid response activities statewide. Headed by the Connecticut Department of Labor, the RR Unit pre-emptively reaches out to employers contemplating or experiencing layoffs and plant closings. Employers, affected workers, and unions are provided information on layoff

aversion, mass layoff/plant closing, unemployment insurance, WIOA, One-Stop employment services, and various labor laws. The RR Unit also makes referrals to, and coordinates services with, CTDOL units, other agencies, and programs for special intervention or supportive services applicable to dislocated workers and struggling businesses.

During the period of July 2020 to June 2021, the RR Unit made 345 initial outreach calls regarding potential layoffs and responded to 57 WARN notices affecting 4,502 workers. Additionally, RR staff made 79 presentations to 1,575 impacted workers at 41 employer and/or union visits (either in-person or virtually). The presentations included two Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) information sessions and 32 webinars for workers from companies that did not avail themselves of Rapid Response services prior to layoff.

7,924 webinar invitations were sent to workers whose employers either declined pre-layoff presentations or who were identified by the Connecticut Department of Labor after layoff as being part of a mass reduction in force.

The RR Unit submitted 20 TAA petitions on behalf of workers whose jobs were believed to be affected by increased imports or a shift in production to a foreign country. Thirteen petitions, covering 1,148 workers, were certified TAA eligible. Four petitions were still pending investigation at the close of the program year. Three petitions resulted in negative determinations.

As a means of layoff aversion, RR staff also reached out to 1,542 employers that were participating in CTDOL's Shared Work program to advise them of their status and make appropriate referrals to Economic Development or other resources if the employers indicated that they were continuing to struggle to emerge from a downturn in business. RR Unit staff also followed up with and offered assistance to 51 employers that submitted WARN notices during the pandemic indicating, at the time, that layoffs were expected to be temporary.

It should also be noted that for the duration of the program year, RR Unit staff continued to respond to several thousand emails and phone calls from employers, displaced workers, and union representatives who had a variety of questions and/or issues related to ongoing job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, CTDOL was awarded a Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG) of \$2,331,000 by USDOL to support the state's COVID-19 disaster recovery efforts through March 31, 2022. The Connecticut COVID-19 Disaster Recovery DWG addresses three critical challenges across the state resulting from the public health emergency caused by the pandemic:

- The public health crisis
- An unprecedented surge in unemployment claims
- A substantial increase in demand for workers in disaster-relief and humanitarian-assistance jobs

The grant addresses these challenges by training and deploying unemployed Connecticut residents to perform clean-up and sanitation jobs, provide humanitarian-assistance services, and perform jobs that promote social distancing. CTDOL administers the grant, and the five local Workforce Development Boards serve as project operators in their respective regions. By the close of the

program year, with \$634,059.70 expended, the boards had placed 52 individuals in disaster recovery-related employment.

In Program Year 2018, USDOL awarded Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) \$5.88 million to operate a Trade and Economic Transition National Dislocated Worker Grant from October 2018 to September 2020. The grant enabled CWP and the American Job Centers in the North Central board area to address ongoing and emerging workforce and economic challenges by providing training and career services to dislocated workers seeking reentry into the workforce. Up to \$9,000 was provided per dislocated worker in scholarship funds and supportive services. In addition, the grant provided up to \$20,000 in On-the-Job Training (OJT) incentives per new hire to area employers. A variety of other resources were offered under the grant, including career coaching, supportive services, career bootcamps, job placement assistance, and recruitment events. With their skill levels increased, participants were well-prepared for high-demand job opportunities in growing fields, and entered employment in manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, transportation and logistics, and construction sectors. CWP applied for a no-cost extension to the grant, and in September 2020, was approved for an additional year. It was projected that the extension would allow CWP to serve 600 dislocated workers rather than 500 as planned under the original grant term. As of June 30, 2021, there were 636 enrollments: 90 participants were placed in OJT, 314 participants enrolled in ITA training, and 230 participants who had obtained employment.

During PY19, CTDOL was awarded a Disaster Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant for up to \$4,757,845.00 by USDOL for the provision of comprehensive workforce services to assist Connecticut residents impacted by the opioid crisis. Aimed at providing training, career services and support, employer outreach, and temporary disaster-relief employment for selected dislocated worker participants, the state's Recovery Works program specializes in serving individuals with barriers, including ex-offenders, single parents, the long-term unemployed, and those who are low income or homeless/runaways. As CTDOL administers Recovery Works, with the agency's commissioner serving in a coordinative role, each of the state's five Workforce Development Boards operates a regional program under the grant funding while also working in conjunction with CTDOL on two statewide initiatives funded by the grant.

