



Jobs First Employment Services Annual Report

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

State Fiscal Year 2022 (SFY22)

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This is the annual report required by Section 17b-688i(c) of the
Connecticut General Statutes.

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The Connecticut Department of Labor – Who We Are

The Department is committed to protecting and promoting the interests of Connecticut workers. To accomplish this in an ever- changing environment, we assist workers and employers to become competitive in the global economy. We take a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of workers and employers, and the other agencies that serve them.

For job seekers, we provide high-quality services that address barriers to employment. With an eye on building economic stability for families, we collaborate with partner agencies and organizations to integrate job training, transportation, childcare, and financial solutions that ensure our customers obtain and stay on a career path.

We also work closely with Connecticut’s employers to help them develop a talent pipeline. In the post-pandemic economy, employers must compete for and meaningfully invest in workers. We help them identify and train a committed workforce that is ready for the future.

The Jobs First Employment Services Program

The Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program assists participants in becoming competitive workers in the ever-changing employment environment. We provide comprehensive, integrated employment services that enable program participants to become and remain independent of cash assistance by preparing them for the next step in their continuum of lifelong learning.

Program Overview

The JFES program serves recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), Connecticut's cash assistance program for low-income families, which is administered by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (CTDSS). The JFES program is administered by the CTDOLE in partnership with CTDSS and Connecticut's five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs)—Capital Workforce Partners, Workforce Alliance, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, The Workplace, Inc., and the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board.

Program Goals

- Enable participants, through employment, to become independent of cash assistance by the end of the 21-month time limit established by law. *(Time limit continued to be suspended during State Fiscal Year (SFY22) due to the Public Health Emergency (PHE) Executive Order)*
- Enable participants who become independent of cash assistance to remain employed and independent of TFA.
- Ensure that the federal Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) federally established Work Participation Rate (WPR) goal is met. *(Due to a caseload reduction credit the state receives as a result of the decreasing JFES caseload, Connecticut currently has no WPR goal.)*

Prior to the Pandemic

Prior to the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, CTDSS enrolled TFA applicants into an in-person JFES Orientation session at an American Job Center (AJC). Following the session, participants were assigned to a JFES case manager, who worked collaboratively with them to develop an employment plan outlining the mandated employment services and steps needed for the JFES participant to become and remain independent of cash assistance. The majority of the assigned activities and meetings were held in-person at the AJCs, worksites, or educational facilities.

State Fiscal Year 2022

During SFY20, Governor Lamont issued a COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Executive Order, resulting in a temporary suspension of the JFES program at the AJCs. This suspension continued through SFY22.

Although JFES participants were not mandated to participate in employment services, they could continue to voluntarily engage in the JFES program virtually. JFES case managers maintained communication with the 2535 participants via email, phone calls and/or video conferencing and assisted them with online career guidance and resume assistance. JFES case managers also helped participants in identifying local COVID-19 crisis resources.

Some participants who were already involved in a Subsidized Employment opportunity continued to work while adhering to social distancing protocols. Participants in vocational skills training also decided to continue with their coursework and completed it virtually.

In August 2020, CTDOOL JFES staff convened a Virtual Services Workgroup with representatives from each of the five WDBs; JFES case managers and supervisors; and CTDOSS administrators. This workgroup continued during SFY22 with the goal of sharing best practices and developing a plan to continue virtual services throughout the pandemic. The group also discussed potential processes for reengaging JFES participants and accepting new referrals from CTDOSS.

New procedures for serving voluntary JFES participants were developed in partnership with CTDOSS and the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA) to provide more in-depth assistance with barrier resolution and COVID-19 related resources.

CCFSA also attempted to contact those individuals who were granted cash assistance, but chose not to participate in the JFES program, to determine if they had any barriers or family issues that needed to be addressed during the pandemic and to encourage voluntary participation in the program.

Program Enhancements

Transportation Benefits-

CTDOOL implemented a new Special Benefits policy that enables JFES participants who secure part-time or full-time employment to have their transportation costs to and from work covered for the entire time that they are receiving TFA benefits. The previous policy only covered the transportation costs for participants who secured part-time or full-time employment to and from work for the first four weeks of employment. This new policy helps to mitigate the “Benefits Cliff” effect

that JFES participants often encounter when obtaining employment by removing the cost of transportation as a barrier to accepting employment while still allowing the participant to receive their TFA benefits

Participation Allowance Benefits-

The new Special Benefits policy addressed program participation barriers and increased the short-term participation allowance benefit to better align with the current economic environment. The allowance per employment activity increased from \$10.00 to \$25.00 and covers events such the mandatory JFES Orientation session. This benefit is used to support JFES participants prior to their TFA benefits being granted or when there is a need for childcare and transportation prior to childcare and transportation subsidies being granted.

