

The Digest of Administrative Reports to the Governor
Fiscal Years 2023-2024

Agency: Office of Workforce Strategy

Commissioner: Kelli-Marie Vallieres, PhD

Established: 2021

Deputy Commissioner: n/a

Statutory authority: Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 4-124w

Central office: 450 Capitol Avenue, 3rd Floor, Hartford CT 06106

Number of employees: 8

Recurring operating expenses: \$35,000 General Fund expenses

Organizational structure: The Office of Workforce Strategy is headed by the Chief Workforce Officer and is comprised of four units: Workforce Strategy, Business and Operations, Research, and Grants.

Mission: The Office of Workforce Strategy's Mission is as follows:

- To serve as the primary advisor to the Governor and the administration on workforce development policy
- To promote equity and access to the workforce by partnering with community-based organizations and stakeholders to develop specific strategies aimed at increasing workforce participation of historically underrepresented populations
- To partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to fund, support, and design industry-aligned educational and workforce training programs that issue an industry-recognized credential
- To liaison directly with employers to better understand labor market trends and hiring needs to help inform investment and focus of educational, government, and community partners
- To provide staff to the Governor's Workforce Council, Connecticut's WIOA-mandated state workforce board
- To research national and state workforce development policy best practices to help bring continuous innovation to Connecticut
- To partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to implement the strategic initiatives outlined in the Governor's Workforce Council's strategic plan
- To partner across state agencies and the private sector to help advise on and coordinate existing workforce development initiatives and programs

Statutory Responsibility: The department head of the Office of Workforce Strategy is the Chief Workforce Officer, whose statutory responsibilities are enumerated in Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 4-124w as follows:

1. Be the principal advisor for workforce development policy, strategy and coordination to the Governor;
2. Be the lead state official for the development of employment and training strategies and initiatives;
3. Be the chairperson of the Workforce Cabinet, which shall consist of agencies involved with employment and training, as designated by the Governor pursuant to section 31-3m. The Workforce Cabinet shall meet at the direction of the Governor or the Chief Workforce Officer;
4. Be the liaison between the Governor, the Governor's Workforce Council, established pursuant to section 31-3h and any local, regional, state or federal organizations and entities with respect to workforce development policy, strategy and coordination, including, but not limited to, implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, P.L. 113-128, as amended from time to time;

5. Develop, and update as necessary, a state workforce strategy in consultation with the Governor's Workforce Council and the Workforce Cabinet and subject to the approval of the Governor. The Chief Workforce Officer shall submit, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a, the state workforce strategy to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to appropriations, commerce, education, higher education and employment advancement, and labor and public employees at least thirty days before submitting such state workforce strategy to the Governor for his or her approval;
6. Coordinate workforce development activities (A) funded through state resources, (B) funded through funds received pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, P.L. 113-128, as amended from time to time, or (C) administered in collaboration with any state agency for the purpose of furthering the goals and outcomes of the state workforce strategy approved by the Governor pursuant to subdivision (5) of this subsection and the workforce development plan developed by the Governor's Workforce Council pursuant to the provisions of section 31-11p;
7. Collaborate with the regional workforce development boards to adapt the best practices for workforce development established by such boards for state-wide implementation, if possible;
8. Coordinate measurement and evaluation of outcomes across education and workforce development programs, in conjunction with state agencies, including, but not limited to, the Labor Department, the Department of Education and the Office of Policy and Management;
9. Notwithstanding any provision of the general statutes, review any state plan for each program set forth in Section 103(b) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, P.L. 113-128, as amended from time to time, before such plan is submitted to the Governor;
10. Establish methods and procedures to ensure the maximum involvement of members of the public, the legislature and local officials in workforce development policy, strategy and coordination;
11. In conjunction with one or more state agencies enter into such contractual agreements, in accordance with established procedures and the approval of the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this section. The Chief Workforce Officer may enter into agreements with other state agencies for the purpose of performing the duties of the Office of Workforce Strategy, including, but not limited to, administrative, human resources, finance and information technology functions;
12. Market and communicate the state workforce strategy to ensure maximum engagement with students, trainees, job seekers and businesses while effectively elevating the state's workforce profile nationally;
13. For the purposes of subsection (a) of section 10-21c identify subject areas, courses, curriculum, content and programs that may be offered to students in elementary and high school in order to improve student outcomes and meet the workforce needs of the state;
14. Issue guidance to state agencies, the Governor's Workforce Council and regional workforce development boards in furtherance of the state workforce strategy and the workforce development plan developed by the Governor's Workforce Council pursuant to the provisions of section 31-11p. Such guidance shall be approved by the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, allow for a reasonable period for implementation and take effect not less than thirty days from such approval. The Chief Workforce Officer shall consult on the development and implementation of any guidance with the agency, council or board impacted by such guidance;
15. Coordinate, in consultation with the Labor Department and regional workforce development boards to ensure compliance with state and federal laws for the purpose of furthering the service capabilities of programs offered pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, P.L. 113-128, as amended from time to time, and the United States Department of Labor's American Job Center system;
16. Coordinate, in consultation with the Department of Social Services, with community action agencies to further the state workforce strategy; and

17. Take any other action necessary to carry out the provisions of section 4-124w.

Public Service

- **Career ConneCT:** OWS continues to implement [Career ConneCT](#) — a \$70 million grant program funded through state ARPA dollars that enables unemployed or underemployed individuals to earn short-term, industry-recognized credentials and receive critical supports to overcome barriers to participate in training. Launched in late 2021, this program is more than halfway toward its goal of training 6,000 individuals for quality jobs in growing industries— including healthcare, IT and advanced manufacturing. Nineteen grants have been made to Workforce Development Boards and community-based organizations across the state. These grants provide free training and supports, including transportation, housing, and childcare.