To fulfill the objectives of both the Recovery Friendly Workplace and the Peer Recovery Navigator initiatives, a Workforce Opioid Advisory Board was established in PY19. Responsibilities of board members, who were selected from state partner agencies, Workforce Development Boards, employers, and private nonprofit community agencies, have included:

- Hiring and placing qualified individuals as Peer Recovery Navigators in each AJC; and
- Development of the Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW) initiative, which provides support to communities by recognizing that recovery is a strength. RFWs commit to hiring and retaining those in recovery and encourage a healthy, safe environment where the employer, employees, and communities collaborate to create positive change and eliminate barriers for those impacted by substance use disorders.

From the initial grant award through June 30, 2021, a total of \$1,443,667.78 (92% of the initial \$1,585,948.00 allocated) had been expended to address the state's continuing opioid emergency

and more than 200 participants were served, with over 50% of those co-enrolled in other programs. During PY20, 90 participants received grant-funded training.

Outreach Efforts by the Office of Research

During Program Year 2020, the manner in which the Connecticut Department of Labor's Office of Research conducted outreach activities changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. No in-person meetings or presentations were held; instead, using the available online tools, the Office of Research provided labor market information of interest to jobseekers, workforce development professionals who provide job search and employment assistance, and education, government, and business leaders. The Office of Research also provided data and information to the Governor's Workforce Council and the newly created Office of Workforce Strategy.

Online presentations were held via Zoom or Microsoft Teams, throughout the year, for audiences including:

- Jobseeker groups;
- Business groups working to create jobs in Connecticut;
- Educational institutions helping their students with career planning;
- Alumni groups; and
- Workforce development organizations working with a variety of constituencies.

In addition, the Office of Research participated in several of the Connecticut Science Center's virtual STEM Career Showcase events during the program year to provide information regarding STEM careers to middle and high school students, their families, and teachers.

The Office of Research continued to provide technical assistance to the Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) for Help Wanted OnLine (HWOL) through an account Research administers. All WDBs have access to jobs posting data, which is gathered from jobs posted each month on thousands of Internet job boards, corporate boards, and smaller job sites. Interest in job posting data increased during the second half of the program year.

This program year, there was particular interest in Unemployment Insurance claimants. The Office of Research provided weekly updates of claimants by race/ethnicity, gender, age, education, industry, town, and previous wages. Data was provided statewide and by workforce area. Workforce Development Boards and other partners were particularly interested in UI claimant data.

Employment and Training

Wagner-Peyser

CTDOL receives federal funding under the Wagner-Peyser Act to provide universal access to an array of labor exchange services offered at American Job Center (AJC) locations throughout Connecticut. These services, delivered both virtually and in person, include assistance with career choices and job search, referrals to jobs, reemployment services to claimants receiving unemployment insurance, and employer recruitment services to businesses with job openings.

Additional resources that are available through the AJCs include computers with Internet connection, copiers, and fax machines, as well as résumé writing, interviewing, LinkedIn, and job search workshops. During PY20, a total of 29,976 Wagner-Peyser program participants received services (staff-assisted or self-service) through AJC offices, with 71,709 staff-assisted services provided statewide. Virtual employment workshops were attended by 4,645 program participants.

Reemployment Services for Unemployment Insurance (UI) Claimants

During periods of unemployment, the agency provides a variety of federally funded reemployment services to residents. CTDOL meets the reemployment needs of many UI claimants through the Unemployment Insurance Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (UI RESEA) program, which serves claimants who are either profiled as most likely to exhaust benefits or receiving Unemployment Compensation for Ex-servicemembers (UCX). The goal of this program is to provide UI claimants early access to services that will help get them back into the workforce faster. The UI RESEA program also serves as a prevention/detection program regarding improper UI payments. In PY20, CTDOL completed 6,481 virtual Initial RESEA appointments. For this same time period, 5,641 claimants participated in a required reemployment activity.

As reported in last year's WIOA Annual Report, the RESEA program was temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and technology was not in place for the provision of virtual services. To meet the challenges of these unprecedented times, CTDOL began redesigning the RESEA program's delivery of services. This included the development and launch not only of platforms to conduct virtual workshops but online forms for customers as well. Efforts to offer other technology options resulted in the use of videoconferencing through Microsoft Teams. These changes, made necessary by the extraordinary impacts of the pandemic, were fully implemented in February 2021. The virtual services were a great success, generating higher participation rates of selected claimants and greater customer satisfaction.

Business Services

Business Services connects Connecticut's employers with jobseekers. From July 2020 through June 2021, a total of 2,052 registrations from businesses were processed by CTHires staff. During this same period, employers posted 56,965 new Connecticut job orders and jobseekers placed 6,910 new résumés into the system. In addition, 142,161 job orders were indexed from corporate websites in PY20.

Serving Our Veterans

Connecticut's veterans receive reemployment services from trained staff at AJCs throughout the state. Among the staff are representatives funded by the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program which offers specialized services to veterans. Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists provide intensive services and facilitate job placements to meet the employment needs of certain veterans and eligible spouses; those who have significant barriers to employment or other characteristics specified by the Secretary of Labor qualify for referral to a DVOP and may receive a jointly developed employment plan and individualized career services that are administered through case management. Local Veterans' Employment Representatives

conduct outreach to area employers to assist veterans in gaining employment; they facilitate the employment, training, and placement services for all veterans in the AJCs.