Staff Professional Development

JFES staff participated in professional development opportunities designed to expand knowledge; provide tools to best serve participants during the pandemic; and broaden perspectives on diversity and inclusion. Some of the training provided included:

- **Welcome to Your Future!** This session introduced JFES staff to innovative and motivating strategies to empower staff to achieve an effective work-life balance while navigating the impacts of the pandemic. Topics also included how to better serve participants in a virtual environment.
- **Poverty Immersion Institute.** This session provided JFES staff with strategies for recognizing, serving, and supporting participants living in

poverty. Staff were trained to understand the deep impact that poverty has on families, how it perpetuated, and how systems can meaningfully interrupt the cycle of poverty.

- **Certified Professional Resume Writing (CPRW).** CTDOLE led a kick-off session to launch the CPRW resume writing credentialing program, a nationally recognized credential that will enable each case manager to become an expert in the art of resume writing.

Facts & Figures SFY22

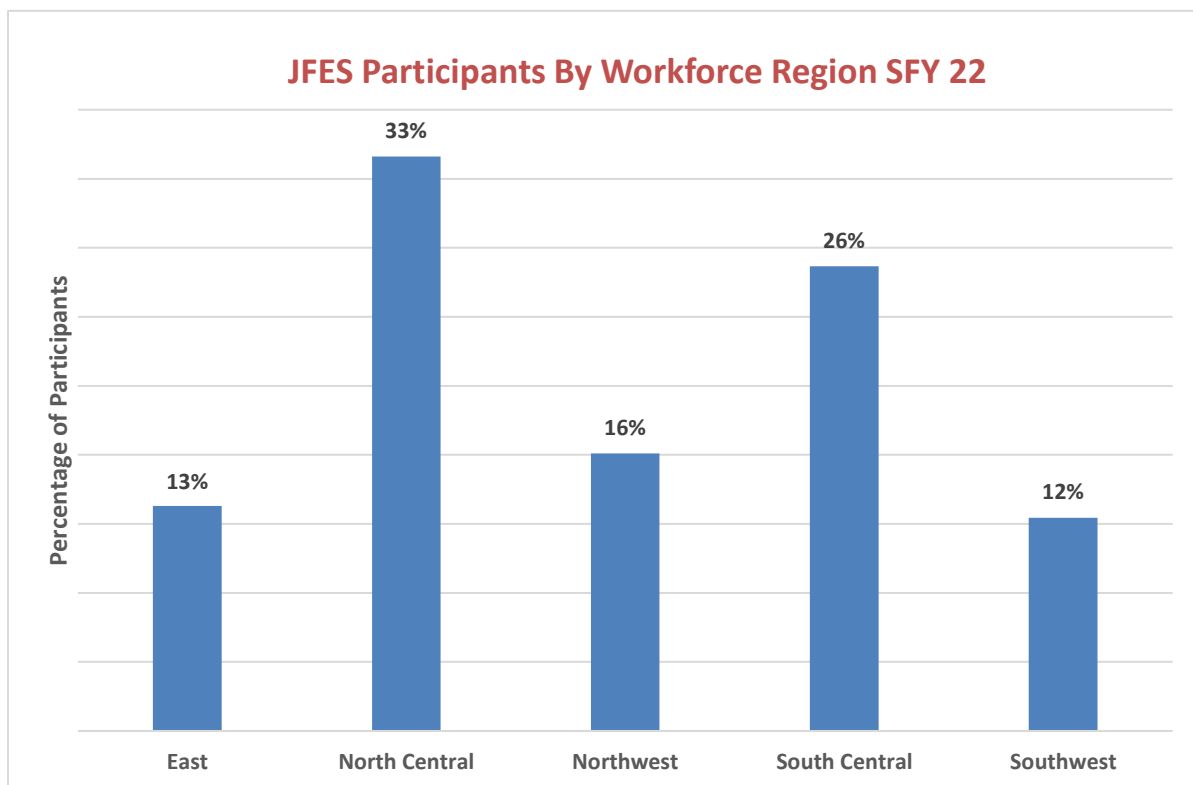
It is difficult to determine the average length of time an individual typically participates in the program for a few reasons:

- Due to the COVID and the public health emergency that followed, the TFA clocks have been stopped for 3 years and client participation has been largely voluntary. This removes our ability use the client's TFA clock or what our JFES staff calls their TFA "counters" to try to measure the average amount of time. These TFA "counters" have been frozen in time since March 2020.
- In addition, DSS determines who gets served in this program, and for how long, and clients go on and off the program for a variety of reasons. Some participants get jobs and go over their income limit while others hit their 21 month time limit and go off TFA. For that reason, it's difficult to draw conclusions based on some raw number of months, even if that data was available like it was pre-pandemic.

- Last, a client’s participation in the program may not be a straight time period. Program participants may go off and on the program over a period of several years before they hit their 21 month time limit so our JFES staff, often times, is not working with a client for 21 months straight. It’s often a series of stops and starts spread out over a much longer time period than 21 months.

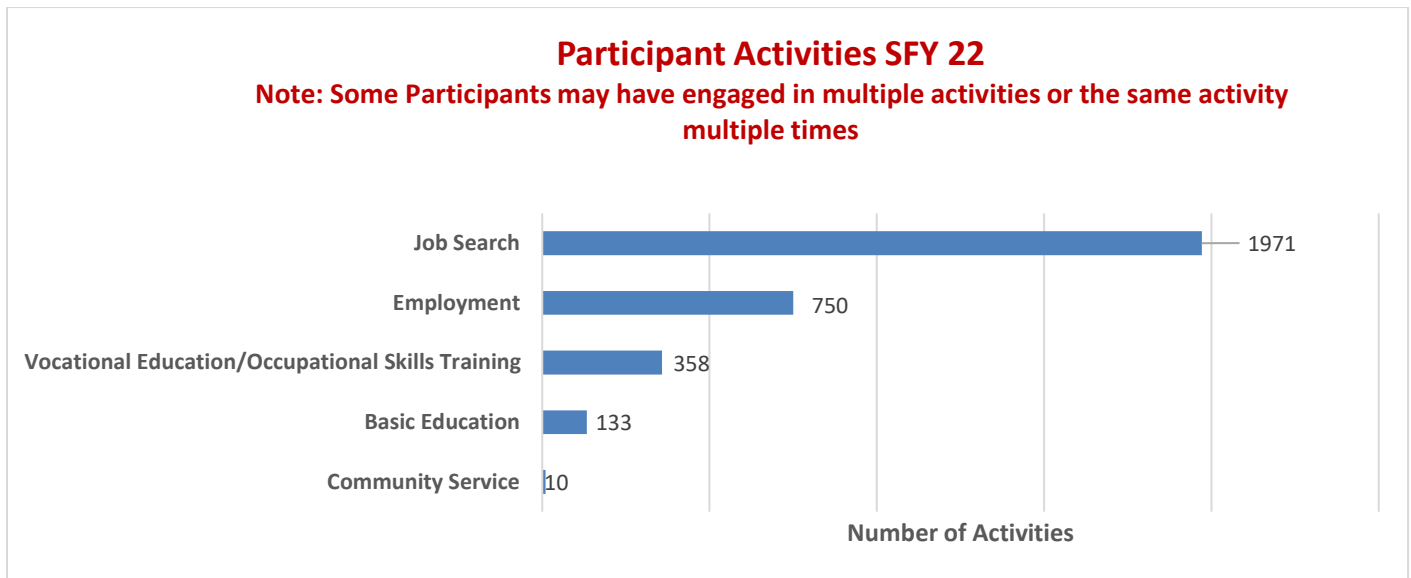
JFES program participants were assigned a case manager to work closely with them to overcome employment challenges. Case managers develop an individualized employment plan to put participants on a path to employment.

