

Bridging the Digital Divide: A Vision for Digital Literacy & Connectivity

Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry

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Letter from the Secretary



Greetings.

Leading the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) during these last 12 months has been among the greatest privileges – and – challenges of my life. L&I staff and our partners across the state have worked tirelessly to deliver services complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and tested by aging or obsolete infrastructure, all while being uprooted by a decentralization of our workplaces that has turned kitchen tables and home offices into call centers and conference rooms. I am proud of them all.

While we have made progress transitioning many of our services from in-person to online, L&I has room to improve before delivering them with the same – or better – quality as before the pandemic. Not only do we need to improve the availability of these services, but their accessibility as well. To this end, Governor Wolf's Administration has made investments to update hardware, improve Wi-Fi and communications software, and increase access to broadband and other tools to bring unemployment compensation, reemployment, work search and job training services directly to those who need them, where they need them, as quickly as possible.

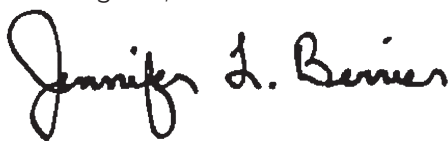
Making effective connections among job seekers, educators, training providers and employers is an important first step to gaining comprehensive employment, which was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to conduct many of our core services virtually. The best virtual connections, tools and services have little value unless our customers have the digital literacy required to log in, navigate, engage and use them to their fullest potential.

That is why L&I is looking closely at our programs and processes to ensure that every Pennsylvanian who wants to use them can. L&I's workforce development office is evaluating its practices and procedures to ensure that they are implemented with the customer experience first and foremost. Consequently, L&I has awarded \$1.3 million in competitive grants to local workforce development areas to foster digital literacy education and training. We are improving software and delivering AI-driven solutions to help Pennsylvanians more intuitively use online PA CareerLink® work-search tools and services. Finally, we've contracted with third parties to take a close, unbiased look at how the department plans, organizes and delivers our services – and where we can improve.

Thank you for taking the time to read this publication and learn about how L&I is working to meet the challenges we face today and prepare for those we will encounter tomorrow.



Kind regards,



Jennifer Berrier

Secretary

Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry

Letter from the Deputy Secretary for Workforce Development



Dear Workforce Development Staff, Partners, Participants, and Friends:

Pennsylvania's public workforce development system strives to deliver the education, training and services residents need to enter career-focused employment that pays a family-sustaining wage. Effective delivery of that service requires that we continually respond to changing labor market conditions, but as we grapple with the impact on the labor market of a pandemic and global health crisis the need to understand and meet the needs of our customers has never been greater.

Today, the impact of technology in the world of work is undeniable. By the end of January 2021, close to 60 percent of firms had either expanded the use of or invested in new digital technology or introduced product innovation. The burgeoning role of technology in the recruiting, application and hiring process has made it especially difficult for Pennsylvanians without digital access, skills, and/or literacy to connect to family-sustaining wages. The Department of Labor & Industry, our state agency partners, and our regional and local partners are all working to improve the processes, practices, and tools we use to help make those critical connections to the labor market that Pennsylvania's job seekers need.

And as we prepare for the future of work, better tools and service delivery methods are important, but equity and access will be our guideposts – we must ensure that everyone who wants to use them, can use them. Fostering gains in digital literacy – the ability to effectively engage new and emerging digital technologies – is crucial to the workforce system's success.

To that end, the Department of Labor & Industry and its workforce system partners are investing in solutions to accomplish this goal. We are working to improve our digital delivery infrastructure by expanding broadband availability and awarding more than \$750,000 to help local workforce development boards overcome barriers to service access. Additionally, we've invested \$2.64 million in providing online skills training through SkillUp® PA, a partnership with Metrix Learning, which is available to everyone who uses PA CareerLink®. Digital literacy grants are bringing \$1.3 million to community-based organizations to deliver skills training to more than 3,800 job seekers across the state.

Finally, in addition to these efforts and others, Pennsylvania's workforce development services delivery system is looking inward to examine our own culture, beliefs, processes, and perceptions to better understand what we do well and where we can improve. We've engaged third parties to review our processes, including taking

an in-depth look at how well we're connecting residents with services and what we need to do to address digital literacy among our users – current and prospective.

Thank you very much for your interest in Pennsylvania workforce development and what we're doing to help bridge the digital divide among our residents, services, and the tools we use to deliver them. This publication describes, in detail, what we've learned and what we're doing to prepare our services and systems, and those who use them, for the future of work in Pennsylvania.



Sheila Ireland



**Deputy Secretary for
Workforce Development
Pennsylvania Department of
Labor & Industry**



Executive Summary



The COVID-19 pandemic presented Pennsylvania's workforce system with significant barriers to service delivery and connecting with job seekers and workers alike. It accelerated our use of virtual platforms to provide continued services, making it difficult for customers with limited digital proficiency and internet access to benefit.