During PY20, DVOPs provided employment and training services to 879 JVSG participants, approximately 84 percent of the 1,045 eligible veterans served under Wagner-Peyser. Included in these counts are veterans filing for unemployment compensation who were connected to reemployment services through UI RESEA as well as those who may have been simultaneously served by other workforce programs in the AJC. Community engagement by JVSG staff included a virtual presentation about CTDOL's services for veterans as part of the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs' September 2020 Stand Down. Held annually for veterans who are homeless, chronically unemployed, or have difficulty adjusting in society, this Program Year's two-day event included information sessions broadcast over social media and a regional distribution of personal items at the VA's campus in Rocky Hill and other locations. In partnership with the Department of Defense and the Connecticut Military Department, JVSG staff also assisted returning troops from the Connecticut National Guard and U.S. Armed Service Reserves by participating in two Reverse Soldier Readiness Program briefings.

Although most community outreach during the program year was conducted virtually due to COVID-19, the DVOPs maintained contact with other service providers and veterans' organizations and made efforts to connect veterans with the AJCs and JVSG services. Services were also provided to homeless veterans, in collaboration with the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families program and grantees of the U.S. Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, and to veterans with service-connected disabilities participating in the VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment program.

Jobs First Employment Services Integration in the American Job Centers

In partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), CTDOL administers the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program, which provides a host of employment-related services to recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), Connecticut's federally funded cash assistance program for low-income families under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The WDBs operate as intermediaries that subcontract with other organizations to provide direct services to JFES participants in American Job Centers (AJCs) around the state.

On March 14, 2020, Governor Lamont issued a COVID-19 Executive Order that included the temporarily waiving of all in-person TFA interview requirements. Since TFA could be granted without mandated participation in employment services, JFES was temporarily suspended at the AJCs, although approximately 46% of JFES participants chose to voluntarily participate virtually in the program. Virtual case management services included:

- Holding all meetings/communication by email, phone, and/or video conferencing;
- Assisting participants with online career guidance and job search assistance efforts; and
- Connecting participants to local resources to assist families that may be in crisis due to COVID-19.

While JFES staff were providing virtual services, they also participated in additional telework assignments that included monitoring and updating the CTHires case management system and participating in extensive professional development opportunities and online training programs coordinated by CTDOL or WDBs. Over 70 JFES staff received virtual training on topics such as:

- Certified Employment Interview Professional (CEIP) home-study certification process
- Metrix online learning training programs
- Racial Equity Training
- Intimate Partner Violence Training
- Annual Conference – Serving Adults with Disabilities

In addition, CTDOL, DSS and the WDBs began JFES program outreach efforts by sending welcome packets to all TFA recipients to provide information about the JFES program, childcare assistance (Care4Kids), and local community services to prepare individuals for program re-opening. Lastly, program partner agencies, along with Middlesex Community College Media Center, produced a JFES orientation video; attending this virtual orientation is mandatory for TFA applicants and, once the program resumes, it will remain a TFA eligibility requirement.

Job Corps

Through Job Corps, youth have the opportunity to receive educational and career technical training, thereby gaining the skills needed to become employable, independent citizens. This federally funded program, administered by the USDOL Employment and Training Administration, offers residential and non-residential placements for youth ages 16-24 (no upper age or income limits for those with disabilities) as well as intensive, wraparound services such as career and mental health counseling, driver education, social skills training, and other services that lend to participants' achievements. Job Corps' success in Connecticut is largely due to the collaborative efforts of CTDOL, the Workforce Development Boards, state and local agencies and organizations, and Job Corps' program operators.

During PY20, a variety of trades were offered at two Connecticut Job Corps locations. The New Haven Job Corps Center offered Culinary Arts, Certified Nursing Assistant, Building Construction Technology, Plumbing, and Carpentry. Trades available at the Hartford Job Corps Center included Business Technology/Insurance & Financial Services, Manufacturing Technology, and Clinical Medical Assistant. Students who qualified for the Advanced Career Training program were eligible to continue their education at local colleges and universities or transfer to a Job Corps Center offering advanced training in the field of their choice.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Job Corps Centers in Connecticut did not enroll new students during PY20. Students who were already enrolled continued to participate in the program through distance learning and campus tours for prospective students were offered via virtual orientations. Local Job Corps Centers were required by USDOL's Office of Job Corps to make a multitude of upgrades in safety and health measures to the campuses. Work on the upgrades began in June 2020 and were ongoing through 2021. Upon completion, it is expected that new student enrollments will resume.

Job Corps Success Story

In 2018, Bernardo arrived from Jamaica to live with his father and, as a recent high school graduate, was looking for an opportunity for growth and success in the United States. His aspiration to attend college was hindered by difficulties in navigating the system and affording the cost of furthering his education. His cousin recommended the Job Corps Program and, after meeting with an Admissions Counselor and expressing an interest in accounting, he decided to apply to the Hartford Job Corps Center's Insurance & Financial Services Program.

