



Vermont Department of Labor

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

Program Year 2020

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Vermont Department of Labor

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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) 2020 WIOA Annual Report provides a summary of Vermont's WIOA Title I and III Programs from July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021.

Vermont's Workforce Development System

Vermont has one federally designated One-Stop American Jobs Center (AJC), located in Burlington, and eleven affiliate and satellite 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 can view current labor market information, research training and education opportunities and resources, explore career pathways, access employment preparation tools, workshops, or information, and post or explore current job postings. VJL also serves as VDOL's case management system and performance tracking and reporting tool. VDOL is 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 had 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 2020, the State's workforce goals were:

- (1) Connect Vermonters to the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence.
- (2) Increase the number of women, veterans, minorities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented people employed in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, advanced manufacturing, and other priority industry sectors in Vermont.
- (3) Increase the number of Vermonters with barriers to employment who complete high school, earn a post-secondary credential - including an industry-recognized certificate, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary degree program - and become employed in occupations that align with the needs of Vermont's employers.
- (4) Improve Vermont's workforce development system by continuously aligning, adapting, and integrating workforce education and training programs and

career and supportive services to meet the needs of all customers.

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

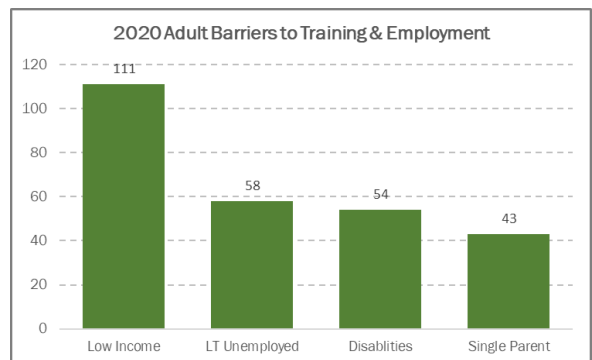
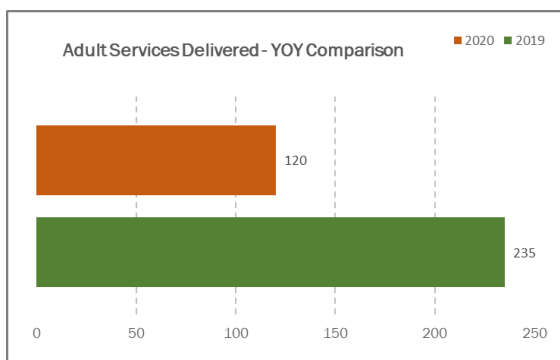
Core Program Updates

The VDOL WIOA Title I programs faced numerous obstacles during PY2020. COVID-19 continued to cause widespread fear among Vermonters and had a major impact on prospective participant interest in seeking employment and employment support services. Caseloads across the state were reduced significantly from the previous program year.

To increase enrollments and promote services, the VDOL staff began an outreach campaign to jobseekers. Staff utilized a variety of contact methods including collaboration with the Unemployment Insurance Division to promote services. Although these efforts didn’t produce a significant increase in enrollments, case managers continued to work with existing participants through basic career and individualized services.

With the limited number of participants on the caseloads, case managers were afforded the luxury of more time per participant to thoughtfully engage and establish strong relationships as they brought together teams of community partners that would support participants in their career pathway.

Title I Adult Program



The Title I Adult Program experienced a significant decline in enrollments compared to PY2019. Over the course of PY2020, services were delivered to 120 adult individuals. The pandemic enhanced barriers to both pre-employment services and employment itself. Some of the most distinct characteristics of participants identified in PY2020 were:

- 92.5% of the adults served were low-income individuals,
- 48.3% were long term unemployed,
- 45% identified as having one or more disabilities, and
- 35.8% identified as being single parents.

During this program year, entering or staying in a workplace was most challenging for individuals with these characteristics. Therefore, services most frequently utilized during PY2020 included labor market information, career guidance, financial literacy, and comprehensive assessments. In collaboration with the labor exchange staff and business services team, case managers worked diligently to connect their participants with employers.

YOY Comparison	2019	2020	change	% change
Work Experience	67	9	(58)	-87%
Cost	\$90,526	\$10,515	(\$80,011)	-88%
Cost/Work Experience	\$1,351	\$1,168	(\$183)	-14%
Occupational Skills	120	91	(\$29)	-24%
Cost	\$250,572	\$151,405	(\$99,167)	-40%
Cost/Occupational Skills	\$2,088.10	\$1,663.79	(\$424)	-20%

Although there was and continues to be a high demand for workers, the supply of workers is extremely limited. Vermont's unemployment rate was approximately 3.5% throughout this time. As COVID-19 continued to run rampant, priority populations tended to decline or be uninterested in our program services. Though occupational skills training also declined in PY 2020, the ability to access virtual training courses was integral in enabling low income, single parents the opportunity to strengthen their Individual Employment Plans while staying at home.