This realization informed the decision to focus on digital literacy as a basis for a thriving workforce ecosystem made up of service providers and practitioners and our internal and external customers (i.e., job seekers, employers and staff). Our goal, then, was to:

- **Shift mindsets and culture** internally so front-line staff are cognizant of the circumstances job seekers and workers face and use that understanding to inform program design related to digital literacy and other workforce development services.
- **Increase digital proficiency and connectivity among job seekers** so residents can take advantage of all public workforce services, attain gainful employment and advance their careers.
- **Increase digital proficiency and connectivity among employed Pennsylvanians** so learners can leverage opportunities for ongoing skills attainment specific to their current work and future career endeavors.
- **Catalyze** employer engagement by connecting businesses to Pennsylvania's talent pool.

\$8.7 million +

In 2021, L&I invested in community-based organizations, local workforce development boards and workforce system partners.

With more than \$8.7 million committed, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, or L&I, has taken several steps in 2021 to close the digital divide – deploying statewide training mechanisms for lifelong learning and through strengthened partnerships and new investments in community stakeholders and their programs. Efforts so far include:

Increasing Capacity and Building Infrastructure

Pennsylvania's workforce system has struggled to transition to remote services. Insufficient infrastructure (e.g., broadband availability), equipment, software and limited staff complicate the effort. In program year 2020, L&I awarded more than \$324 thousand to local workforce development boards and workforce system partners to address and overcome these barriers.

Digital Skills Training

In 2021 L&I developed the Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant, awarding more than \$1.3 million to community-based organizations that offer digital literacy fundamental skills training to more than 3,800 job seekers statewide.

SkillUp® PA

In 2021 L&I partnered with Metrix Learning to develop and launch a free skills-training application for public use. The \$2.64 million investment is an online solution that assesses individuals' skills gaps, connects them to appropriate training and explores career pathways of interest to users. SkillUp® PA benefits users at different points along their career journey – including unemployed job seekers, dislocated workers and individuals currently employed.

With equity and inclusion in mind, L&I wants to be certain that underserved and disadvantaged residents can access all public workforce services and thrive in a new and emerging economy – one that is dependent on digital literacy and interconnectivity. We are taking the necessary steps to ensure these goals are met and to iteratively assess dynamic challenges and opportunities. From increasing broadband availability, to capacity building for our partner organizations and investments in customized training to meet job seekers' needs, all efforts are designed to connect Pennsylvanians to the future of work.



Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry

Established in 1913, the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, administers unemployment compensation benefits to unemployed individuals, oversees the administration of workers' compensation benefits to individuals with job related injuries and provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.

The department also prepares job seekers for the global workforce through employment and job training services for adult, youth, older workers and dislocated workers. Additionally, L&I enforces various labor laws and safety standards in the workplace and administers the commonwealth's programs for community service by young Pennsylvanians. L&I also promotes economic development and an improved business climate through a variety of initiatives and programs to help Pennsylvania's workforce remain world-class and globally competitive.

L&I comprises four deputates, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and boards tasked with program delivery and administration, labor relations and mediation.

Pennsylvania's Workforce Development System

Pennsylvania's public workforce system comprises 10 regions, 22 local workforce boards, PA CareerLink® one-stops and program partner organizations tasked with delivering workforce development services.



Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry Workforce Development Deputate and Primary Network

Apprenticeship and Training Office	Guides and promotes the expansion of apprenticeship programs across the state and oversees the development and approval of programs, agreements and policy that support apprenticeship.
Bureau of Workforce Development Administration	Provides financial management of public workforce funds at the state and subrecipient levels and coordinates the drafting and publication of Pennsylvania's workforce system policies.
Bureau of Workforce Partnership Operations	Operationalizes workforce system programs to identify and meet job seeker, business and training provider needs and expectations.
Center for Workforce Information & Analysis	Develops labor market information for the commonwealth and provides timely, objective and credible workforce and economic statistics and analysis to help customers make informed policy business and career decisions.
PA CareerLink®	The primary workforce service delivery channel, with 62 total PA CareerLink® centers across 23 local workforce areas.
Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board	Business-led, industry-driven policy advisor on workforce development aligned with the commonwealth's education and economic development goals.

A Vision for Preparing Pennsylvanians for the Future of Work

The COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating the adoption of technology (e.g. automation, artificial intelligence and machine learning), across the world of work.

In 2020, the suspension of in-person service delivery statewide drove our public workforce system to use virtual training and service delivery methods to meet employers', workers' and job seekers' needs.

As the pace of technology adoption quickens, shifts in the labor market have altered the entry-level skills required to connect to work in a largely digital employment market. This shift in service delivery makes it harder for Pennsylvanians with limited

internet access and digital literacy to connect to the labor market, use our services and maximize available benefits.

Pressing questions became ones of focus.

How – despite our limited capacity, aging infrastructure and limited resources – will we provide in-time workforce development services to residents? How do we reach communities disconnected from our services by location, digital literacy levels and access to channels for connectivity?