Bernardo always took his education seriously; he completed the Insurance & Financial Services Program in less than six months, was accepted into the Job Corps' Advanced Career Training Program, and then began attending Capital Community College where earning straight A's every semester helped him secure an internship with a prominent insurance company in the area. Having graduated with an Associate's Degree in Business Studies, Bernardo will attend Central Connecticut State University on a full-tuition scholarship in the fall, entering as a Junior. Bernardo credits Job Corps with providing an early introduction to the structure of the work environment in America. He is grateful for the stable environment at the school, the housing, and meals which afforded him the ability to focus completely on his studies without having to worry about being distracted by things that would get in the way of obtaining his career goals. Bernardo's long-term career goal is to become a Certified Public Accountant.



Bernardo credits Job Corps for providing a pathway to his many achievements.

Bernardo's long-term career goal is to become a Certified Public Accountant.

Serving Individuals with Disabilities

The Connecticut Department of Labor, the Departments of Social Services (DSS) and Aging and Disability Services, and other state agencies and community-based organizations offer assistance and guidance on opportunities and options for individuals with disabilities. One particular role that remains a focus for CTDOL in this regard is the agency's membership on the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. In support of the Committee's mission of addressing the workforce development needs of individuals with disabilities, CTDOL provides links to disability resources for employers and jobseekers at www.ctdol.state.ct.us/gendocs/pwd.htm, a web page developed collaboratively by CTDOL and the Governor's Committee. Information on assistive technology, tax credits, workplace accommodations, and disability employment initiatives is offered via the web page.

In addition, CTDOL serves as a member of the following:

- Connecticut Parents with Differing Cognitive Abilities Workgroup – This workgroup, with members from various public and private agencies from around the state, is led by the Department of Children and Families and provides training to professionals to better equip them in assisting parents with cognitive limitations to access and navigate the vast offering of services available to them.
- Disability Focus Group – The members of this group, including the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the Department of Developmental Services, State Department of Education, CTDOL, EdAdvance, and Adult Education providers, plan

the Annual Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities. The 28th Annual Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities was held on May 7, 2021 in a virtual format for the first time due to the impact of COVID-19.

- Connecticut Tech Act Project Advisory Council – This group, whose members include representatives of agencies interested in advancing the use of assistive technology (AT), individuals with disabilities who use AT, and family members or guardians of those individuals, provides input and perspectives regarding the Tech Act Project and the statewide, comprehensive activities implemented through it. Funded by a federal grant and overseen by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the Tech Act Project has made significant strides in familiarizing employers and individuals with AT options.

Workforce Development Boards

(Summary information has been provided by Connecticut's Workforce Development Boards.)

Northwest (Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board)

The Northwest Connecticut Manufacturing Partnership

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB) launched its Next Generation Sector Partnership focusing on manufacturing. The Northwest Connecticut Manufacturing Partnership is the first regionwide, industry-led effort to promote the benefits of manufacturing careers to key target audiences, as well as provide all local education programs with insights on the latest industry trends and curriculum changes needed to train new manufacturing talent. The collective efforts of partnership entities will result in a substantial increase in young people choosing manufacturing as a career, a much greater proportion of local graduates staying in the region rather than leaving for manufacturing jobs elsewhere, a growing number of career-changing adults opting for manufacturing, and more talent from outside the region choosing to work for local companies.

Northwest Construction Careers Initiative

The successful Northwest Construction Careers Initiative (NCCI), which involves local trade unions' work in partnership with private sector companies to encourage careers through apprenticeship in a variety of construction trades, continued in Program Year 2020. Staff offered outreach and recruitment events for residents of the Northwest region, with orientation sessions held virtually.

The NRWIB also delivers a reentry program that offers a two-week workshop providing participants with job-readiness skills and the opportunity for more training, specifically with the Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation program. Collaboration continues with local trade unions. NCCI has a mutually beneficial relationship with International Union of Operating Engineers Local 478. In addition, the program has helped participants find jobs with Laborers Local 611 (LIUNA) and with the Western Connecticut Area Labor Foundation.

NRWIB also administers the Good Jobs Ordinance, the local hiring ordinance issued by the City of Waterbury that requires contractors working on Waterbury projects with a value of \$500,000 or greater to hire qualified Waterbury residents. Contractors are required to hire 30% residents

and 10% minority. The board continued to offer OSHA 10 classes multiple times a year, since this certification is mandatory for those who want to work in the construction field.

Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is a voluntary Social Security program that assists recipients of SSI or SSDI benefits, age 18 through 65, to obtain vocational counseling, training, job readiness, job referrals and other employment support services, free of charge. Authorized by the Social Security Administration as an “Employment Network,” the NRWIB provided these services to 36 participants during PY20. To participate, individuals must be currently receiving SSI or SSDI, meet the age criteria, and be willing to work full time. While participating, disability medical reviews are deferred, Medicare/Medicaid benefits continue, and individuals receive expedited reinstatement of benefits if needed.