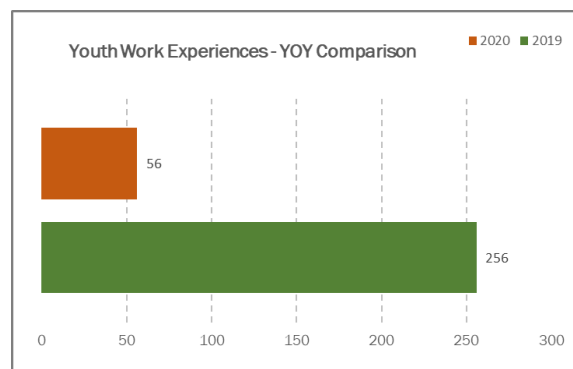
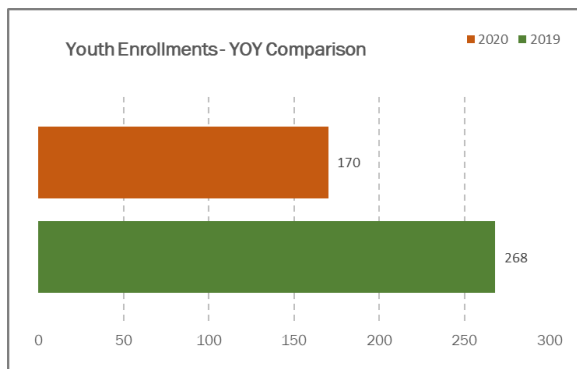
WIOA Performance Measures	PY2020 Goal	PY2020 Actual
Participants Served		120
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	72.5%	65.5%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	63.0%	58.1%
Median Earnings	\$5,800	\$5,512
Credential Attainment	65.0%	76.4%
Measurable Skill Gains	50.0%	57.5%

Title I Dislocated Worker Program

The pandemic had an extraordinary impact on the dislocated worker program during PY2020, reporting 53 individuals served (totaling \$64,276.88). The dislocated workers primarily focused on exploring the labor market to identify the career pathway they wanted to follow. In addition, they took advantage of accessing virtual trainings and workshops to enhance their resumes so they would be more attractive to employers when they were ready to enter the workforce. As Vermont prepares for an influx of dislocated workers in PY2021, a key focus will be on connecting its dislocated worker population to employers through its On-the-Job training program and exploring the appropriate education and training programs to upskill the workforce. The Vermont Department of Labor's Workforce Development Division will rely on its strong relationships with its employers to connect the dislocated worker population to the workforce.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2020 Goal	PY2020 Actual
Participants Served		53
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	82.0%	73.0%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	74.0%	66.7%
Median Earnings	\$10,000	\$7,356
Credential Attainment	70.0%	90.0%
Measurable Skill Gains	60.0%	60.5%

Title I Youth Program



Enrollment for PY2020 in the Title I Youth Program was also low, ending with 170 participants. Work experiences were drastically impacted in PY2020, only reporting 56 enrollments (\$102,927) in comparison to the 256 enrollments (\$296,885.62) reported in PY2019. Our efforts to support youth enrolling in work experiences was challenged by the widespread fear of COVID in the workplace and the scarcity of employers willing to support a virtual work experience program in the beginning of PY2020.

In Spring of 2021, a statewide youth virtual summit was held for the purposes of launching an effort to re-engage and re-connect youth to the Vermont Department of Labor services and employer opportunities. Several industries were highlighted during the youth summit including Vermont campgrounds, agricultural opportunities, and specific youth initiatives including barn painting projects. The VDOL plans to expand its youth summit and increase youth engagement into PY2021. The hope is to offer more industries that youth will have the opportunity to explore while participating in the program.

During PY2020, staff worked with other community partners to offer innovative alternatives to the 14 program elements. With the challenges related to low enrollment in the work experience element, enrollment into other elements such as leadership development, financial literacy, and labor market information were increasing. Case managers were afforded the time to have more meaningful, expansive conversations with youth as they prepared for their future.

Covid-19 created challenges during this unprecedented time, and youth were trying to access services virtually in an already chaotic environment. Therefore, case managers prioritized ensuring that youth had the supports they needed to face and overcome their challenges before entering the workforce. A Jobseeker Inquiry Form was developed and placed on VDOL’s website to give youth easy access to the One-Stop Job Centers. As VDOL re-opened its doors near the end of PY2020 and transitioned to more in-person meetings, work experiences will be a prime focus as well as strengthening the other program elements to be offered across the state.

SUCCESS STORY: Brattleboro Retreat Farm

A cohort of youth in the southern region of Vermont had the opportunity to participate in a 10-week work experience with the Brattleboro Retreat Farm. A diverse curriculum was developed to allow the participants to experience many different tasks including trail work, invasive plant removal, grounds work, caring for animals, and harvesting.

The cohort enhanced transferable skills such as work ethic, teamwork and/or independent work, reliability, flexibility, time management, problem solving, and communication skills. At the end of the summer program VDOL and The Retreat Farm staff hosted an employer networking event for the participants. The event afforded an opportunity for participants to speak directly with employers to learn what their expectations were and discuss possible future employment.