Accordingly, our vision to bring digital access, literacy and equity to Pennsylvania job seekers and employees is three-pronged:



Improve our Customer Experience

Pennsylvania's workforce development system must improve our capacity and capability to deliver services to residents.



Improve Access to Skills Attainment

Digital skills training and other services should be accessible and available to all Pennsylvania employers, workers and job seekers so they develop skills and attributes necessary to gain and retain employment.



Leverage Technology to Improve Operations

Workforce development must leverage our data systems, programs and platforms to provide comprehensive and curated service delivery models at our locations across Pennsylvania.

Identifying the Challenge

Digital literacy as a potential barrier to state workforce services became more apparent as Pennsylvania's workforce landscape changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, economists identified automation and the adoption of new technologies as major drivers of change in labor markets and the nature of jobs¹.

As firms incorporate new technologies, more of the labor market enters the digital space. Consequently, we are focused on one core premise: If your work, your employees' work or your business's is focused on routine or non-cognitive processes, you are at risk.

Unfortunately, this reality has deepened inequality as only a segment of the workforce is able to work remotely – generally, workers with higher income

and advanced education. According to a survey by the Interamerican Development Bank and Cornell University, members of a poor household were three times as likely to have lost their job during the pandemic than members of wealthier households².

Among Governor Wolf's chief priorities is connecting Pennsylvanians to "Jobs That Pay." Without digital access, literacy and skills equitably available across Pennsylvania we will be unable to achieve this goal.

The Effect of COVID-19 on Pennsylvania's Labor Market and the Future of Work

The state has not only worked to respond to the pandemic's immediate effects on residents but has also been proactive, planning and implementing strategies to respond to potential residual effects.



Before COVID-19's crippling effect on the global economy, L&I took interest in the future of work; that is to say: What does tomorrow's labor market require of its workers? Which industry sectors show promise for future growth and continued demand for human talent? What skill sets might be in demand and what are the pathways to acquire those skill sets? How might workers engage the workplace to be effective and successful?

"The labor market is shifting rapidly. If you do not have digital skills, both as a commonwealth employee or as a job seeker, you are in trouble."

– Deputy Secretary Sheila Ireland

L&I understands the need to push, internally and externally, toward the future of work and prepare Pennsylvanians – employed and out of work – for that future work landscape.

Pennsylvania is among the states with the lowest levels of digital literacy and connectivity⁴, a challenge magnified by higher-than-typical unemployment levels. By April 2020, Pennsylvania's unemployment rate was 15.1%, compared to the national unemployment rate of 14.7%⁴. Further, between February and May 2020, nationally, people with a high school diploma or less, experienced the brunt of workforce participation decline – decreasing to 51.8% participation – a 4% drop.⁵

Workers and job seekers with lower levels of educational attainment already faced the challenge of remaining competitive in the labor market – that is, to keep their jobs or the successful pursuit of new career opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new dynamics, making it harder for disadvantaged workers and job seekers.

Barriers to Job Security

Availability & Accessibility	Skill Gaps	Risk of Automation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18% of households don't have internet access.⁶ 11 counties (nine of them rural) have a high concentration of households without internet access and unemployment rates above the state average.⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 26% of job postings required high school or vocational training, 7% required an associate degree, and 33% a bachelor's degree or higher. 34% did not specify.⁸ Digital literacy and Microsoft Excel proficiency ranked among the top 10 of in-demand skills.⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Of the 50 currently most in-demand jobs, 26% have more than a 50% future risk of automation.¹⁰



Figure 1. In Pennsylvania, workers and jobs seekers are facing unprecedented challenges related to the availability of future-forward infrastructure and resources, competitive skills attainment and automation as a threat to job availability.

The Modern Workplace and Workforce Service Delivery

The future of work and how workers engage employers will largely be reliant on tech-enabled interactions and operations. There is a need to be more technical and responsive to a hybrid work model that incorporates remote work. Moreover, skill sets once in demand (e.g., manually collecting and processing data) are largely obsolete, with tech-enabled skill sets now necessary for this emerging digital environment.

We want to equip job seekers with the tools and resources they need to be successful in this new work environment. This will include access and availability to equipment and infrastructure (e.g., computers and laptops), knowledge of tech-enabled systems and the ability to use them effectively.

However, like every other industry affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, Pennsylvania's workforce system faces new realities related to service delivery (i.e., how workforce development organizations and practitioners connect with job seekers and employers, and the types of training and job-search support offered).

At the pandemic's onset, the commonwealth needed to transition service delivery to a remote model – leveraging phone, email and digital communications platforms. As a result, staying connected to customers became increasingly difficult for PA CareerLink® and local workforce development boards. We were met with the reality that many Pennsylvanians who use the state's workforce services are not equipped with the resources and knowledge (e.g., broadband availability, digital literacy and geographic proximity) necessary to take advantage of our services remotely – a barrier to equitable access to public services promised to Pennsylvania residents. With that in mind, we engaged the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and Accenture to ground our understanding of the digital divide and consider initial steps to address existing and potential challenges.