The [Career ConneCT portal](#) serves as a single entry point for broad recruitment, data collection, and reporting. The portal includes a “skills inventory” (assessment), a connection to a career coach, training opportunities, and jobs. To ensure Career ConneCT reaches individuals with the greatest need, the initiative features a comprehensive media campaign in English and Spanish targeted to underserved, high poverty communities.

OWS measures the success of the program through a number of criteria that includes but is not limited to the number of participants who complete training, number of participants placed in jobs, and support services provided.

- **Good Jobs Challenge:** OWS continues to implement the Good Jobs Challenge grant, which it received through the federal Economic Development Administration’s [Good Jobs Challenge program](#). Connecticut received a \$23.9 million grant – the largest award in the nation – to build collaborative skills training systems and programs that prioritize efforts to reach historically underserved populations. OWS made ten grants to Regional Sector Partnerships to train and place 2,000 people in quality, in-demand jobs in healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology. OWS measures the success of the program through a number of criteria that includes but is not limited to the number of participants who complete training and number of participants placed in jobs.
- **Jobs.CT.gov:** To provide job seekers with easy access to data and resources, the State has launched a new portal to assist Connecticut residents — and those seeking to become Connecticut residents — in their job search. Through [Jobs.CT.gov](#), jobseekers can access free and low-cost training and certification opportunities and powerful job search tools and resources to help land a job. Employers also have access to resources to help hire, train, and retain talent. To measure the effectiveness of the web site, which was launched in January 2024, the state is collecting data that includes views, average time on page and session duration, bounce rate and new visitor sessions.
- **CT Health Horizons:** In September 2023, the state launched [CT Health Horizons](#) to fill the nursing and social work workforce pipeline, with a focus on diversity. With OWS support, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CSCU), UConn and The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC) have awarded \$35 million in grants to public and private institutions throughout the state for:
 - tuition support to incentivize low-income and minority student enrollment in accelerated, affordable programs;
 - faculty support to expand seat capacity and training opportunities; and
 - innovative programs to promote employer-driven efforts to support entry into relevant careers.

In less than a year the program awarded 591 scholarships, with 34% of scholarships issued to Pell eligible students; expanded nursing and social work faculty to 38 positions; and funded eight innovative programs partnering higher education with business and industry.

- **Tech Talent Accelerator:** The \$2 million [Tech Talent Accelerator](#) initiative aligns community college, public, and private university coursework in emerging, in-demand fields like cybersecurity, virtual modeling, software development, and digital analytics with industry needs. Co-managed by the Business Higher Education Forum (BHEF) and the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), this OWS-supported effort includes:
 - developing/implementing short-term (6-12 week) postsecondary credential and certificate programs that satisfy critical skills requirements for entry-level, technology-enabled jobs; and
 - embedding sought-after credentials developed by global technology leaders (e.g., Google, Amazon) and industry-validated skills into post-secondary credential or degree programs.

In 2022, the Tech Talent Accelerator supported 7 partnerships. The success of the first cohort of Tech Talent Accelerator grantees led the state to award BHEF and NEBHE with a second round of Tech Talent Accelerator funding that expands the cohort of higher education grantees to up to 13 partnerships. As of Spring 2024, these partnerships have resulted in: 26 industry partners; 15 credential pathways under development; and 229 learners (some of who may have participated in more than one program).

Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Governor Lamont's vision for Connecticut is a nimble workforce ready to meet the needs of the 21st century economy. That vision is centered around engaging businesses to be more proactive in shaping their own workforce agendas. A foundational initiative outlined in the Governor's Workforce Council's strategic plan was the development of regional sector partnerships across the state. Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs) are the core infrastructure for building an industry-led workforce agenda that provides for effective alignment of industry needs, education and training programs and other supportive services for an effective, inclusive workforce system. Convened by the Workforce Development Boards and other business organizations, its business members and support partners share a commitment to sustained, continuous improvement in workforce and economic development.

The number of RSPs in Connecticut has doubled in two years from seven to 14, which include 400+ employers representing Manufacturing (5), IT/Tech Enabled (2), Bioscience (1), Healthcare (4), Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (1), and Architecture/Engineering/Construction (1). A Statewide Clean Energy Sector Partnership is currently in development. The Office of Workforce Strategy will continue to provide statewide coordination, support, and promotion of these partnerships.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec 10a-57g(e), the Office of Workforce Strategy is charged with submitting a request for data and an analysis of such data to P20WIN, Connecticut's longitudinal data system, for the purpose of assessing the performance and outcomes of Connecticut's workforce system to include the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs. The *Request (#0042) To Study the Impact of Workforce Training and Education on Economic Outcomes* will result in annual assessment results in the form of an interactive dashboard of data, which will answer the following research questions: (1) What are the wage and employment outcomes of CT workforce training programs, (2) What are the wage and employment outcomes of CT post-secondary, adult education, and technical education programs, (3) What are the common career pathways

in CT, (4) What are employment and wage outcomes by career pathways, and (5) Which career pathways lead to the strongest wage growth. The Office of Workforce Strategy worked with the Office of Policy and Management’s Data and Policy Analytics unit and the Department of Labor’s Office of Research to gather the requisite information from partner agencies to perform the analysis.

The annual P20WIN request and report will replace the Connecticut’s Higher Education/Workforce Legislative Report Card (LRC), which the Department of Labor’s Office of Research has produced over the years and may be viewed at <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/LRC/LRC2.aspx> The most recent LRC data, as of 2022, includes information on employment by industry and average wages of recent graduates of Connecticut’s public colleges and universities.