SUCCESS STORY: Barn Painting Project

The Vermont Youth Program added three barn painting projects to its accomplishments in PY2020. The participants took great pride in the work they performed in preserving the barns’ natural beauty for future generations to admire. PY2020’s initiative was a collaboration with the Agency of Agriculture, ReSource, YouthBuild, and the Pizzagalli Foundation. Our VOSHA partner provided Work Safe training to the participants prior to starting the projects. During the projects youth learned the value of teamwork, developed good work habits, basic work skills, received structured on-site instruction with exposure to work and the requirements for successful job retention, and gained a recent work history and references. Participants were co-enrolled with Vocational Rehabilitation thus allowing the braiding of funds and supporting integrated service delivery.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2020 Goal	PY2020 Actual
Participants Served		170
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	71%	61.3%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	57.5%	65.0%
Median Earnings	\$3,978	\$3,796
Credential Attainment	47.8%	43.5%
Measurable Skill Gains	40.0%	40.4%

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. Screenings and assessments are also available to determine appropriate service referrals and help individuals enroll in available employment, training, education, and social assistance programs.

Throughout the PY2020, services provided through Title III declined due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Staff were reassigned to work remotely while building systems, tools, and procedures to support the needs of both jobseekers and employers. Staff became familiar with the use of technology to offer virtual workshops, job fairs, hiring events, and virtual one-one-one meetings with jobseekers. The technology also afforded staff the opportunity to participate in professional development and training to enhance their skills.

To ensure a greater coordination of service delivery among partners, staff engaged in closer connections with community partners. For example, the Workforce Development and Vocational Rehabilitation staff scheduled quarterly meetings to ensure that the service delivery between organizations was efficient, effective, and comprehensive. In addition, business services staff from each organization met regularly to respond to the needs of the business community, which included recruitment and retention assistance and planning virtual hiring events. This virtual relationship building provided the groundwork to increase the ability to have a common intake and referral process, shared assessments and braiding of resources.

In PY2020, VDOL served 2,230 individuals in staff-assisted labor exchange services. This is a drop from the previous year's number of 5,895 individuals supported in staff-assisted labor exchange services. Although employment after the 2nd and 4th quarter after exit has also declined for the PY2020, median earnings have increased. Median earnings in PY2019 were \$5,635 and that increased to \$6,623 in PY2020.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2019 Actual	PY 2020 Goal	PY 2020 Actual
Title III Wagner Peyser Program			
Participants Served	5,895		2230
Employment (2 nd Quarter after Exit)	66.6%	62.6%	59.5%
Employment (4 th Quarter after Exit)	58.4%	57.1%	52.4%
Median Earnings	\$5,635	\$5,035	\$6,623

Waivers

Vermont had no waivers in place during Program Year 2020.

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.

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. As a result of COVID-19, 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. In PY2020 we began to publish and send a Weekly Job Newsletter in coordination with the UI division. Business Services Team members identify “hot” jobs from their regions which is sent to a mailing list of over 20,000 unique e-mail addresses.

As Vermont, like other states, continues to experience an unprecedented labor shortage, the Business Services Manager and Business Services Team have been active in fielding incoming inquiries, writing and entering job postings, and coordinating other marketing and promotional activities to raise awareness about their current and sometimes critical labor needs. Job postings in Vermont Job Link increased by 60%, from 4,900 Vermont jobs in October 2020 to 8,100 Vermont jobs posted in June 2021. This increase reflects a strategic approach to communication and follow up with our employer customer.

In PY2020, Vermont selected “retention with the same employer” and “repeat business customer rate” as the indicators we would report. In PY2020, 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. Overall Employer Services Provided are up in PY2020 and Repeat Business with Employer Customer is also up as reflected in the chart below.

WIOA Performance Measures	PY2019 Actual	PY2020 Goal	PY2020 Actual
Effectiveness in Serving Employers			
Employer Services Provided	1173		1623
Retention with the Same Employer in the 2 nd and 4 th Quarters After Exit Rate	62.8%	Baseline	60.4%
Repeat Business Customer Rate	25.5%	Baseline	31.6%

The Business Services Manager continues to meet bi-weekly with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Business, Legislative and Community Relations Manager with the goal of sharing key projects and activities as well as looking for opportunities for joint staff learning and outreach to businesses. A key goal for the later this Program Year or early PY2021 is joint business engagement training for the respective teams.

Customer Satisfaction

The need to offer services virtually has provided new opportunities for communication and interaction with both jobseeker and employer customers. Following each weekly Virtual Job Fair, every registered attendee receives an email with helpful and important follow up information and a request for them to provide feedback on the event. They are directed to an online form and local program staff conduct follow-up outreach on areas of concern. This tool is being adapted and improved regularly to improve the quality and quantity of the data collected.

Additionally, a feedback form has been created for our employer customer to complete after they participate in one of the Virtual Job Fairs' we host. This tool is newly developed but has shown general approval and appreciation for the platform being provided and the opportunity to present information about their opening, company culture, benefits and application process.