Analyzing Dynamics through Partnerships

Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia Partnership

As part of a Research in Action Lab, we partnered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and Penn State Extension to understand the intersection of digital access and labor market attainment; that is, where does the city of Philadelphia stand with access to technology and broadband, and how does that relate to workforce development opportunities and pursuits?

After engaging 84 stakeholders, we partnered with the Federal Reserve to host and facilitate a series of convenings:

- **Bringing together global workforce development leaders to discuss the future of work and its effect on workers and job seekers.**
- **Bringing Philadelphia businesses together to brainstorm solutions.**
- **With our corporate partners at the helm, a discussion about the future of work and its effects on Philadelphia's Black and other historically marginalized communities.**

This effort is the basis for digital literacy as a topic for consideration and prioritizes expanding broadband infrastructure to underserved residents.



Geography Matters⁴

- **Nationally, metro areas with low household broadband subscription and computer access were primarily located in the Southeast and Southwest; metros with high connectivity were mostly located in the Northeast and West Coast.**
- **Workers aged 25-54 with a broadband-enabled computer participate in the labor force at a much higher rate than prime-age workers without such access.**



Future Works Alliance Partnership

The Future Works Alliance PHL created a five-year Future of Workers strategy that will help guide workforce development activity during the remainder of Governor Wolf's term and serve as a transition document for the next governor. Fifty-nine stakeholders from all sectors and regions of our state, including employers, employees, economic development leaders, workforce professionals, educators, academics and public policy staff – all with unique perspectives – participated in surveys and interviews to draft the plan, share expertise and address challenges. This process identified areas of alignment among the experts' thoughts and helped catalyze the plan's creation.

Understanding the “Why”

- **Understand the unmet needs and pain points of claimants/job seekers with lower digital literacy.**
- **Understand the needs and pain points of front-line staff who engage claimants/job seekers with lower digital literacy.**
- **Examine the digital tools being used by job seekers and front-line staff for usability and relevance for lower digital literacy audiences.**
- **Understand the challenges of prospective employers and partners in programs that apprentice/hire/train job seekers with limited digital literacy.**

Accenture Partnership

To jumpstart our digital literacy efforts and get a holistic view, in Spring 2021, L&I partnered with Accenture, a professional services company, investing \$824,000 to create actionable strategies to support and empower job seekers with limited digital literacy. Focusing on job seekers and examining the ecosystem around them, this engagement aimed to understand the “Why.”

Additionally, it explored internal culture dynamics and mindsets. Our digital literacy pursuits began with front-line staff acknowledging and understanding the circumstances job seekers face. This work produced a set of digital literacy mindsets, a framework of different job seeker perceptions and actionable strategic opportunities for the commonwealth to better serve its customers with low digital literacy.

These partnerships and studies informed what we hope to address related to digital literacy and where we expect to land.

Goals for Digital Literacy

In our quest to bridge the digital divide – creating a more digitally literate and connected workforce – we look to three overarching focus areas and goals.



Creating an Effective Customer Experience

New ways of thinking ensure staff's understanding of Pennsylvania job seekers' circumstances and improve processes, service and delivery.

Education: Preparing Job Seekers, Staff and Employers

Provide job seekers and workers with access to resources for job placement and improved digital literacy.

Additionally, equip staff and employers with the information and training needed to connect with job seekers and effectively serve.

Upgrading, Creating and Leveraging

Ensure the effective use of existing resources to connect with and serve job seekers and improve infrastructure to increase capacity.

Figure 2. Our digital literacy goals start internally with culture and mindset shifts, then consider training and continued education opportunities for job seeker and workers then connections made to employers.



Creating an Effective Customer Experience

Our pursuit of a more digitally literate and connected population starts internally with an acknowledgement of Pennsylvania job seekers' daily circumstances. What are we trying to accomplish? Who are the most disadvantaged populations and how do we ensure service delivery? What are the barriers related to digital literacy and how much help do job seekers with lower levels of digital literacy need?



Education: Preparing Job Seekers, Staff and Employers

We aim to ensure that front-line staff understand these dynamics and use them to inform how they connect with customers and design programs that aligned with actual need.

Further, we will help job seekers increase their digital proficiency and connectivity so they can take full advantage of all workforce services offered by the commonwealth and attain gainful employment.

Through a Career Advisor Assessment, we aim to ensure our 1,400 career advisors across the state have the hard and soft skills to effectively connect job seekers and employers.

Keeping in mind that employed residents seek opportunities to grow their skill sets, we aim to increase their digital proficiency and connectivity so that they can take full advantage of all workforce services offered by the commonwealth and feel prepared to take the next steps of their career progression.