Services for Ticket Holders include:

- Career counseling
- Résumé development and interview preparation
- A wide variety of employment workshops
- Referrals to additional services and support
- Job matching and job development
- SSA disability benefits advisement referral
- Job accommodations instruction and assistance
- Possibility of training through WIOA funds, based on eligibility
- Follow-up supports and retention services after employment

Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative - Manufacturing Your Future

The NRWIB, serving as a convener and broker, continues to facilitate the implementation and delivery of a broad array of initiatives that focus on the region’s priorities. NRWIB’s Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative program addresses the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector through a regional partnership of schools, two community colleges, business associations, chambers of commerce, Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation, and local businesses.

With funding from the Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative (ACI), NRWIB operates the Manufacturing Your Future program. This four-year, workforce pipeline program trains qualified, entry-level workers for job placement with manufacturers. During PY20, on-the-job training was offered and program expansion was undertaken to include plastics molding manufacturing training (ACI 2.0 Plastics). The Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation (MASC) delivers the training with curriculum specializing in plastics molding.

Performance outcomes for Manufacturing Your Future were as follows:

- ACI - A total of seven 11th and 12th grade students participated in manufacturing training after school at MASC’s training facility in Waterbury. Fifteen adults (age 18 and over and not in high school) participated in manufacturing certificate training at MASC and two adults participated in manufacturing certificate courses

at Northwestern Connecticut Community College. Fourteen individuals participated in on-the-job training and four participated in an apprenticeship.

- ACI 2.0 Plastics - A total of twenty adults (age 18 and over and not in high school) participated in the 2.0 Plastics training. Two individuals participated in on-the-job training.

The board furthered program participation via CareerPath, a mobile app designed for NRWIB that enables students to create personalized career pathways. The application takes a student from registration to course completion, all from the convenience of a smartphone device. Ultimately, the student will have access to active employers seeking qualified, skilled applicants. CareerPath features include push notification, graphic reporting and analytics, soft and hard skill tracking, co-curricular program integration, badging and credentialing system, events, tasks, and milestones.

Youth

The NRWIB strives to deliver a comprehensive array of youth services that focus on assisting both out-of-school and in-school youth who have one or more barriers to employment to prepare for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. The goal is to attain educational and/or skills training credentials, and secure employment with career/promotional opportunities. During PY20, 182 youth were served and, of those youth, 151 attained either a recognized certificate, diploma, and/or degree.

Southwest (The WorkPlace)

Response to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic created great economic uncertainty for many Connecticut residents. Those laid off navigated job search in the virtual world and suddenly faced a future different from what was anticipated. Although closed to the public, The WorkPlace still operated programs and continued to make a difference in the lives of those served. Utilizing video conferencing tools enabled program staff to continue their work and connect with customers in different and new ways.

The Health Career Academy, YouthWorks, Dress for Success, Platform to Employment, and Re-Entry programs shifted in-person training and classes to a virtual setting. Many programs, including The Health Career Academy and YouthWorks, hosted information sessions weekly via Zoom. YouthWorks helped participants train and get certification in Customer Service and Sales through the National Retail Federation. The Health Career Academy had placements in various healthcare roles, including Certified Nursing Assistants, Pharmacy Technicians, and Home Health Aides.

For many years, Dress for Success Mid-Fairfield County (DFSMFC) has helped low-income women achieve economic independence and thrive in both work and life by providing a support network and professional interview attire. During the COVID-19 pandemic, DFSMFC had to close its doors to the public and was unable to serve women in person for suitings or personal development workshops. By transitioning their workshops onto Zoom and assisting female

jobseekers for suitings virtually, DFSMFC succeeded in continuing its important services. Staff can meet jobseekers over video chat to understand their style, clothing needs, and sizes. Staff then prepare clothing boxes and distribute them by appointment to customers in Bridgeport and New Haven. In addition to clothing, the boxes include accessories, hand sanitizer, masks, and resources from both DFSMFC and an area bank that provided funding for the boutique boxes.

Platform to Employment (P2E) 2.0 was created in response to the rise in unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new online version of P2E helped those who lost employment due to the pandemic by offering classes focused on emotional support, preparing participants for the new world of work, and upgrading skills. Participants in P2E 2.0 still received many of the same benefits of in-person classes such as mentoring, career counseling, and job placement assistance.

Throughout the pandemic, the American Job Center Business Services staff remained actively engaged with the business community by providing valuable information and resources. As pandemic-related restrictions eased and hiring needs emerged, staff held several virtual jobs fairs with break-out rooms for real-time interviews via Zoom to help employers meet the new hiring demand; several jobseekers were offered immediate employment. To address sector-based hiring challenges, Business Services staff also coordinated virtual job fairs specifically for healthcare, transportation, and retail sectors.