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

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

During PY2020, the VDOL staff launched a variety of innovative outreach initiatives to reconnect Vermonters to education, training, and support services that would allow them the opportunity to enter and advance along a career pathway and lead to greater financial independence. In collaboration with our communications team, we increased the social media presence to consistently deliver the message that the Workforce Development Division was at the ready to assist Vermonters. Utilizing our MIS system, VDOL staff were able to identify specific demographics and perform several outreach efforts to Vermonters that were most in need.

The Vermont Department of Labor's One-Stop Job Centers worked diligently to foster and grow connections with community and state partners such as Vermont Youth Services, Community College of Vermont (CCV), Vocational Rehabilitation, Creative Workforce Solutions, Northland Job Corps, ReSOURCE, and Vermont Works for Women. PY2020

afforded the opportunity to strengthen its relationships and credibility with employers. With that, the VDOL teams across the state connected potential participants and provided career guidance, support services, WIOA funding for On-The-Job-Trainings (OJT's), Work Experiences, apprenticeship programs, and training programs. Despite COVID-19 having forced the change of norms of "business as usual" regarding access, outreach, and quality to both businesses and customers, our team has been very successful in the dissemination of practices and being extraordinarily creative and insightful to ensure access to services for all clients. In the face of great community fear and desperation we are able to not only continue to offer and promote promising employment assistance programs, but expand, grow, and move with the momentum of change to further highlight and improve our services.

Labor-On-Location provides an ideal opportunity for staff to meet potential participants where they reside, while promoting workforce development services in their areas. The ability to host employers on the weekly Virtual Job Fair and engage job seekers with those employers is invaluable. The resume, employment connections, and interviewing workshops have allowed those that would otherwise not be able to access our services a platform that helps them achieve their goals.

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

The Vermont Department of Labor has been actively engaged with a variety of partners to expand Registered Apprenticeship awareness and engagement for individuals who have been historically marginalized. As we expand Registered Apprenticeship offerings to include additional occupations in healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, bookkeeping, aviation, and a host of other career paths, our goal is to ensure that all Vermonters have access to these opportunities. To that end, we continued developing the following partnerships during PY2020:

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The Vermont Department of Labor's Workforce Development Division is a core partner in the Department of Corrections Adult Re-entry Employment Services grant, recently awarded through Second Chance Act funding. The purpose of the grant is to identify systemic improvements to re-entry services that can better link individuals to the training and employment needed to be successful upon release from incarceration.

One element that has generated a lot of interest is the potential to develop a Pre-Apprenticeship to Registered Apprenticeship model that will allow individuals to gain skills and related instruction while in a correctional facility, and then to "matriculate" those hours of instruction and hands-on application to a Registered Apprenticeship upon release.

DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The Vermont Department of Labor continued to partner with the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to improve and streamline access to Apprenticeship programs for individuals with disabilities. Starting with a “seed” grant from the Vermont Department of Labor for \$30,000 to help with development activities, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was able to secure a multi-year grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to dramatically increase the number and breadth of Apprenticeships for individuals with disabilities. As a core partner in their grant application, the Vermont Department of Labor is an integral part of expanding access to this population. The focus of the grant is the development of Pre-Apprenticeship to Registered Apprenticeship “pipelines” for youth with disabilities, primarily in-school youth, in partnership with the VDOL Apprenticeship team.

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS

With a long history of refugee resettlement, Vermont is well-positioned to support individuals who are new arrivals. While the labor market is very strong, and jobs are plentiful, most individuals who are new to the community tend to start in lower paid, entry-level jobs. Starting with a pilot Apprenticeship in solar installation, the Vermont Department of Labor has worked with Burlington Technical Center and the two main refugee programs to highlight the value of Registered Apprenticeship, and to explore additional occupations that might be a good fit. One challenge in delivering related instruction and on-the-job training are the language and cultural barriers that can make skill development a little more challenging.

VERMONT WORKS FOR WOMEN

Vermont Works for Women (VWW) has a longstanding relationship with the Department of Labor, including several workforce development programs funded directly by the Workforce Development Division. As we continue to expand Registered Apprenticeship to include occupations that are outside of the typical trades, we see a tremendous opportunity to highlight Registered Apprenticeship as a valuable and affordable way for Vermont women to increase their earning potential. Because Registered Apprenticeship is an “earn while you learn” model, we believe it could be a nice fit for single mothers or any woman who needs to gain skills but can’t afford the time or expense to attend school full-time.

Apprenticeships in Medical Assisting, LNA to LPN, Bookkeeping, Pharmacy Tech and others are well-suited to many of the individuals served by Vermont Works for Women, and we hope to expand into more occupational titles going forward. Construction trades for women are certainly not to be ignored either, and VWW has a long history of providing construction training to women interested in entering the trades. With a booming construction industry and a severe workforce shortage, there will be increasing opportunities for women to enter the field.

In addition, throughout PY2020 staff were requested to support other Divisions of the Vermont Department of Labor and community partners struggling to provide services to marginalized community members. During the pandemic, Workforce Development Division staff from the Burlington American Job Center created a local response team to support English language learner (ELL) clients needing support to file and access unemployment

services. This team created a resource bank to share information that supported ELL job seekers, employers, and community partners.