Upgrading, Creating and Leveraging Existing Resources

Acknowledging a labor market that is rapidly transitioning to tech-enabled environments, we look to improving infrastructure and leveraging existing resources that allow for a more digitally connected workforce – exploring the ways our public workforce system and partners can engage residents, and the technologies available to job seekers. This includes upgrading Wi-Fi and broadband capabilities, funding for 32 public computing labs with additional funding to be released and continued partnerships with the Pennsylvania Department of Education adult education programs and libraries.



Strategy and Implementation

Pennsylvania's strategy to bridge the digital divide accounts for job seekers, employers, educators, training providers and our own internal processes. We explore our tangible steps to ensure that people have access to services and the knowledge and

opportunity to use them. Our focus is to ensure that people are not only connected to existing tools, but to make sure they can use them appropriately to make the most of the employment opportunities they seek.

The strategy is multi-pronged:

Workforce System Partnerships and Capabilities

- Increase capacity of Pennsylvania's workforce system by providing funding opportunities for PA CareerLink® and local workforce development boards to leverage for service delivery and staff development.
- Jointly design programming focused on digital literacy skills and invest in third-party digital training providers.

Community

- Connect with community organizations to reach Pennsylvania's neighborhoods and most rural communities.
- Jointly design programming focused on digital literacy skills.

Internal Process

- Iteratively evaluate the public workforce system to learn and adapt to labor market and economy shifts.
- Refine and enhance internal operations and processes, including website navigation and outreach.

Employer & Job Seeker

- Encourage employers, including those receiving public economic development funds, to engage job seekers using PA CareerLink®.

Figure 3. Our strategy considers capacity building for workforce system partners, reaching disconnected residents through community-based organizations, internal evaluation and enhancements and employer engagement.



Reimagining how we reach Pennsylvanians and the importance of local partnerships:

Through the Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant, we have an opportunity to engage disconnected communities by creating new partnerships with community-based organizations. These local organizations have an advantage of remaining connected to residents when geography and internet accessibility are barriers for the larger workforce development system. Through our local partners, digital literacy in the commonwealth will increase, and job seekers will be better positioned to connect to Pennsylvania's workforce system and services, ultimately increasing the workforce system's capabilities.

Implementation

With more than \$8.7 million invested in 2020-2022, L&I has taken several steps to operationalize its vision and the strategies created in response to its digital literacy goals. From new partnerships with local community-based organizations to deliver digital literacy training, to deepened connections and infrastructure investments for PA CareerLink® and local workforce development boards; we are taking the necessary steps to increase digital literacy as means to better employment outcomes.

Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant

To realize Governor Wolf's vision and goals for digital literacy in Pennsylvania, L&I announced that it would invest \$1.3 million in community organizations committed to workforce development for residents, with a focus on four digital literacy domains: digital fundamentals, job seeking, digital citizenship and navigation skills.

To date, the Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant, or DLWDG, has awarded 31 participating organizations with up to \$45,000 each, covering 28 counties across the state.

Over a 15-month period ending September 2022, the DLWDG will have helped promote the basic digital skills job seekers need to successfully apply for jobs and perform the essential job duties their careers require.

Figure 4 provides project overviews for each grantee.