JFES Participants (Voluntary) Served SFY 22 – 2535



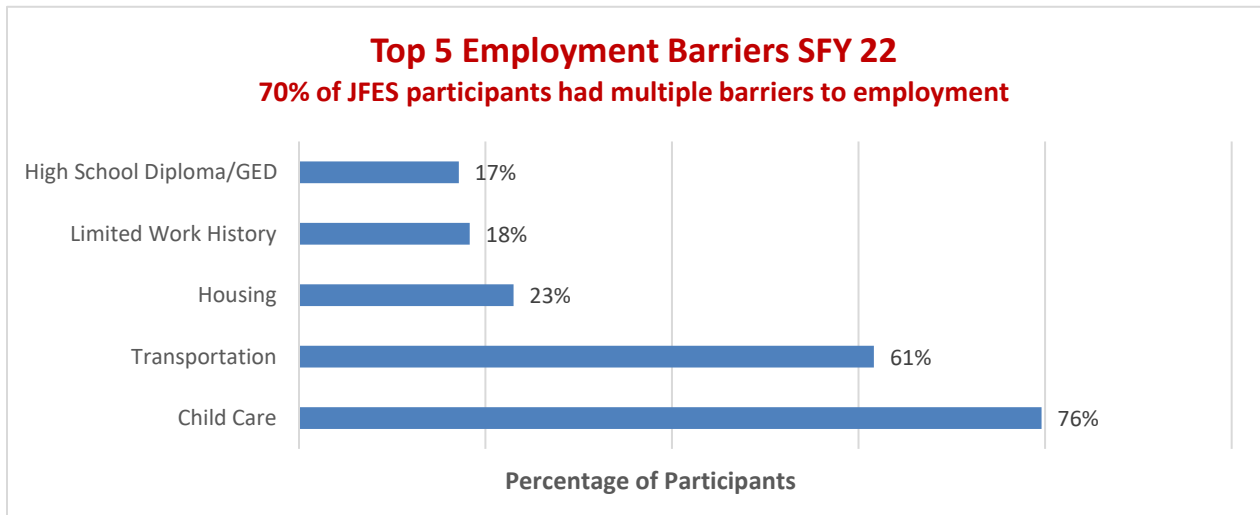
JFES Participant Employment Activities

Participants engaged in a variety of virtual activities each week including job search, adult education classes/vocational skills training, subsidized employment programs, and community service. Employment services were provided by community-based organizations under contract with the WDBs, other state agencies, and education and community programs.