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

To increase the workforce in Vermont, we must establish programs that will draw out and engage Vermonters that are currently unemployed or underemployed. This is often individuals that have a high school diploma, but have settled into low skill, low wage jobs. Through strong marketing and promotion and partnership with other workforce development professionals, the goal is to find ways to connect with these individuals and clearly outline the pathways available in the key sectors that will lead to high skill, good paying jobs.

Vermont has identified manufacturing, health care, human services, construction, business services, information technology, and hospitality as key growth sectors and is focused on the development of pathway identification and development to support the creation of a pipeline of workers in those fields. The Business Services Manager along with key Business Service Team members around the state have been engaged in listening to the needs of employers to try to learn their immediate and future staffing needs, and find ways to build out opportunities for internships, work experiences, on-the-job trainings, and apprenticeships. Below are some key areas of current focus and success.

The continued demand for skilled and credentialed workers for the health care industry has prompted strong employer relationships and training programs to evolve and attempt to meet the current workforce need. The Vermont Department of Labor played a key role in working with the Agency of Human Services during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. A strong marketing campaign was created to entice part-time, semi-retired and retired nursing assistants and nurses to join the Vermont Covid-19 Emergency Staffing Pool to support the high demand for staffing in long-term care, home care, and other health care settings. VDOL worked with the businesses to post job openings and promote this important effort and support this critical need.

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

The COVID-19 crisis created an immediate need to adapt our service delivery model to jobseekers and businesses in the One-Stop Job Centers from in-person services to a virtual model. Ensuring that essential quality services were available to the public became a high priority in the early stages of pandemic. The Workforce Development Division developed and implemented a new virtual service delivery model when staff were assigned to work remotely. Staff were provided with the tools necessary to work in a virtual environment while still ensuring quality service delivery and protecting the confidentiality of our customers.

The goal of providing virtual services to our customers focused on the capability to deliver services timely, professionally, and safely utilizing all the technological resources and tools available. The virtual services provided skill development, training, support, and referrals to partner agencies. Our business partners were able to rely on our assistance for recruitment and hiring support of qualified candidates to meet their business needs.

The virtual services that were established included workshops (Resume Writing, Interviewing Skills, Re-Employment Strategies and Regional Employment Connections); WIOA Program Orientation; one-on-one Teams meetings for initial service intakes for various programs (WIOA Title I, WIOA Title III, JVSG, SNAP, and Registered Apprenticeship); virtual job fairs; rapid response events and community partner meetings. The video conferencing with jobseekers, businesses, and community partners allowed staff the ability to meet and share documents via a screen share.

Many of our customers require multiple forms of support to overcome barriers to employment and to develop the necessary skills to become successful in the workplace. We continued to leverage our community partners for services and co-enrollments into various workforce programs. For those individuals without access to technology, staff provided employment and training services over the phone and were able meet the needs of those individuals with significant barriers to employment.

Throughout the PY2020, we continued to develop strategic partnerships with secondary and post-secondary institutions, career and technical education centers, community partners, and the military to develop a workforce to align with business demands. Our goal was to increase skill development opportunities for Vermonters and to promote career advancement and increase earnings potential.

Social Media outlets were utilized during PY2020 to communicate instructions on how customers could utilize virtual services and participate in virtual job fairs/hiring events. Vermont launched the “*Hiring2DayVT*” Campaign to help Vermont get back to work. We publicized and spotlighted businesses and job openings and helped connect jobseekers and employers to training opportunities.

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

The pandemic greatly curtailed cross-boarder movement as health recommendations and emergency orders limited the movement of people.

Sector Strategies

Transportation. The need for qualified truck and transit drivers has reached a critical point in Vermont and nationwide. VDOL participates actively in an Interagency Transportation statewide workgroup and is part of a sub-committee focused on workforce challenges and opportunities within the industry. One goal that was set and achieved was to have all jobs from regional transit authorities posted in the Vermont JobLink system. With federal funding, a marketing campaign was launched to drive interested drivers to Vermont JobLink to connect directly with the transit employers. On a regional level, VDOL staff are working to make job and training matches for these openings.

In the area of Commercial Driver's License jobs, both Class A and Class B, the team in the Southeast region has partnered with their regional economic development partners to promote and market the variety of CDL truck driver openings in their region. Once the individual trainees are identified, a local training provider is engaged to provide the training. In recent classes, the barriers to employment of the trainees have been significant. The training provider has provided remediation, mentorship, and job placement to assure a successful outcome for both the trainee and the employers in the community.

Performance Accountability System

Statewide monitoring continued to be a focus, but also a challenge in PY2020. The monitoring policy comprised of methods to identify areas of concern or non-compliance, establish corrective action plans for resolution of identified problems, and identify issues requiring technical assistance. Although annual on-site monitoring visits to the One-Stop Job Centers are written in the policy, due to the mandates outside our control with offices being closed, the monitoring team was unable to conduct the annual onsite visits for PY2020. With capacity issues of the key stakeholders, adhering to the policy was sometimes a challenge. For PY2021, VDOL is committed to strengthening its monitoring policy and ensuring that it is executed through training and follow through. The VDOL team has created a library of resources for its staff to refer to at their fingertips. The resources include videos, desk guides, FAQ's, valuable links, Workforce GPS, etc.