Enhancements Within The WorkPlace

In late 2020, The WorkPlace created a “Diversity, Inclusion and Professional Development Manager” position to continue bringing cutting-edge, in-house training and resources to staff regarding racial diversity. This position chairs The WorkPlace’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee and is also responsible for the delivery of The WorkPlace’s professional development programming which consists of regularly-scheduled staff training.

During the year, The WorkPlace pooled employment relations efforts, creating a single team that connects participants of various grant-funded programs with employment opportunities. To best accomplish this, the Employer Relations Specialist (ERS) Team, working as an extension of The WorkPlace’s many programs, focuses on building and strengthening relationships with local businesses. The advantages of implementing this model include better team collaboration and consistent messaging to the business community. It prevents multiple contacts by WorkPlace employees to the same employer, offering different information. The entire ERS team receives the same sales-based training and uses the Customer Relationship Management system to record information about placement activities.

The WorkPlace also invested in its workforce by delivering more than 75 workforce training sessions on topics such as Labor Market Information, WIOA Career Pathways, and performance. More than 50 self-help trainings on topics covering health, wellness, and exercise were also provided to staff.

Youth

During PY20, operations began for the Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Grant (YARG). Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, the purpose of the grant is to support the enrollment of youth (ages 16 to 24) into new and existing Registered

Apprenticeship Programs (RAP) and ensure that wraparound services are provided to improve success in the program, which runs from July 2020 to June 2024.

A large part of the first year focused on program development and employer engagements. Grant project personnel were hired and participated in both service delivery and grant-related trainings. Outreach was conducted with over 80 regional manufacturing companies to identify workforce needs and promote RAPs as a workforce strategy. Collaboration with local employers has resulted in identification of both suitable positions for youth and training needs; a contract was finalized with Housatonic Community College (HCC) to provide CNC Machining I, II and III courses as Related Technical Instruction (RTI) for future apprentices enrolled in the grant; and other local contracts were established to provide pre-apprenticeship trainings to participants in areas including manufacturing and professional skills, OSHA 10, and the National Incident Management System (a system that provides multifaceted guidance regarding workforce incidents for a broad sector of employers and organizations.)

Eastern (Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board - EWIB)

Virtual Services

To accommodate customers who were no longer able to visit the American Job Centers during the COVID-19 pandemic, EWIB established a few virtual services. The need for technology workshops has increased significantly as a result of the pandemic. To meet this need, EWIB began offering technology workshops virtually, utilizing the Zoom platform to reach customers at home. Workshops include: CTHires Résumé Builder, How to Apply Online, Email for Job Seekers, Preparing for a Virtual Interview/Job Fair, Skillup CT Metrix Learning, and Networking with LinkedIn. EWIB's Job Development team also coordinates a monthly virtual hiring event where employers are invited to conduct interviews over Zoom with AJC customers. In addition, EWIB conducts its WIOA Orientation Workshop either live via Zoom or in a video format. EWIB also offers two virtual workshops for those impacted by the pandemic: Dealing with Pandemic Unemployment and Rebounding & Recovering from COVID-19 Job Loss.

Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative

The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI), an award-winning workforce program managed by the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) and other partners, continues to flourish in the Eastern region. Since its inception in 2016, the MPI has placed over 1,800 individuals in jobs by raising the baseline of competencies in the jobseeker and aligning those skills with jobs in demand by manufacturers. With a solid foundation of curriculum designed by manufacturers and academia, the MPI's success is also attributable to its strong partnership of more than 30 stakeholders, including the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance which designed and implemented the program. During the pandemic, the MPI was successfully able to continue offering its effective training options by conducting virtual assessments and instituting a hybrid in-person and online model.

Health Profession Opportunity Grant

The Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG), offered by EWIB in partnership with two other WDBs since 2015, is targeted to individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and low-income adults. The program offers a "boot camp" to build foundational

skills as well as entry-level vocational trainings in healthcare. In the Eastern region, through June 2021, 161 participants have been enrolled, 123 completed healthcare training, and 141 secured employment in healthcare or other sectors.

Youth

Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative

The Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) is an extension of the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) described above. The YMPI offers the potential for a career pathway for high school graduates who have chosen to enter the job market instead of college. EWIB has partnered with 15 regional high schools, that have begun to embed the YMPI curriculum into their schools. In the three years since its establishment, the YMPI has placed 117 graduates into jobs. The program has received strong support from the participating schools' administrators and youth participants.

To accommodate students during the pandemic, EWIB partnered with two community colleges in the area, Three Rivers and Quinebaug Valley, in developing a virtual YMPI model for high schools. Students were provided with online material and a shortened hands-on summer course to learn the manufacturing skills needed for a career. Some schools that were able to remain open for in-person learning for a majority of the year chose to take the traditional YMPI route and send their students to the final "Hands-On Evaluation" at Three River's Manufacturing Apprenticeship Center at Ella T. Grasso Technical High School in Groton.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Of the many activities and services offered through EWIB, a focal point is its Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Delivered by EASTCONN, in partnership with New London Youth Affairs and Norwich Human Services, the program is made available to 41 towns in the region. The program provides valuable job experience and skills to youth while paying their wages.