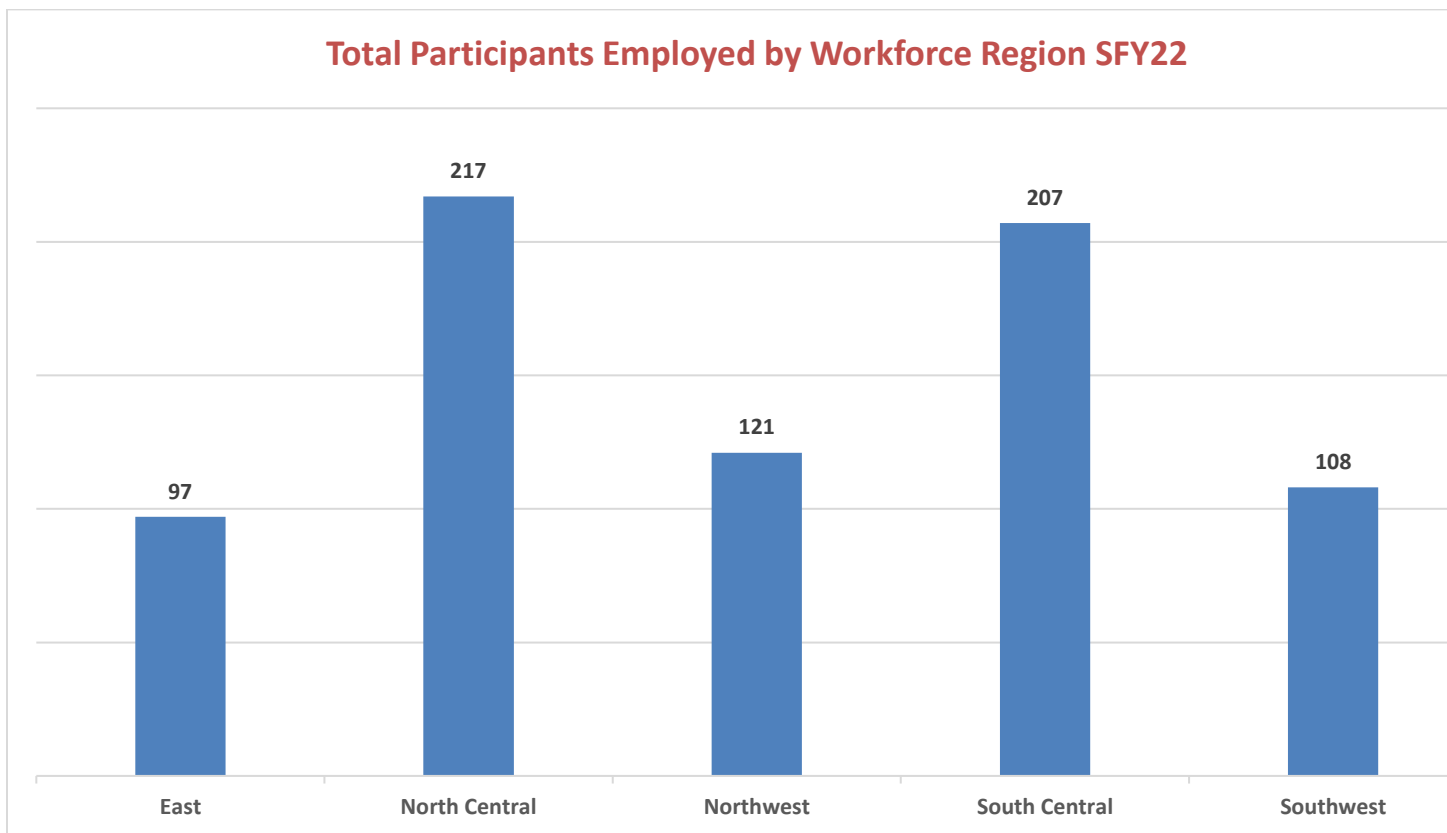
Barriers to Employment

JFES case managers assisted JFES participants overcome barriers to employment by helping them gain access to supportive services provided by community-based organizations under contract with the WDBs, other agencies, educational programs, and community resources. Supportive services included transportation assistance (bus passes and mileage reimbursement); childcare subsidies through Care4Kids; temporary use of Chromebooks and internet service; work uniforms; tools; books; and training materials.



Obtaining and Maintaining Employment

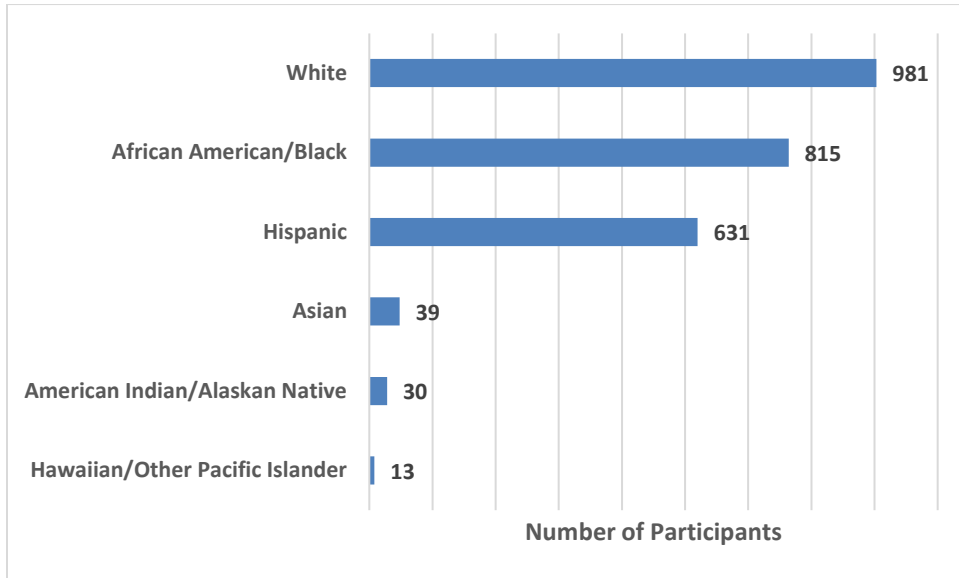
The JFES program emphasizes a balanced work-first approach for participants. Job-ready participants are assigned work search activities until they obtain employment. Whenever possible, work and work-related activities are combined with education and/or training to increase participants' earning potential so they may become and remain independent of cash assistance.