The Vermont Department of Labor continues to use the method of Administrative Memo's to introduce any document changes to policies.

In September of 2020, an administrative memo was sent to all staff outlining the policies and procedures for WIOA and TAA data validation. Staff were subsequently trained, and a Data Validation Team was appointed to fulfill the work of reviewing samples of files for accuracy. Vermont conducted data validation work in December of 2020. Pass/fail results were calculated, and more training was completed in Quarter 1 of 2021. Data validation was also conducted during the summer of 2021 on the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade programs.

In PY2020, the Vermont Department of Labor signed a data sharing agreement with Vocational Rehab for co-enrollment activities. Our goal is to establish a process to automatically capture this data in the case management system, reducing time spent on manually verifying and entering data.

State Activities

Governor's Reserve Funds

A key activity during PY2020 was the gathering of system requirements for our information, data, and case management system and job board so that VDOL could develop an RFI, followed by an RFP, to procure new systems, applications, platforms or other software as a solution. The RFI was completed in the spring and the subsequent RFP was posted in November 2021.

Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion

As Program Year 2020 began, the newly formed Business Services Team was just hitting their stride and learning new ways to engage employers in their regions to continue to meet key goals of serving businesses across the business cycle and increasing the quality and quantity of jobs in our Vermont Job Link system. The team meets weekly to discuss strategy, training needs, share regional news of layoffs, and active recruitment needs. The Business Services Manager coordinates this work and serves as a resource for all activity related to business engagement.

A key role for the Business Services team is to support employers through the layoff process and providing Rapid Response services to both the employer and the impacted workers. In Program Year 2020 VDOL served approximately 20 unique companies and over 2,400 individuals with Rapid Response Services. These numbers represent companies and individuals that experienced permanent layoffs. During this time, all Rapid Response information continued to be delivered virtually due to COVID-19 considerations, with follow up provided by One-Stop Job Center staff. The Business Services Team also continued to support businesses who were navigating the ongoing COVID-19 related business interruptions during this Program Year. Many of these businesses were served in coordination with UI programs that allowed for temporary or partial layoffs to retain workers.

Through Rapid Response, companies are identified by state or regional staff for referral to the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition filing process. In June 2020, Vermont participated in the National TAA Navigator Pilot Program. Vermont was partnered with TAA Navigator staff from Virginia who consulted with the Vermont team, reviewed WARN and non-WARN layoff notices, and researched similar industry activity in other states. They were able to file 6 petitions on behalf of Vermont by June 30, 2021, to meet the deadline prior to TAA Reversion 2021. Three of those petitions were certified, one denied, and one is still under investigation. Rapid response and subsequent TAA Information sessions were held for these companies.

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. Additionally, to continue to strengthen the critical partnership with our economic development partners, the VDOL Commissioner, Workforce Development Director and Business Services Manager now meet bi-weekly to take up and share important high level economic and workforce topics to achieve the goal of understanding the needs of Vermont businesses across the business cycle.

Promising Practices

Adult CTE Training Scholarship. During PY2020 the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) and Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC) launched a workforce education and training grant scholarship program, *Career and Technical Education Adult Training Scholarship*. This scholarship was targeted to adult Vermonters who were seeking to advance their employability skills through enrollment in a career and technical education offering. The total funds available through this grant totaled \$175,000. Scholarships provided up to \$1,000 per student to cover course related expenses including tuition, mandatory fees, uniforms, tools, books, and supplies. This state funding allowed us to add more resources for participants, in addition to WIOA and partner funds. Seventy-six Vermonters applied for and were awarded the scholarship funding for a total of more than \$64,000.

Process Mapping. In PY2020, Vermont Department of Labor engaged in a comprehensive regional process mapping activity with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. This work was done in each of the regions around the state to identify similarities and differences in the ways we serve our common customer and find ways to leverage our funding. Some key points of intersection are an intake/initial interview, assessment of customer needs/goals, plan development, and supportive services. The results of a participant's comprehensive assessment are now being shared between caseworkers who are co-serving a participant. This information is key to developing successful employment and training plans. An area of high interest for further exploration would be a common intake process.

Motivational Interviewing Training. All Workforce Development staff attended a Motivational Interviewing (MI) training series. Motivational Interviewing is a strength-based conversation style that helps people resolve ambivalence and increase commitment for making a behavior change. Motivational Interviewing is one of the most researched counseling interventions available with over 300 outcomes studies determining its effectiveness in a wide variety of settings. The training is designed to help participants learn the spirit, foundational skills, and processes of MI. Staff were able to feel the "spirit" of MI through exercises that highlighted personal experiences and perspective.