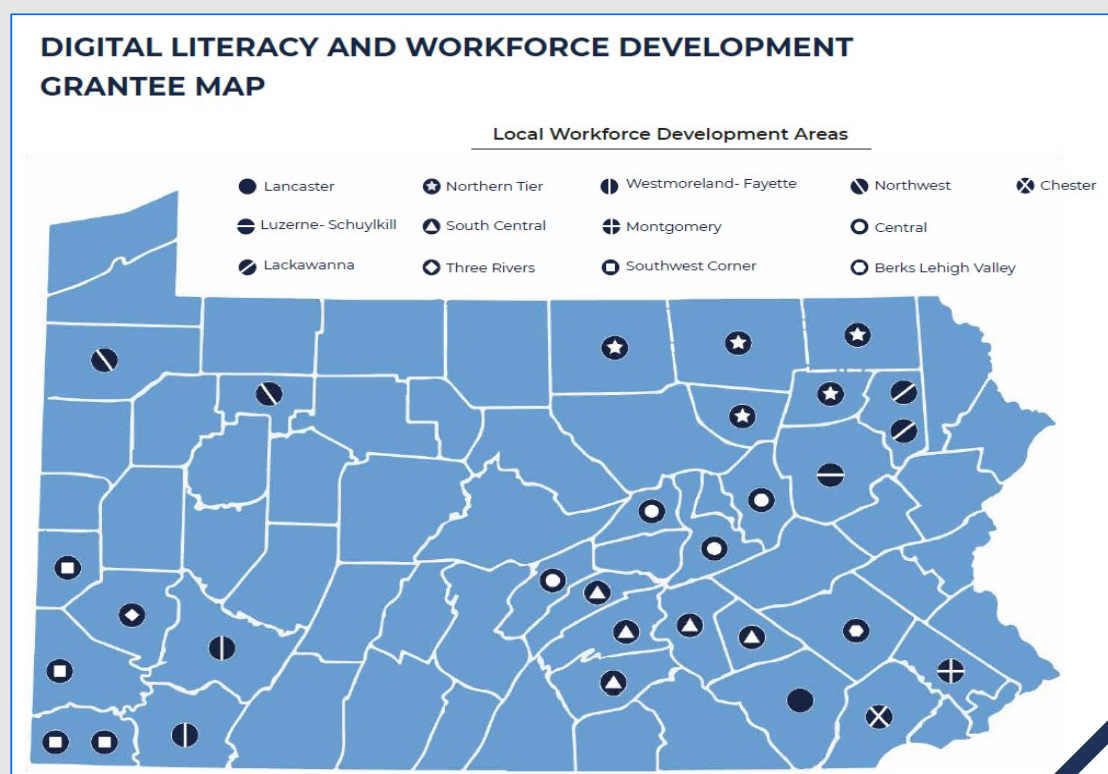


Figure 4. Digital Literacy and Workforce Development grants, awarded strategically across the commonwealth, ensure Pennsylvania's most disconnected and vulnerable communities have access to digital literacy services.

With more than 3,800 expected individuals served through the DLWDG, many grantees will focus on curriculum design, upgrades to equipment, the purchase of loaner laptops for their customers to take home and internet connectivity (including on-site parking lot Wi-Fi hotspots).

The DLWDG will reach some of the state's most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents, reaching into rural communities that have historically been disconnected from available workforce services due to several barriers, including internet accessibility and distance from physical PA CareerLink® sites.

With convenience in mind, we believe that residents served by their DLWDG-awarded local community organizations will be better connected to workforce services, substantially improve their digital proficiency and increase job-search activity.

Figure 5 matches digital literacy and workforce development grantees with specific services carried out with this funding and PA CareerLink® partnerships. Where some grantees are partnering with PA CareerLink® for program design and delivery, the majority are leveraging PA CareerLink® for supplemental service delivery, e.g., referrals, supportive services, career services and more.

Mobile Labs	Loaner Laptops	PA CareerLink® Partnerships
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11 • Scranton Lackawanna Human Development Agency • Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit • Northern Tier Workforce Development Board • Private Industry Council • Goodwill of NEPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (all projects) • Literacy Council of Lancaster Lebanon • Literacy Pittsburgh (All projects) • Northern Tier Workforce Development Board (All projects) • SCPa Employment Skills Center Cumberland County • Titusville Regional Literacy Council (All projects) • Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intermediate Unit 1 • Literacy Council of Lancaster Lebanon • Literacy Pittsburgh • Northern Tier Workforce Development Board • Private Industry Council • SCPa • Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11

Figure 5. Grantees were empowered to identify and pursue the types of services most applicable to their communities. Six of the 31 grantees will use mobile labs to reach customers. Seven will provide loaner laptops so customers can stay digitally connected and search for jobs, and seven will partner with PA CareerLink® for programming.

DLWDGs are 100% federally funded by Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA, Statewide Activity funding.

PA CareerLink® & Local Workforce Development Board Activity

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for PA CareerLink® to be more proactive and nimbler in its go-forward approach. This approach needs to be one that considers remote service delivery. Moreover, ensuring that the necessary infrastructure exists and customers can be confident that the one-stops' advantages are available and accessible to them is crucial. Leveraging WIOA Statewide Activity funding, PA CareerLink®, partners and local workforce development boards address service disruption, access and capacity constraints and more. (See Figure 6.)

As part of these efforts, Pennsylvania invested more than \$105,000 to equip a majority of the 62 PA CareerLink® one-stops with Wi-Fi, providing internet access beyond four walls and into parking lots for safe access – an investment that ranged by site.

Organization	Project Description
Bucks County Workforce Development Board	Provide technical assistance to local workforce development boards, one-stop partners and eligible providers in local areas on the development of programming and provision of technology to facilitate remote access to services. Further, to purchase infrastructure (e.g., laptops and phone system), enabling of the PA CareerLink® Bucks County staff to work remotely and stay connected to customers.
Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation	Infrastructure improvements to allow for continued and seamless program delivery, and to develop a lending library of camera-equipped Chromebooks for customers.
Chester County Workforce Development Board	Collaborating with the Chester County Intermediate Unit, the project will study internet coverage gaps in southern Chester County. The study focuses on the challenge of delivering internet access to the community and suggests mitigation strategies.
Lancaster County Workforce Development Board	Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on students' connectivity to career exposure, Junior Achievement, partnering with the Lancaster County Workforce Development Board, developed an online career exploration program and fair – Inspire Virtual Career Expo – for middle and high school students.
Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Development Board	The project provides mobile hotspot units to customers without internet service and hired a digital media producer to create marketing strategies and online workforce training content.
Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Development Board	Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on students' connectivity to career exposure, Junior Achievement, partnering with the Luzerne/Schuylkill Workforce Development Board, leveraged WIOA Statewide Activity funding for the sustainability of an online career exploration program and fair – Inspire Virtual Career Expo – for middle and high school students.