Offered primarily in a virtual format for PY20 due to the pandemic, the summer experience consisted of an 80-hour internship via Google Classroom that included résumé creation, career decision-making, labor market information, communication skills, interviewing, and youth worker safety. To round out the experience, the Metrix Learning online platform and Virtual Job Shadow were also offered to the youth participants. The program, which served 383 youth in PY20, was financially supported by the Connecticut Department of Labor, Department of Children and Families, CARES Act and other donations from local foundations.

North Central (Capital Workforce Partners)

Throughout Program Year 2020-2021, North Central's American Job Center (AJC) services were provided mainly on a virtual basis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenging times, the AJC staff were able to serve 1,431 Adults. Of those, 568 entered employment, 334 received training, and 182 earned credentials.

Connecticut Workforce and High-Tech Industry Skills Partnership

In February 2021, Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) launched the Connecticut Workforce and High-Tech Industry Skills Partnership (CT-WHISP) with a \$10 million H-1B One Workforce grant from USDOL. This statewide project supports Connecticut’s manufacturing and technology sectors and helps unemployed and underemployed jobseekers connect to careers in these sectors by delivering demand-driven IT training and credentials, as well as supportive services and job placement assistance. CT-WHISP will also provide on-the-job training and incumbent worker training resources to help IT employers tap into new talent and help advanced manufacturing employers retool their existing workforce.

Free to Succeed

One of the North Central Workforce Development Board’s great success stories is Eddie Lewis, who first sought American Job Center (AJC) services while living in a halfway house in Hartford. AJC staff provided information to Eddie about the Free to Succeed program, he immediately registered to participate, and began working in warehouses. His career goal was to eventually become a truck driver. To achieve that, he registered for services through WIOA, enrolled in training, and obtained a CDL-B license. Eddie began working as a driver and built his résumé with time and experience. He re-engaged in the WIOA program, obtained his CDL-A license, and works full-time as a truck driver.



Eddie Lewis attained his career goal by participating in WIOA.

Employer Engagement

North Central engaged and/or served 1,544 employers regionwide through Youth, Adult, and special programs. A total of 83 new on-the-job and subsidized employment placements were made through various grants and programs, representing a total training investment of \$949,024.96. CWP’s Employer Engagement team identified more than 200 openings for CNAs, sterile technicians, and pharmacy technicians, and began coordination of job placement activities for participants graduating from CARES Act-funded programs.

Youth

Although the COVID-19 pandemic presented unexpected challenges, the area’s WIOA Youth participants endured and overcame barriers to education and employment with the support of North Central regional training providers. In PY20, 352 participants were served and staff facilitated participant entry into 175 sector-based trainings. Despite employers being hesitant to open their doors, 78 youth participated in paid work experiences across the greater Hartford region at various companies and organizations. A total of 128 youth entered employment, and 90% of them retained their positions as of the close of PY20. During a time when mental health crises were on the rise and participants faced additional barriers to success, community-based providers were able to make 175 supportive service referrals for youth in crisis.

Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program (SYELP)

In April 2020, with the onset of COVID-19, CWP began planning a rapid SYELP redesign to adapt the program to the pandemic. Considerable attention was focused on the merits of quality

programming given the unprecedented circumstances. Leading the list of concerns was that well-documented, high urban unemployment and disconnected youth issues would be further compounded by the impact of COVID-19 on urban communities. Common jobs for youth, mainly in the sectors of retail, hospitality, culinary, and other customer-facing occupations that were hit hard by COVID-19, had become scarce; this, coupled with fragile community and family supports, led to the need for immediate, aggressive public/private sector action.

The redesign process required imagining what a remote or semi-remote employment and learning program could look like, and what resources, partnerships, and program design elements would need to be in place for it to be a valuable experience. Key understandings, paramount to the design of the program, included:

- The need for mental health supports to be available for all youth;
- Virtual learning would be a core component of SYELP; and
- Connection was more important than ever; with youth out of school since March, it was important to give them the experience of connection to peers and community organizations.

Work experience, though offered differently than in years past, was a vital SYELP component; across the region, 1,313 youth were employed, working a total of 158,466 hours.

Community Renewal Team (CRT) Summer Youth Employment Learning Program

Through CRT's remote-based, civic engagement activity, youth promoted community awareness through the creation of yard signs, such as for the 2020 Census and Get Out the Vote. Blank yard signs and art supplies were provided so participating youth could design their own creative message to the Hartford community. Participants were also tasked with conducting weekly research on the topics and having discussions on what they learned. Over 300 signs were created and displayed throughout Hartford.