The staff were trained in three levels of Motivational Interviewing; Intro to Motivational Interviewing, Advanced Motivational Interviewing, and Employer targeted Motivational Interviewing. Staff were able to identify the processes of MI as well as describe ways in which MI is both directive and empathic. Staff are planning to form coaching circles with other VDOL Case Managers and Vocational Rehabilitation counselors for those that are co-enrolled.

Weekly WIOA Brainteasers. Weekly, the WIOA staff received a scenario and a series of questions in a survey format that measured their knowledge on a variety of WIOA topics. The weekly brainteaser gave our staff the opportunity to individually test their knowledge of what they learned during the WIOA World Series sessions. Depending on the results of the survey, additional trainings were developed and delivered to the staff.

Verbal De-Escalation and Building Resilience Training. During PY2020 Workforce Development staff participated in a *Verbal De-Escalation and Building Resilience Training* which outlined how to de-escalate an upset customer and regain their own sense of balance and calm. The training was offered through the Vermont Department of Human Resources – CAPS Division (Center for Achievement in Public Service), which provides workforce development services to Vermont state agencies and departments. The goal of the training was to identify and practice strategies for de-escalating agitated customers and caring for oneself after an event of serving a difficult customer. The training offered a half-day training session on the topic of de-escalation techniques with strategies for strengthening one's resilience.

Communication. Program Year 2020 brought many challenges to the workplace, including communication between supervisors and staff while everyone was still learning and adjusting to remote work. The need to communicate updates, new initiatives and stay connected to staff regularly was more important than ever with staff working in a remote work environment. A communication plan was created to lay the foundation to keep staff engaged and informed of departmental policies and procedures. Recurring Microsoft (MS) Teams meetings were established within the Vermont Department of Labor, the Workforce Development Division, and the One-Stop Job Centers. The Department level all-staff meetings and Workforce Development Division all-staff meetings offered vital information and the opportunity for staff to ask questions and participate in conversations. These meetings also provided opportunities for acknowledging the outstanding work of teams and individuals. The One-Stop Job Centers scheduled recurring MS Teams meetings to stay connected and engage in local workforce development activities. In the age of remote work, Teams meetings can seem impersonal, but Leaders and staff were creative in establishing ways to stay connected while adjusting to the new normal. As we have begun a return to the workplace, we have continued with the MS Teams meetings to communicate with staff on a regular basis.

Success Stories

Danielle, a single parent residing in rural Vermont was laid off from her employment due to the pandemic. The layoff forced her to apply for public assistance benefits to support her family which included food stamps and subsidized housing. She learned about WIOA training opportunities through a partner agency and attended a WIOA Orientation session to determine if this could assist her in becoming re-employed. Danielle met with a WIOA Case Manager and began the assessment process to determine job interests, skills, and career planning for re-employment. As a result of the career exploration process, she decided to pursue a career in truck driving, an occupation that she was familiar with as she had family members working in the industry. The WIOA Case Manager partnered with several community organizations to share resources in the tuition costs for the occupational skills training, support services and tutoring. Danielle enrolled in the CDL-A training program through Northeast Driver Training Program and successfully earned her class A commercial driver's license. She is now employed with a trucking company earning \$30/hour with benefits and is no longer receiving public assistance.

Ethan, an 18-year-old recent high school graduate immediately connected with The Vermont Department of Labor for support aligning and funding his long-term career goals. A WIOA Case Manager connected with Ethan to provide job search assistance and labor market information. Ethan landed a summer job at a local food processing plant, allowing him to save \$3,000. In the Fall of 2020, he enrolled in a six-month combination Structural & Pipe Welding Program through the Advanced Welding Institute (AWI). Ethan was able to source funds for his tuition and materials through the support of the WIOA Program, VSAC, a Pell Grant, VSAC's VT Incentive Grant, a Welding Scholarship, and his own personal savings. In March of 2021 Ethan successfully earned his certificate from AWI. Upon completion of the program, he re-connected with VDOL for resume and job search support. As a result of his training program, Ethan was able to secure full time employment as a Welder with a local manufacturing company. He is also saving money to purchase a welder for the back of his pick-up, with a goal of dabbling in entrepreneurship in the future. Most recently, Ethan has offered to share his WIOA experience and to provide a tour and job shadow to a peer who is interested in a similar pathway; this act of giving demonstrates his pride & hard work re: past decisions, commitment to his employer and to his place in supporting stability and promising pathways for his peers.

Frank, an unemployment compensation recipient, was referred to the Workforce Development (WFD) Team via the Jobseeker Inquiry tool in January 2021. Frank and a WFD Job Center Specialist utilized their ability to connect via the TEAMS platform and phone to delve into his skills, abilities, and interests. Frank and his family were newly relocated to northern VT and his wife had accepted a position as a registered nurse at the local hospital. Before the move, Frank owned and operated a bread route in a neighboring state for 4 years and prior to that, worked long term as a manager for a supermarket. During the Teams meetings, Frank received assistance building a resume, searching for employment, and connecting with staff to learn about job opportunities in the labor market area. He shared

his joy and talent for building construction and the trades, while identifying his goal of wanting to become an electrician. He was referred to apprenticeship staff and Vermont Technical College to explore steps, training, and potential sponsors to support his goals of becoming an electrical apprentice. In January 2021, Frank obtained employment as a Production Team Member with a local forest product employer. Frank has seeded conversations regarding his interest in apprenticeship and plans to revisit the topic of apprenticeship with his current employer.