Figure 6. Projects ranged expanding digital remote access for customers, fielding mobile hotspots and lending libraries and improving PA CareerLink® infrastructure.

SkillUp® PA

As part of L&I's work to adopt effective virtual channels for workforce development service delivery, in summer 2021 we announced a partnership with Metrix Learning and launched a \$2.64 million, statewide online learning system: SkillUp® PA. This tool helps those seeking to enter the workforce or advance their knowledge by learning in-demand skills. This online solution assesses individuals for skills gaps, connects them to training that closes those gaps and helps them explore career pathways. SkillUp® PA connects to the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (Pennsylvania's web-based point-of-contact for job seekers, employers and training providers) which then connects to job seekers. The tool helps empower Pennsylvanians at different points across the employment spectrum, including but not limited to:

New-Entrant Job Seekers

People new to the workforce who need guidance to better understand their employment potential and opportunities.

Dislocated Workers

Workers who, after years in one trade or industry, must consider new career pathways and skills attainment.

Employed Workers

Workers who hope to upskill and prepare for new opportunities in their existing work or a different job.

Figure 7. SkillUp® PA caters to new workforce entrants – individuals with experience in the workforce but who lost their jobs, and individuals currently employed but want continued education.

To support reskilling and upskilling in a virtual setting, platform users have access to an array of training content, including:

- **Accounting/Finance**
- **Clerical**
- **Customer Service**
- **Human Resources**
- **Information Technology (IT)**
- **Marketing**
- **Microsoft Office**
- **Project Management**

To ensure this service aligns with residents' needs, Pennsylvania is working with local workforce development areas to understand their specific needs, partnering with local boards to know more about the careers most in demand in their communities and fostering partnerships with local educators, training providers, employers and community-based organizations to drive the system's use.

Further, we are building a certification component for high-demand occupations into the system as a value-added benefit. Now in its first year, SkillUp® PA will be available to the public through 2024.



Success Highlights

Luzerne Schuylkill Workforce Development Area – Internet Hotspots

Distributed 47 mobile hotspot devices to program participants who did not have adequate internet service at their homes. This helped participants stay connected to workforce services and available employment-related resources.

Luzerne Schuylkill Workforce Development Area – Job Seeker and Employer Connections

Integrated new technology, including mobile strategies, to improve the interface between PA CareerLink® and job seekers.

To date, more than 500 participants have enrolled in one or more established campaigns – Hot Jobs, Hired and Courses to Careers.

Junior Achievement Inspire Virtual Career Fair

Partnered with the Luzerne-Schuylkill and the Lancaster County workforce development boards to conduct the Inspire Virtual Career Fair, connecting students to career exploration despite the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on in-person activity. Engaging students grade 6 through 12, participants connected with business professionals to learn about a variety of career options.

In addition to virtual booths, students viewed webinars and presentations from local and national speakers in a virtual auditorium. Topics included financial literacy, inspirational career journeys and entrepreneurial stories.

- **19,000 students participated**
- **70 schools were represented**
- **50 educators participated**
- **200 business professionals participated**

North Central Workforce Development Area – Supportive Services

Provided supportive services funds of up to \$1,000 to individuals participating in PA CareerLink® programs. Supportive services funds covered expenses including: transportation, child care, housing and broadband connectivity necessary for those in training or conducting job searches. A total of \$60,000 was awarded across the region.

Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board – Zoom Rooms

PA CareerLink® sites across this local area established “Zoom Rooms,” giving participants a laptop and quiet place on site to attend Zoom interviews or attend virtual training.





Looking to the Future

Looking to future programs and prospects, we first want to understand the effects of our 2021 investment activity more precisely. Based on anecdotal accounts, we recognize the value of our newly created partnerships with community-based organizations and capacity-building efforts for our workforce system, i.e., PA CareerLink® and local workforce development boards. To quantify results and understand what continued support might look like, we are taking several steps with our partners.

Key Performance Indicators – Measuring Success

L&I has invested \$680,000 to evaluate program performance in outputs. Key indicators we hope to better understand include, but are not limited to:

Lagging Indicators

- **Number of customers reached and served**
- **Demographics, i.e., ethnicity/ race, gender and age**
- **Geographic spread**
- **Number of customers who successfully complete training**
- **Instructor performance**

Leading Indicators

- **Job placement activity**
- **Customer program satisfaction assessments**
- **Staff program satisfaction assessments**

We plan to capture similar performance metrics for grants awarded to PA CareerLink® and workforce development board partners related to infrastructure and capacity building.

Internally, we will develop a dashboard to track key workforce development system and strategy implementation performance indicators.

Customer Intake

The workforce system's primary goal is to prepare residents for the jobs of today and tomorrow. We want to use customers' digital proficiency to connect them more accurately to the right programs and services, all while ensuring these individuals are not turned away or feel intimidated by the process.