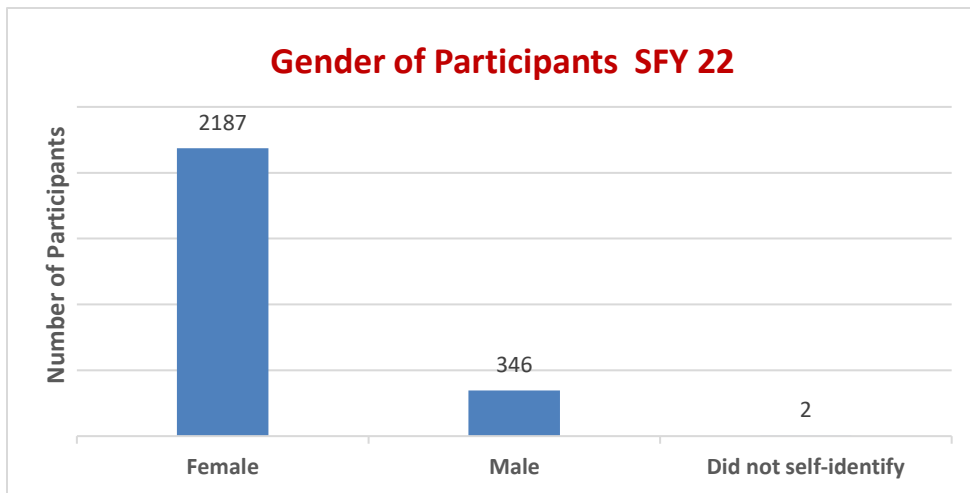
30% of Participants were Engaged in Employment	
Average Hourly Pay	\$15.38
Average Weekly Work Hours	25

JFES Demographics

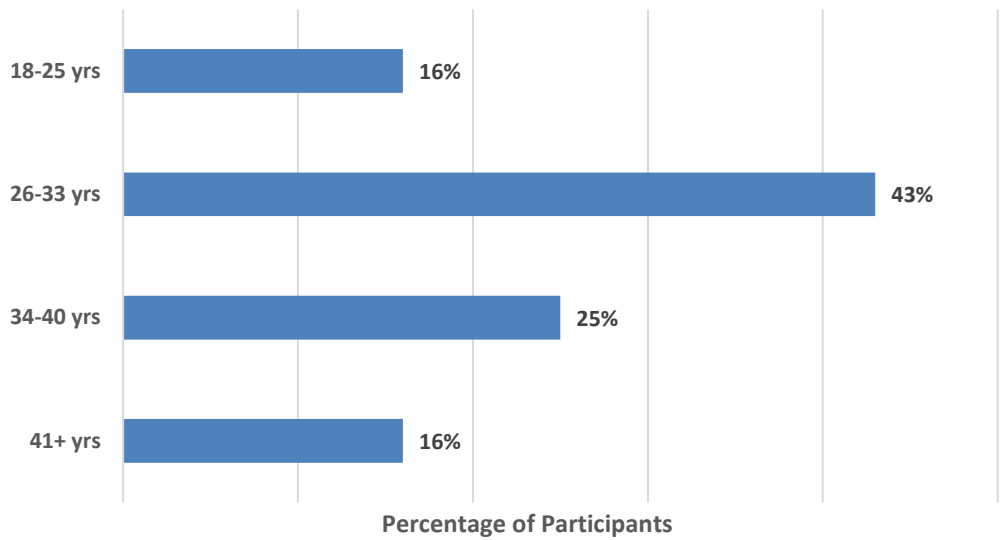
The JFES program serves a diverse population of individuals.