South Central (Workforce Alliance)

Virtual Hiring Event Series

As part of Workforce Alliance's "Fight COVID with a Career" initiative, the Business Services unit launched a Virtual Hiring Event Series in October 2020. Hosted and moderated by Business Services Specialists, the series featured a wide variety of businesses on the Zoom platform. Displaced or underemployed job seekers pursuing new opportunities registered in advance to attend and learn about immediate short-term and permanent job opportunities in Connecticut. Each 60-90 minute session included a hiring representative, live, from the highlighted business. Following an overview of job vacancies, the hiring representatives shared information about the hiring process and answered questions from jobseekers. Participating employers included local medical providers, shipping entities, community organizations, manufacturing companies, and other businesses.

Job openings at these and other employers were welcome to be posted on the Workforce Alliance website. Jobseekers had the choice of having their résumé screened by Business Services staff before applying directly to jobs. While Virtual Hiring Events and Essential Employer posting continue to be open to the public, Business Services offers WIOA-related hiring incentives to

employers to hire eligible candidates including Dislocated Workers, low-income Adults, and 18-24 year-old Youth.

Youth

Youth Career & Resource Fair

Project CEO, the South Central board's WIOA-funded program for Youth and young adults, marked the end of the school year and kicked off summer 2021 by hosting an outdoor, in-person career and resource event at the New Haven American Job Center. More than 30 employers gathered on June 18, 2021 to welcome 18-24 year-old jobseekers from greater New Haven and Middlesex County and their families. Institutions of higher education, the New Haven Police Department, community organizations, transportation-related entities, and other local community resources participated. Thanks to extensive promotion of the event, including via social media, more than 120 individuals attended the event and learned about hiring and training opportunities.

Leading up to the event, Project CEO was already serving 171 Youth and young adults, including 71 enrolled during the COVID-19 pandemic. All attendees of the Youth Career & Resources Fair were able to enroll in Project CEO on the spot or were contacted following the event to encourage enrollment in the new program year (PY21).

Cost of Workforce Development Activities

During Program Year 2020, a total of \$25,845,894 was allocated to the Workforce Development Boards for WIOA services, a decrease from the PY19 WIOA allocation of \$26,253,534. Funds were distributed as follows:

Program Year 2020 Fund Allocation

Adult - \$7,550,367
Dislocated Worker - \$9,992,405
Youth - \$8,303,122

For the period of July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, as reported by CTDOL to USDOL via form ETA 9169, a total of 4,895 participants were served during PY20. The Dislocated Worker program assisted the largest number of participants; the 2,239 served represents 46 percent of the total WIOA participants served. Also in PY20, a total of 1,731 Adults and 925 Youth were served, comprising 35 percent and 19 percent of the total number of WIOA participants served respectively.

<u>Program Year</u>	<u>Adult</u>	<u>Dislocated Worker</u>	<u>Youth</u>	<u>Total</u>
PY19	2,337	1,814	1,225	5,376
PY20	1,731	2,239	925	4,895

The decrease in the number of WIOA participants served during PY20 is largely attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced office shutdowns and necessitated a shift to remote services. New and enhanced technology options and modified operating procedures were put in place as quickly as possible by the boards, and virtual service delivery was established as the "new normal" until in-person services could safely resume. While the actions undertaken by the WDBs

very likely prevented a more significant decline in the number of participants served, another pandemic-related factor likely undercut participation; as of the close of PY20, federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, and Mixed Earner Unemployment Compensation were still in place in Connecticut. While more Dislocated Workers were served in PY20 than in PY19, the 2,239 that participated reflects a small segment of the thousands of UI claimants that may have been eligible for services. It is also likely that continued health concerns, including the arrival of the Delta variant and second wave of COVID-19 spread, played a role in the overall decrease in participation in PY20.

Discussion of Activities Funded By WIOA 15% Statewide Funds

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires the Governor to allocate the majority of WIOA funds, via formula, to the local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) which are responsible for setting local policy and directing the use of these formula-allocated funds in their regions. Under the Act, the Governor also may reserve a percentage of the state's WIOA funds for use in the administration and provision of statewide employment and training activities.

Statewide activities, delivered in Connecticut with 15% reserve funds during PY20, included:

- Maintaining the state list of eligible training providers;
- State administration of the adult, dislocated worker and youth workforce development activities, by conducting performance evaluations, including programmatic monitoring and customer satisfaction surveys;
- Assisting in the operations of the American Job Centers;
- Operating fiscal management and performance accountability system activities; and
- Supporting CTHires, the state's WIOA case management information system.

Activities related to monitoring, evaluation, and accountability provide essential information and guidance for the state and its workforce development partners regarding continuous improvement and program efficiencies. Also, performance data that is made available through CTHires is valuable to the Workforce Development Boards in achieving programmatic goals. By having timely access to this data, WDBs can analyze performance, determine areas in need of attention, and focus on solutions.