Over the last year, we have worked to develop a common digital intake mechanism for PA CareerLink® statewide. This intake process will help us learn more about new customers, understand their respective digital literacy levels and be certain that individuals who have traditionally been less likely to have successful outcomes are connected to foundational services so they can more effectively leverage all workforce services available and ultimately obtain gainful employment.

New Things to Come: Improved Navigation and Support

Recently, L&I integrated a digital platform into its service delivery – Microsoft Hub and Bots – to improve intake and engagement with PA CareerLink® customers. The digital hub's success will be affected by users' digital literacy. Therefore, we are keeping top-of-mind how we plan to use this benefit and which features will be most prominent.

Microsoft Hub (\$1.1 million): An online platform for PA CareerLink® customer intake and digital case management. Enabling of streamlined processes and shorter wait times.

Microsoft Bot (\$556,000): An online chat bot that serves as a virtual assistant to help customers navigate the platform.

Now in late development, this new intake mechanism is planned for a spring 2022 launch.

Labor Market Data Usage

We plan to use new data sets from our Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, or CWIA, to inform new digital literacy programming.

At the pandemic's onset, it became apparent that unemployment compensation, or UC, claims data best gauged the effect of COVID-19 on Pennsylvania's labor market. To more efficiently respond to stakeholder requests for customized data, CWIA developed a digital dashboard that presents UC claims data distributed by county, industry and various demographic attributes.

CWIA offers a wide range of additional services and insightful findings that can inform new opportunities for the PA CareerLink® and LWDBs. CWIA plans to regularly engage workforce system partners to showcase these value-added capabilities.

Employer Engagement

Increasing employer engagement and connections to Pennsylvania's workforce remains a top priority. To better understand related workforce system activity, L&I plans to engage a third-party evaluator to assess business engagement services at all 62 PA CareerLink® centers and LWDAs statewide. We are in the process of procuring a vendor to help develop a solicitation for the evaluation of business services provided to employer customers through the PA CareerLink®.

National Governors Association Workforce Innovation Fund & Workforce Innovation Network Grant

Pennsylvania applied for \$100,000 in National Governors Association funding to support the progression of current and future digital literacy skill development across the state. On Oct. 26, 2021 the National Governors Association notified Pennsylvania that its application was selected for funding. This award will help Pennsylvania clarify the meaning of digital literacy, better understand where the most significant digital gaps are in the state, identify available resources and build a sustainable action plan that supports advancing digital skills through a holistic approach. Pennsylvania will convene a team of experienced, diverse leaders at the forefront of the state's efforts to expand and improve digital literacy skills in communities across the commonwealth. The team's convening will immediately establish the

development of new state policy, and the revision of existing policy, to operationalize a digital literacy strategy, improve access to digital resources and hasten infrastructure development.

CAREER Grant

L&I was awarded \$3 million by the United States Department of Labor to further integrate SkillUp® PA into CWDS through the Metrix Online Learning software. Funding will be used to strengthen connections between Metrix and CWDS, improve outreach to underserved populations and support two years of licensure for all Pennsylvanians to use the free platform by registering in the PA CareerLink® system using CWDS and the Metrix Online Learning Portal. Once registered, dislocated workers will be able to access more career pathways, a skills gap assessment



and more than 6,000 different learning modules that will enhance their current skills and help them develop new skills to compete in the post-pandemic labor market.

Career Advisor Assessment – Career Consciousness

L&I's strategic plan to improve PA CareerLink® service delivery includes a determination as to the extent which the one-stops' career advisors have the skills to respond to job seekers' present and emerging needs.

Several conditions affect the career advisors' ability to inform, encourage, strategize and build trust with their customers, including changes in the labor market, effects of automation and cultural competency.

We will partner with a consultant to assess career advisors':

- **characteristics**
- **essential attributes**
- **available training**

To determine current career advisors'

characteristics, the consultant will conduct one-on-one interviews with 25 of them. The consultant will identify at least seven subject-matter experts representing public and private career practices, career thought leaders, representatives of workforce development professional organizations and human resource professionals with recruiting responsibilities. The consultant will use the data gained through the interviews and discussions with subject-matter experts to prepare an electronic survey that will be sent to all career advisors throughout the system.

The information gathered will be analyzed and used to prepare a final report that provides a detailed picture of career advisors' current situation, along with recommendations for training essential for career advisors to meet customers' current and projected needs.



Glossary



1. Automation: human-delivered job activity that can be replaced with technology that does the same thing, perhaps even more quickly and cheaply.
2. Career Pathway: a structured approach to career planning for people in search of jobs or to improve skills for new jobs.
3. Digital Citizenship: having the skills and knowledge to use the internet and digital technology to participate in society.
4. Digital Literacy: the core ability to leverage new technologies and navigate virtual environments.
5. Future of Work: the reinvention of the overall work experience for all levels of employees, including the leaders of organizations, given digital technology.
6. Labor Force: all persons classified as employed or unemployed.
7. New Entrant: an unemployed person looking for a first job.
8. Unemployment: not having a job, having actively looked for work in the prior four weeks and being currently available for work.

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