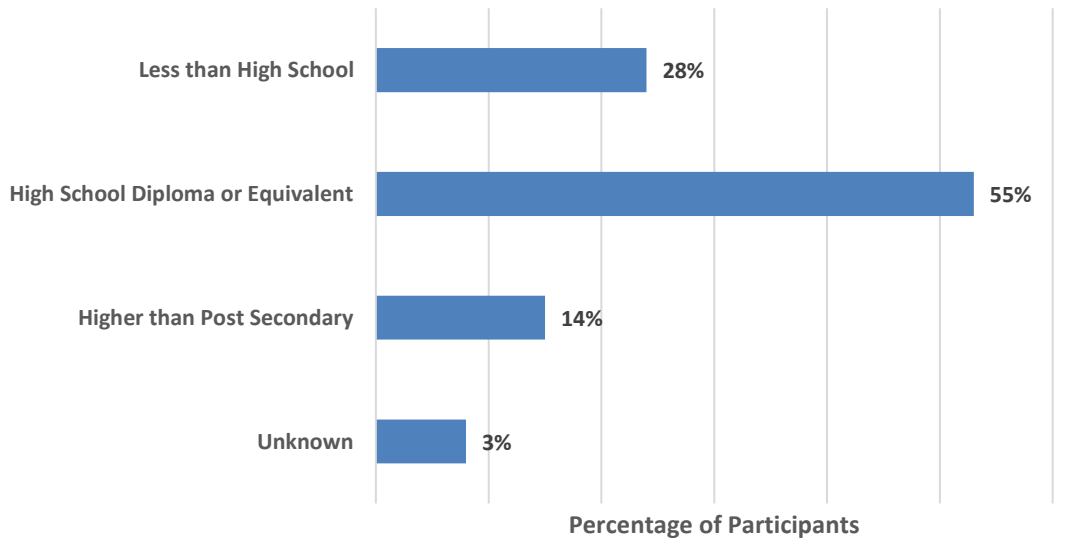
Note: Some participants self-identified as more than one race. 748 participants chose not to self-identify regarding race and 884 participants chose not to self-identify regarding ethnicity.



Age of Participants SFY 22



Education Level SFY 22



JFES Budget SFY22

Allocation Category	Amount	Percentage of Total
WDB Allocations	\$10,841,470	86.27%
DOL Employment Services	\$661,058	5.26%
Case Management System	\$438,665	3.49%
Special Benefits	\$300,000	2.39%
Training and Assessments	\$125,000	.99%
Refugee Resettlement Program – Workforce Alliance (South Central Region)	\$100,000	0.80%
Preventative Services – Individual Performance Contracts (IPCs)	\$100,000	0.80%
TOTAL	\$12,556,193	100%

***Average cost per JFES participant = \$4,953**

Planning for the Future SFY23

New England Regional Multi-State Conversations

In September 2020, CTDOL and CTDSS began participating in bi-monthly, multi-state meetings with Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The agencies share best practices on how to better serve participants while managing the restrictions and challenges of COVID-19.

Recent conversations centered on implementing new technologies and strategies to enable staff to serve participants virtually. Pandemic related challenges experienced by our participants, such as the need to assist their children with at home virtual school and a lack of available childcare and enhancing transportation policies, were also discussed.

CTDOL and CTDSS Collaboration on New JFES Program Rules

In the spring/summer 2021, CTDOL and CTDSS began planning for the suspension of the State of Connecticut Public Health Emergency. We strategized how to re-open the JFES program to all clients and expand our reach beyond the voluntary participants we served during the worst of the pandemic. We continue to reconnect participants to their JFES case managers, examine how virtual services play a role in JFES, and bringing new TFA applicants into the program.

Grow with Google Initiative

In mid-2021, CTDOL (JFES) began working closely with the CTDOL AJC in Hartford to discuss the launch of the *Grow with Google* initiative for JFES participants and the underserved and economically disadvantaged populations. Grow with Google

has established a partnership with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) to distribute scholarships to JFES participants for the two-year Google Career Certificate. The program offers six Google Career Certificates in the areas of:

- Data Analytics
- IT Support
- Project Management
- User Experience (UX) Design
- IT Automation with Python
- E-commerce/Digital Marketing

This is a self-study online training program that typically lasts from three to six months if the participant is completing 6 to 10 hours each week. There is no education, experience, or prerequisite required.

Program Summary

Although the challenges presented by the pandemic during SFY22 were very stressful for both the participants in the program and the staff who served them, these challenges have created new opportunities for serving JFES participants. Providing virtual services mitigated some of the childcare and transportation problems that often prevent participants from engaging in activities. Furthermore, mastering the art of virtual communication for partner meetings and professional development has significantly reduced travel time and expenses and made it much easier to plan and coordinate capacity building training designed to improve services to JFES participants.

Acronym Glossary

AJC	American Job Center
CCFSA	Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies
CEIP	Certified Employment Interview Professional
CPRW	Certified Professional Resume Writer
CTDOL	Connecticut Department of Labor
CTDSS	Connecticut Department of Social Services
IPC	Individual Performance Contract
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
JFES	Jobs First Employment Services
SFY	State Fiscal Year
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TFA	Temporary Family Assistance
WDB(s)	Workforce Development Board(s)
WPR	Work Participation Rate
WtW	Welfare to Work