Wendy is a 31-year-old single parent of 3 school-aged children. When she enrolled in the WIOA Program she had no income and was receiving TANF and food stamp benefits. She resides in a small rural town in Southern VT which is located 30 minutes from the closest economic hub. Wendy was long-term unemployed, and her previous work was in retail trades earning minimum wage. She shared that she had previously struggled with substance abuse and had a misdemeanor charge dating back to 2011. Through the assessment, guidance and support from various community agencies, Wendy enrolled in a WIOA funded occupational skills training at Vermont Technical College for the nursing assistant program. She successfully completed the program and regularly provided support and encouragement to her peers in the course. She greatly enjoyed her experience, and it reconfirmed her decision to go into the healthcare field. Wendy immediately secured employment at a local assisted living facility earning \$16.00/hour. Wendy shared, *"I love my job. I love knowing that people like how I take care of them. Knowing when I leave my job at the end of the day that I made a few people smile or made their day makes me happy!"*

Brandon, age 32, lost his sous chef position permanently in November 2020 following a reduction in hours due to the Covid pandemic. He received food stamp benefits and unemployment compensation, but his goal was to become re-employed quickly. Brandon sought assistance in his search for new employment from the Vermont Department of Labor (VDOL) in January 2021. He met with a WIOA Case Manager to begin career exploration and assessments, and it was determined that occupational skills training was the best bridge to re-employment. A combined effort between Brandon and his WIOA Case Manager at VDOL led to networking with partner agencies, including Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), the Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR), the Vermont Student Assistance Program (VSAC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and the Individual Career Advancement Network (ICAN). As a result, Brandon received a total of \$22,050 in tuition and supports to attend the Advanced Welding Institute (AWI). After six months of welding training, Brandon graduated from AWI and a week later, received a job offer from a large manufacturer in the region. Brandon is very happy in his new job.

Connie, a jobseeker that received basic career services through the Job Center shared her thanks for the services she was provided and how those services impacted her life:

"I wanted to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation for the help that the VDOL/WFD Job Center Specialist gave me in securing employment. I am a 61-year-old female, who lost a great job in Burlington to Covid, moved to a rural area and had specific needs in my ability to work successfully. The Job Center Specialist listened and in a kind and concise manner, helped me with job leads, gave me great information on

formatting resumes and cover letters, even offering to mock interview. They coached me through it and helped me find a really good job. I can honestly say, I could not have done it without their help. I just wanted to let you know what an asset they are and how well they performed their job. Because of this, I'm off unemployment for the first time in ten months and I have a career until I retire. I want to thank all of you for the good work you do. Vermonters are very fortunate to have the resources and support our state provides to help us up when we are down and give us paths to succeed."

Challenges

Key Workforce Development Division staff and leaders were reassigned to assist UI claimants as COVID-19 affected the UI Division workload. A significant number of our Workforce Development Division staff in our One-Stop Job Centers and in our Administrative Office were reassigned to assist with the increased demand for unemployment benefits. As a result of the Workforce Development staff reassignments, a decrease in the number of jobseeker participation and enrollments into WIOA programs occurred. Assisting UI claimants in filing claims for benefits to meet their basic needs became the major role for many Workforce Development Division staff.

Many education and training partners (high schools, career and technical education centers, colleges, adult learning centers and tutorial centers) offered only virtual services which limited the number of referrals that were made to VDOL for workforce services and training opportunities. This loss of in-person services interrupted the ability to engage youth and adults in WIOA programs and the referrals decreased dramatically throughout this program year. The inability to visit and participate in activities within the educational facilities limited our dual enrollments and connections to our educational partners.

Jobseekers were reluctant to engage in virtual services as many lacked the ability to engage remotely via a computer. Many jobseekers had significant barriers to employment which included limited access to the Internet, no computer, poor connectivity, and legal issues that prevented them from using a computer. Virtual burnout became a reality as well, as jobseekers wanted in-person services rather than virtual services, although spikes in COVID outbreaks led to continued fear of in-person services.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought to light some areas for improvement in the state's case management system. While learning to work remotely with participants, we identified many useful tools that could be incorporated into a more robust case management system. In PY2020, a team had worked on and published a Request for Information and received numerous responses. A full Request for Proposal has recently been released.

Technical Assistance Needs

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

- Outreach, service delivery, and monitoring of services to migrant seasonal farmworkers
- Updating required policies for WIOA Title I and III
- Providing layoff aversion assistance under Rapid Response activities
- Establishing evaluation processes for WIOA core programs
- Improving methods of collecting customer satisfaction and feedback information, and
- Using WIOA funds to improve outreach to service delivery to potential Title I and III clients.